

JOURNAL *of the*
WRITERS PROJECT
of GHANA



JWPG Vol. 1, No. 1
June 2022

Journal of the Writers Project of Ghana

Volume 1, Number 1
June – August 2022

Editorial Board

Nancy Henaku - Chair
Mamle Kabu - Member
Nana Fredua Agyeman - Member
Novieto Setor Donne - Member

Editor-in-Chief

Elizabeth Johnson

Editors

Ewoenam Akaxoxo (Submissions Editor)
Aisha Nelson (Poetry Editor)
Jeffrey Atuobi (Prose Editor)

Cover Photo Credit: Yibor Kojo Yibor
Cover Design and Typesetting: Megastyles

© Writers Project of Ghana, June 2022

All original rights to the contributions remain with the authors.

Contact: journal.wpg@gmail.com

Contents

Message from the Chair of the Editorial Board	i
---	---

Prose

Ekow Manuar <i>Let's Hope For Rain</i>	1 – 9
Akua Nehanda Williams <i>The Road to Hell</i>	10 – 15
Yaa Konadu <i>This Thing, Sex</i>	16 – 19
Kwasi Adi-Dako <i>Don't Fall Asleep</i>	20 – 26
Fui Can-Tamakloe <i>The Mastery of Things</i>	27 – 36

Poetry

Sarpong Osei Asamoah	37 – 41
<i>Ars Poetica</i>	37
<i>Ode to Home</i>	39
<i>Ananse's Coast</i>	40
K. Asare-Bediako	42 – 44
<i>Spelling My Tongue</i>	42
Araba Ofori-Acquah	45 – 47
<i>Growth</i>	45
Estella Esinam Apenuvor	48 – 50
<i>Uncut Me</i>	48
David Agyei-Yeboah	51 – 53
<i>The Effrontery</i>	51
Elikplim Akorli	54 – 57
Ama Afrah Appiah	58 – 60
<i>Mε nnka nkyerε obiara</i>	58
<i>I just want to die when I am dead</i>	59

A'bena	61 – 62
<i>Every Sunday</i>	61

Haiku

Priscilla Arthur	63 – 65
<i>Five haiku</i>	63

Non-Fiction

Amy Shimshon-Santo, Mamle Kabu, Sabata-mpho Mokae, Nii Ayikwei Parkes, Michaela Paulette Shirley, and Ana Rita Santiago	
<i>Repatriation of Language, Culture, and Community</i>	66 – 76

Commentary

Manu Herbstein <i>Planet Earth: Wake Up!</i>	77 – 85
--	---------

Poetry

Shainah M. Andrews	86 – 88
<i>Residual (Piece of We)</i>	86
Nana Yaw Sarpong	89 – 91
<i>Many Loves</i>	89
Gabriel Awuah Mainoo	92 – 95
<i>Learning the Art of Hurricanes</i>	92
<i>14:23 at George Padmore Library</i>	94

Prose

Ama Pomaa <i>Nothing Happened</i>	96 – 101
Akua Serwaa Amankwah <i>Transcendence</i>	102 – 109

Message from the Chair of the Editorial Board

It is a great pleasure to finally present you with the debut issue of the Journal of the Writers Project of Ghana (JWPG). Conversations about this journal began several years ago. But direct planning for this debut issue started at the height of the Covid pandemic that, as we all know, viciously impacted writing lives globally. I wish to thank the contributors for continuing to write in a time of uncertainty and for trusting us with their work. I also thank the editorial team and the many others whose commitment and tenaciousness made this publication possible.

Literary production in Ghana has suffered major setbacks for several years. With African literature being rediscovered on a global scale in recent years, there is often the sense that Ghana has not done as well as some other African countries on the literary map. While this is largely true, it is crucial to also recognise the forces shaping the global marketisation of African literature and how these impact the visibility of works that do not fit an expected mode. Locally, we are witnesses to the efforts of especially young Ghanaian writers who continue to produce works, organise events and build new literary spaces against all odds. There is now—and always has been—a large amount of original work available locally. Yet, publishing opportunities—even in this era of digitisation—remain nearly non-existent in Ghana. That's why we are excited about the possibilities that this journal holds for the future of literary publishing here in Ghana.

This issue marks the beginning of an exciting literary journey for us. Our vision has always been clearly defined: to prioritise Ghanaian writing and provide opportunities for critical discourse on the literary arts from any part of the world. Location is crucial to how JWPG positions itself; however, this is not necessarily uniform or parochially local. We understand the possibilities that liminalities present not just in the ways in which our contributors describe themselves but also in

relation to the multiplicity of work they produce. This allowed us to operate with an expansive notion of Ghanaianess—one that allows us to bring together work from the many complex places that Ghanaian/African literature is produced.

Related to location is the question of language which has always been pivotal to conversations about what qualifies as African literature. Whether or not African literature should be produced in indigenous African languages continues to be debated several years after the first African writer's conference in Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda where indigenous language writers were absent. Amy Shimshon-Santo, Mamle Kabu and colleagues' contribution in this issue ("Repatriation of Language, Culture, and Community") is crucial for expanding the discourse on the language question from a global perspective as well as presenting us with alternative ways of being linguistically free.

Ghana's sociolinguistic reality—once described as “a kente of many colors”¹—is characterized by high linguistic diversity. Consequently, most Ghanaian writers know English and at least one indigenous language. But a monolingual publishing approach has tended to mask the literary prospects of multilingualism for our specific context. That's why it was important that JWPG accept submissions from indigenous Ghanaian Languages as well as English and its pidgin variants. The current issue still privileges English because that is the language deployed by many Ghanaian writers.

But there are several examples in the issue that highlight the authors' efforts to harness their multilingual resources by for example, switching between languages in their writing. What we have is not a mere merging of languages just for the sake of it. These submissions

¹Bodomo, Adams, Jemima Asabea Anderson, and Josephine Dzahene-Quarshie. "A kente of many colours: multilingualism as a complex ecology of language shift in Ghana." *Sociolinguistic Studies* 3.3 (2009): 357-379.

are actually characterised by multilingual aesthetic experimentations that align with their themes. Among other things, K. Asare-Bediako's "Spelling my Tongue" forces us to have a sonic experience of the Akan language that he so masterfully weaves into his poem. Juxtaposed against the title of his poem, this aurality spotlights the tension between the printed writings on the page and the vocal power that characterizes spoken discourse in many African languages. The "tongue" itself becomes highly symbolic in Ama Afrah Appiah's "Mɛnnka Nkyerɛ Obiara" in which the persona critiques "the government" for being greedy and bad-intentioned. The persona admonishes readers not to out her because if found out, they will "let me starve/ until I eat out my tongue." The switch to Fante during the persona's negative assessment of "the government" as being "pɛsɛmankomenya" and as influenced by "adwen fi nkotsee!" renders the critique forcefully because to say it as it is one must sometimes speak in a language that allows you to be yourself.

We have assembled here twenty-two writers, many of whom are emerging voices in Ghana. The contributions range in style, genre, theme, mode, and length. There are political pieces, creative non-fiction, novel extracts, transcripts of panel conversations, poems of various kinds, and so on.

This collection is a testament to a new phase in Ghanaian literature. Whether we are reading about the art of writing poetry (in Sarpong Osei Asamoah's "Ars Poetica"), the metamorphosis of a girl written entirely in diary entries (in Kwasi Adi-Dako's "Don't Fall Asleep"), the innovative use of historical material to weave a narrative about nostalgia for one's childhood home (in Akua Serwaa Amankwah's "Transcendence"), the evocative narrative of teenage sexual explorations (in Yaa Konadu's "This Thing, Sex") and so on, one thing remains clear: we are at the cusp of something important!

These writings are aware of a literary context and yet carve a path that is entirely their own. Their diversity acts as a reminder of the ever-

expansiveness of the Ghanaian literary tradition and how a new generation of voices continues to redefine it in bold new ways.

We hope you enjoy these writings as much as we have!

Nancy Henaku, PhD
Chair, Editorial Board (JWPG)

Prose

LET'S HOPE FOR RAIN

AN EXTRACT FROM A NOVEL

Ekow Manuar

CHAPTER I

“How long has it been since it rained you said?”

“Eh, a few weeks.”

“Is that long? I never really thought about it.”

“In this season, it is.”

“If it isn’t on your mind it could just skip you by. And you wouldn’t know.”

“Exactly...”

“So what happens if it continues like this?”

“There’s a build-up of particulate, smoke, dirt, dust, especially in the congested parts of the city. The rain usually comes in and eases the build-up... Then you have all the people depending on rain for farming. Then all the people depending on the food from the farms. Like those plots in Dzorwulu around Farah’s Place...”

“Oooh! I really liked that tomato garden. It was so nice going there and walking through and picking our tomatoes.”

“A bit expensive don’t you think? We paid for entry and the produce too!”

“I don’t know. I don’t mind paying for that kind of experience.”

And Pearl tilted her head and leaned back so her body was on Kofi. And Kofi made his body more accommodating to her weight. He had been looking at her as she stared off into the horizon but now his attention was focused up above as she was. They weren’t looking at anything in particular. Just enjoying the ease of the end of the day on the rooftop of Pearl’s home in Labone. Tucked in a cul de sac away from the bustle that had become part and parcel of living in this part of the city.

The sky had gone from a golden red hue to a violet shade all in a matter of minutes. The air had also gotten heavier. Kofi could make out the underbelly of some storm clouds forming in the distance. He nudged Pearl and pointed in the direction of the forming clouds.

“You see there? We might get lucky.”

They watched as the clouds made a thick mass over the crest of the world. A brisk wind had picked up, and the leaves of the mango tree that stood by Pearl’s home were crackling. Kofi took his eyes off the sky and brought them down to the ground. He saw a banana-lady busy packing her things into a trotro’s side door. Kofi assumed the little girl tugging at the banana-lady’s dress was her daughter. The little girl wasn’t happy about her mom’s promptness since she had been playing with the twirling leaves caught in the wind. Anticipating the rain.

The trotro was a fair way away from Pearl’s house but he could almost make out the little girl pinch her mother saying “nsuo wa ba.”

It smelt of rain and felt like rain, but Kofi had this feeling that it wasn’t going to come. This skepticism, not just for the rain, but of a great many things, had become more clear against Pearl’s boundless positivity. He continued to watch the little girl. Her mother wasn’t quite yet done with moving her wares. Kofi realised it was the fruit lady from near the American Embassy. She was now instructing her

daughter to grab the rest of the fruit. Fruits covered with a white cloth sat on their respective benches waiting for the little girl. As her mother negotiated with the mate about the cost of taking up the space on the seats for the rest of her goods, the little girl marched up and down with the fruits on her head. By the time she was setting the pawpaw down, the trotro driver had lost whatever patience he had left and began to move the van. The mate hurriedly jumped on the car and helped the fruit lady, then her daughter on it. Their negotiations continued as they worked their way over the speed bumps and up the road. Kofi spied a security camera whizz as it followed them down the street.

“Hey! Can you please not put your whole body on me?” Kofi demanded of Pearl. She had been pressing herself onto his body.

“Shut up! I know you like it Kofi,” she snickered.

‘I don’t just like it,’ he thought. ‘I love it.’

“I didn’t realise that trotros still passed through here,” Kofi said.

“Ah, yeah,” she caught a final glimpse of the trotro which had just picked the fruit lady. “No, there was a whole issue about it some time ago when they knocked down that expat on his bicycle. But I think the ones that pass through here are registered and all that jazz.”

“The vehicles are definitely nicer looking. But the drivers are still silly...”

“I think it has gotten to the point where they feel it is their duty to act the fool, to fulfill their role as a trotro driver... otherwise who are they?” Pearl asked, flinging her arms to the sky and causing the bangles on her wrist to jingle.

“Every day identity crisis. You have a problem!” Kofi jabbed then made to get up.

“You have a problem!”

They both laughed and Kofi decided to heed to Pearl’s bodily request for them to stay a little longer on her rooftop. Watching the dying day give off its last beams of brilliant golden red light.

CHAPTER 2

It was odd with Pearl. She had this way of making you feel unique. A significant part of her life even. But Kofi had to remind himself that Pearl was just Pearl, and that is what she did. She radiated this glow and warmth and you could get so caught up in it that you thought you were the only one in the world she made feel that way. Kofi knew this was far from the truth. It wasn't that Pearl led you on. But she was just like that. And you needed to do your job and remind yourself of your place in her world.

Kofi had been quite good at keeping himself at arm's length. Conversations were kept lighthearted and any turns toward deeper depths were avoided by the quick laugh and non-sensical joke. You could always get away with the non-sensical joke. Kofi kept a few on him at all times to divert from those plunges into the deep the rare times they came around.

And just to run through some of the deflectors in his repertoire. For instance, when Pearl tried to ask Kofi about his parents, Kofi simply said, his parents were all dead. It was not his funniest joke, he realised belatedly. But it got him out of having to get into it. And it did get a small laugh out of Pearl. Or, the other time when he and Pearl were walking to the roasted corn seller. Pearl had asked Kofi about how his last relationship ended. Kofi, again, simply said he had killed her. Again, a laugh from Pearl and a successful deflection. Kofi had made note to veer away from the darker jokes in his catalogue.

There was one time though when he did let his guard slip. Not because he wasn't aware that the turn was coming. But more of that the turn was unavoidable. He had walked up to Pearl's house and she was nowhere to be found. Pearl's dad wasn't around for him to ask if she was indeed in the house. But Kofi was almost 100% sure she was because it was that time of the day when she would lie around 'preparing' to go for a run or to the gym. Finally, Kofi marched up to her rooftop,

which she had introduced him to a few weeks back, and saw Pearl sitting on her yoga mat with her knees pressed to her chest, and her frizzy brown hair hanging over her face.

When she heard Kofi walk up behind her, she turned her head so the glare from the sun washed on her face. She looked at him with an expression which brought Kofi down to the floor and into a hug. They hugged for a long while, and afterward, Kofi pulled himself away and thought to joke “I can’t believe we hugged for so long, you are smelling.” But he couldn’t bring himself to say it so instead, made himself comfortable and sat by her as she let whatever it was that was troubling her to subside.

It was then that Kofi appreciated how words were not the only way to make a connection with someone. To understand something was very different from appreciating it. For him, when people got into all that talk about the spirit, the body, and the whatever, he could understand it. About how words were limited in their way of expressing the range of emotions we feel as humans. He could understand it. And though, to some extent, he somehow shut off when those conversation came up, just nodding in mindless agreement, after that hug with Pearl, he couldn’t hide from his full agreement with them. With those who talked of connections made beyond words. No amount of words could bring him that warmth he felt with Pearl, on that rooftop. After that hug.

Later that day of the hug, coming back down from the rooftop, Kofi remembered his desire to find out what had made Pearl so down. He asked what had been wrong. Pearl took ahold of his arm and said casually enough, that she had been thinking about her late mother. Kofi knew that she had passed a few years back. But he didn’t know the hows and the whats. But at that moment, feeling her caught in this slump, he wanted to do everything in his power to lift her up. The moment came and went and much later that day when Kofi was in his room at home, thinking about the events of the day, he marked down

that he shouldn't allow himself to get lost in Pearl like that again. In words, body, or spirit. That in the end, that was how Pearl was with everyone.

CHAPTER 3

Alas, Kofi would find himself slipping more and more often. And again, presently, sitting on the rooftop with her weight on his, he felt that extra bit special to her. A half an hour after the fruit lady and her daughter had left, Kofi and Pearl decided that they should probably head in. They had a commitment with friends at a lounge called Front/Back.

They stepped down the steep steps from the rooftop into the backyard of Pearl's home. The pavement was still warm from the sun's heat. The potted plants stood silent in their respective corners. Ferns. Aloe Vera. Plants with broad palm like leaves, swatting invisible flies. A small plot of grass at the centre of the yard withering into yellow. A small raised bed of mint, parsley, and basil jostled for dominancy in their little bush against the back wall of the house.

Pearl walked to the back door which led to the kitchen. Pressing her palm to unlock the door, she swung it open and let Kofi go in before she did.

"Don't know why a woman would complain about having a door opened for her? It is great!" Kofi joked.

Pearl side-eyed him then stepped in as well. The beep from the door confirming that it had locked itself.

Pearl's dad was in the kitchen cutting some cassava fish. Already prepared was an assortment of vegetables and steaming balls of kenkey. He was stooped over the cutting board, his glasses removed as he wiped sweat from the corners of his eyes.

"Daddy, you too! When will you ever get tired of eating this kenkey!?"

"Don't act like you don't like it in front of your friend. You were the one who even said you wanted some. Or am I lying?" He shot at her,

putting his glasses down to take a sip of his red wine.

“I never said... argh... Never mind. Whatever. You say what you have to say. Me too, I will catch you!” She stepped to his side to eye his work so far, her hand reaching for a sliced carrot. Pearl’s dad smacked her hand her way.

She smiled then they kissed each other’s cheeks and Pearl’s dad continued his dance with the fish.

Pearl’s house was one of those townhouses built during the late 2010s at a time when Labone was undergoing rapid development. On one hand was the rapture of post-modern architecture and mini private estates. The other, an almost shameless commercialisation of every space available in between the accommodation, properties caught in legal crossfire, and elderly families refusing to budge to the wave. The housing was all geared towards bringing the Western-style living to Accra in a bid for the estate developers to make their money back from expats and/or oil industry workers. The only people who had money to afford such homes.

It was a chicken and egg scenario. The expat and oil industry players had foreign currency. The estate developers wanted returns. And the financiers wanted more of all of the above. So maybe it was more of an egg before the chicken scenario? Market meeting the demand and all. But the problem was that the foreign currency holders were not a significant percentage of the population. A lot of those post-modern houses, though they looked great, were, therefore, empty. Sad. Elephants.

Pockets of Labone were void of life because of this. Spare the odd Fan Milk bicyclist, hooting his horn searching for a mouth to enjoy his sugary delight. Or the droves of househelps, gardeners, gymnasts, trainers, chefs, and other part-time workers that marched in between the faceless six foot walls.

The stalls and kiosks of yesteryear had been removed to make way for new tenants. Wherever they were!?

Government, through the Housing and Loans, eventually intervened. To some degree. Mortgage was never going to be a realistic prospect for most Ghanaians. But for Pearl and her dad they were prime candidates to make use of the 'sell and buy for less' program. Those sad empty houses, lonely and bereft of any spirit, would be somewhat filled.

Pearl and her dad's old place was in Labone so they got lucky that the interventions were around the time they were looking for a new place. Kofi assumed that she and her dad were trying to leave behind the memories of Pearl's mother. A new beginning.

In line with all the high-end-ness, the kitchen where Pearl's dad was performing his antics was floored with glossy wooden panes, and the house had this very open shiny feeling to it. Which was all in keeping with the fads of the time. The structure of the house itself was a cutout from some generic architecture magazine. Straight angles, basic shapes. Glass. Wood. Dark metal. Then the furniture, dark leather bound and sleek brassy metal. Looked great but not the most comfortable.

What Pearl loved most, at least what she told Kofi, was the natural sunlight that poured into the house. The glass panes had this cool shading effect that was sensitive to the amount of light it received. It would take the light and dissipate it, usually to reduce the intensity of the shine. But Pearl would play with the app that controlled the light filtering in and get the panes to perform some extravagant light shows when the shine was right. Kofi had been witness to a couple of these shows when he came to visit her during the day. There were times when Pearl could change the world inside her house. Purple taints casting the interior of the house in a haze. The dust motes floating in the air, pink. The caramel tips of Pearl's hair, pinkish. Pearl's eyes, like diamonds.

But most days when Pearl was at home early from a half-day at work, she would sprawl on the carpet in front of the glass pane and read until the words on her iPad eased her into a long nap. It was usually after

her naps that she would go for a run or gym. Kofi always timed to catch her in this period of transition, as he did today. He knew her resolve to be weak. A small nudge would normally take her off her course and he would have his time with her. Just as it had happened today. Kofi smiled to himself and followed Pearl out the front door toward his car.

Ekow Manuar is an award winning African Futurist writer from Ghana. His works have been published in literary magazines across the planet, including: The Dark Mountain Project, Decolonial Passage, Writers Project of Ghana, Kalahari Review and many more. Ekow Manuar has a background in sustainability science and currently works developing renewable energy and environmental projects in Accra. He recently published his first book 'The Men from StayWell' which can be found on Amazon. His stories can be found on his medium page [abdallahsmitho6](#).

Prose

THE ROAD TO HELL

Akua Nehanda Williams

After almost a decade of abandoning the strict Catholic faith I grew up on, I decided to go to church. Saint Luke's Catholic parish was located right in the middle of the huge Korle Bu Teaching hospital. It had both an appropriate location and an appropriate name. The latter because if you knew anything about saints, you would know that Saint Luke was considered the patron saint of all health workers. The former because really think about it, what better place to site a church than in the middle of a hospital. People who were dying needed God the most – to heal them, and if He couldn't do that, to at least prepare a place for them in His house.

It was the tiniest and prettiest Catholic Church I had ever seen, not that I had seen that many. It was painted white. The entrance had an electronic signpost indicating the mass schedule for the week and always one of the beatitudes. I looked at it every day I came for mass, wondering when they would display my favorite beatitude, 'blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. I considered myself very poor in spirit and badly wanted to go to heaven. The building was hexagonal in shape and was made of wood and cement,

alternating beautifully in a unique pattern. It had an equally tiny compound that had a statue of the Virgin Mary surrounded by pink and white lilies. It had a bell which rang on its own at six am every morning, right before the mass. The compound also had a set of white lovers' benches. Although now that I think about it, that isn't really an appropriate name for the benches, in a holy setting like this. Let's call them prayer partner benches.

And when I entered the church, it was bigger than it looked on the outside, kind of like how religion tries to convince you that what you see or hear about God is just surface stuff. That when you enter His kingdom, that is when you know how glorious He really is. The church could seat about fifty congregants. The windows had this bright and multi-colored glass mosaic picture of the patron saint. It was distributed in bits across the window such that you could only see the full picture when all the windows were closed. The church always smelled like incense even when they weren't burning. I love the smell of incense. The lighting in the church was very dim giving it a very mystical vibe, even though religion needed nothing to make it more mystical than it already was. There was a section for the altar, a section for the choir and organist and a section for the congregation.

It was a Saturday morning. I had been coming for morning mass every single day since the incident happened last week Saturday. I always sat at the very left end of the second pew, facing the altar because I am a creature of habits and routines. I was also always in my green and white nurses' uniform. Every day I would kneel and pray before the mass started, begging God to forgive me for my sin. I would pray again during the mass itself, promising God that it would never happen again. And again, I would pray at the end of the mass, asking God to heal my heart. Despite all I was doing to rid myself of the guilt, it still hung over me like heavy clouds over a rainy day. That morning, Father Michael, the parish priest, a handsome young man, who looked more like a Calvin Klein model than a priest gave the homily. It was one of

those days where you felt the homily had been tailored specifically for you. The scripture was taken from James 5:16 – confess your sins to one another. Father Michael went on and on about how sin was like a cancer, how it would eat you up from the inside unless you killed it. But I wonder if he knew that sometimes even when you tried to kill the cancer, it still won. I would know, I was a hospice nurse. Nonetheless, he was talking to me. I was convinced that of the twenty-three people that were present at mass that morning, I was the one that needed to hear this preaching. I was itching to talk to someone about what I had done so I went for confession.

I needed someone to hear me out and tell me that the intention with which I had committed the act superseded the act itself.

It was a great idea. It was the only way I could get this off my chest without going to jail. Who better to share this with than a catholic priest? The priest would have to observe priest confessor confidentiality. And he would also pray for me. Maybe God had shut me out because of the grievous nature of my sin, but He would certainly listen to one of His own. The confession was taking place right after the mass. So after the service, I hung around at the prayer partner benches till everyone left. Only four people stayed behind, myself, the priest and two old ladies. We ushered ourselves into the reconciliatory room, which was hidden behind the altar. Father Michael had already entered his little cubicle to prepare himself for the sacrament of penance he was about to administer. And also to avoid seeing the faces of the people coming for confession. I decided to let the old ladies go first, their sins couldn't be that bad. It was better to start off with the light sins. Also, one of them looked extremely old and frail. Ironically, I didn't want her to die in the queue without confessing her sins first. So they went in and spent about fifteen minutes each. While they were away, I mentally went through the steps of confession in my head. It's funny how even after a decade of abandoning my faith, I still remembered everything. Even the prayers and responses during the mass. The Catholic

Church felt like fine wine that was refusing to age or change.

Finally, it was my turn. The priest and confessor's cubicles were separated by a wooden wall and connected only by a metal mesh so the two people could hear each other but not see each other. Whoever came up with this idea was brilliant. Bearing your soul to someone you didn't even know was not an easy thing. I entered the wooden confessor's cubicle, did the sign of the cross and in a soft voice greeted the priest.

"Bless me father for I have sinned. My last confession was..."

This was the part where you mentioned the last time you had come for confession. The last time I had come for confession I was being baptized as a girl or maybe when I was being confirmed. I couldn't remember. So I settled for 'this is my first confession'. Immediately the words came out of my mouth, I regretted uttering them. I was coming for confession and starting the process off with a lie.

I sat in silence until the priest said, "go ahead sister in Christ. The Lord is listening and ready to forgive."

I had planned to start the priest off lightly with my baby sins but suddenly, I could not remember any of my sins except the one for which I had actually come there.

"I sometimes tell lies father," I said, referring to the one I had just told. Then I paused for a long time, waiting for feedback from the priest, even though I knew very well that that was not how confession worked.

"Go on my child," Father Michael said when he realized I wasn't speaking.

"Father, I killed someone!" I blurted out.

"Eeeeeiiii!" Father Michael exclaimed.

I hadn't been to confession in a while but I was pretty sure a priest was not supposed to react that way to anything I said. I was so glad the separate cubicles had hidden my murder stained face. I contemplated leaving the reconciliatory room at that moment, because saying the

words out loud had been cathartic. The priest's reaction had also unnerved me and I worried that he would turn me in to the police. "What happened my dear?" he said.

Priests are not supposed to ask you why you committed any sin. In fact, they usually stopped you when you tried to explain yourself. That would be justifying the sin, and it was a sign that you were not truly repentant. All they were to do was listen. Father Michael had broken protocol by asking me that. Maybe he was just curious or maybe he was obliged to ask when the sin was also a crime. All I had been looking for was someone to explain what happened to and now I had my chance. I adjusted myself in my seat like a victim about to testify before a grand jury.

Father he was ninety-nine years old. The man was suffering. He couldn't breathe without the ventilator, couldn't urinate without a catheter and couldn't feed without the tubes. I had been taking care of him at home for over six months and he wasn't getting any better. He wasn't going to get any better but his children just didn't seem to understand that. They were not spending every second of their day with him like I was. They did not know the kind of pain he was going through. It broke my heart seeing him like that. He was building tolerance to all the painkillers. I would administer the strongest dose of morphine and he'd still be in pain.

Every time I checked his vitals they were unstable. I always read his file, and all the doctors were saying the same thing. There was no progress. The truth is that his condition had deteriorated so quickly that he hadn't had the chance to make his end of life decisions. I knew in my heart of hearts that he wanted me to end it. I saw it in the way his dejected eyes looked at me when I changed his diapers. He was practically begging me to end it.

One Saturday night, his vitals were all over the place. His breathing was rapid and irregular. He was tossing in the bed, fighting for what was left of his life. I decided this was not living and not worth fighting for. I decided to put him out of his misery. I went close to his ventilator and turned it off for less than a minute, then put it back on. The few seconds was all it took. His

heart stopped and he died with his mouth wide open. I looked at his eyes and I could see gratitude in them. I did it for him father. He was suffering too much.

I expected the priest to ask me more questions about what had happened, or to give me a sermon on the Catholic Church's stand on euthanasia.

Instead, without even praying for me, or asking me if I had any more sins to confess or giving me a penance, he said, "your sins are forgiven in the name of the father, the son and the holy spirit. Go forth and sin no more." I got up from my seat with relief and was leaving the church. Then I heard the priest call me by my name – my full name which I had never disclosed to him.

"Sister Esi Burland, do not forget that the road to hell is paved with good intentions."

Akua Nehanda Williams is a twenty-three year old medical student at the University of Ghana Medical School, who enjoys reading. As the saying goes, read a thousand books and your words will flow like a river. Her love for writing stems from her love for reading. When she is not reading, writing or chasing her dream of becoming a paediatrician, she loves to advocate for women's rights, and spend time with her amazing family. She is an aspiring writer with a preference for short stories and flash fictions that have a tragic end. She was a participant in the first ever Ghana Writers Marathon 2020 and has a manuscript of short stories to her name. She has no published works yet. However, she hopes to be a part time medic and a full time writer in the near future. Akua Williams lives in Accra, Ghana, with her parents and sister.

Prose

THIS THING, SEX

Yaa Konadu

“This Thing, Sex” forms part of a collection of creative, personal prose on the topic of young womanhood, as told by a young Ghanaian woman living and working in Accra. This piece is an exploration of self-actualisation, sex, and selfhood, as part of the transition to womanhood. “This Thing, Sex” (within the full collection) is part of a coming-of-age story we do not get in popular or literary culture.

THIS THING, SEX

We lie and say we’ve had sex. Not with words. In the drinking game “never-have-I-ever”, the point is you don’t have to say anything. Sip means yes. Holding the cup of cheap beer in your lap means no. Glancing over the rim of our cup, we notice the number of nos and quietly, desperately wish we had told the truth. Shortly thereafter we do have sex. Specks of our blood are found on the top edges of drawers and down the side of the bed. We remember most notably the lingering sensation that we did not smell like ourselves.

We're in his dorm room and our friend just left because she believes we want to be there. We're unaccustomed to making a scene or exerting ourselves, and he's in the doorway. We let him sleep with us and leave as soon as we can. In our own home, we tell Nick and he says how we must have wanted it because he was small and we didn't simply leave.

He is (also) white, with mid-length floppy blond hair and average height. We're not sure we like him, but he walks us home and we take this gesture as significant. Being European, he feels familiar and we feel cosmopolitan. In his house, we shower and he lathers us with soap. We're bored after he cums (quickly) in our mouth, and feeling strange, so we smoke a cigarette on his bed. He says it's fine, but it's not. We'll hold on to this small revenge for years when he later doesn't pick our calls.

She's seen us in the café many times because she lives round the corner. Our deep loneliness and the unassuming beauty of early womanhood have created a gravity around us that draws people. We sometimes try to reach them, but the gravity works on us too and it's heavy. She makes it to us. We learn she too is harbouring a swirling inside and maybe this is why when we lifted our head and saw her sitting at our table, what we saw were her lips and felt an urge to kiss.

In her flat, we're surprised that she's surprised we're there because it's our first time and not hers. We're surprised at our readiness and our wetness. We want to move fast and our teeth hit against hers. She takes us to the bedroom and we remove our underwear. She used to be fat so her soft skin seems more than it needs to be – we hold on to it. We jab amateurishly inside her with three fingers. She deftly moves her mouth between our legs and we almost cry. At home, we note distinctly, again, that we do not smell like ourselves.

The moon comes up on the horizon through the hotel window though it's dawn. We nestle against him and he holds us into his body though we do not love him and he does not love us. It could be said that he does not know us. He does not see us. In any case, we move on him in silence and he orgasms inside because, after all, we are together in this room and it is beautiful.

We're learning (finally) how to have sex – and talking about it. A friend says she recognises she's passive in sex. "My body is already a gift." We look at her steadily. We're stunned because we remember thinking the same, precisely. But we were both too erotic and too insecure to sit comfortably in that. We are learning power now.

What we are learning is how to slip into this other self that is ours. How we can move our mouth along a body, look into eyes, and feel what it is to sit in our power. But the intensity of his near-silent thrusts shifts us. We press our hand to our lower belly and ask if he's close. He smiles a little and says no, so we stop and remain mostly in our head even as he kisses us and we kiss him back, by our car. The third time and the fourth, we treat the shift as a current and coax our body to move with it – without fear. That is to say, we rest into him and hold soft and still to his touch, which moves around our thighs and hugs them close. We explore what it is to step away from the speed of stereotypes and regain our self in searching fingers, cheeks that caress, and legs that draw in tight.

Yaa Konadu is a British-Ghanaian writer, creative, and business owner living in Accra. Growing up across cultures and continents, she is insatiably curious about identity, identity making, and selfhood. As winner of the inaugural Kofi Addo Writivism prize for non-fiction by African writers, her writing was published in the anthology, "Sundown and Other Stories." Most recently, her essay "In This Body" was published in Lolwe's fourth edition (2021). In ad-

dition to writing a collection of essays on the theme of young womanhood, she is also working on a podcast on the same theme that incorporates other voices for a broader look at this transitional time.

Prose

DON'T FALL ASLEEP

Kwasi Adi-Dako

Monday, September 20th

I dreamt I was flying last night. I looked down at Accra's lights and let the warm breeze fill my wings as I drifted lazily above the city. I could see people scurrying around like ants and the mice that darted in the shadows just out of their view. I tucked my silent wings in and dived toward the street, snatching up one of the unsuspecting rodents in my talons. I felt like the queen of the skies.

I usually don't remember my dreams but this one stuck with me. I sat up in bed after I woke up and stared out of the open window at the sparrows that flit between trees. I never noticed how pretty they are. I sat for so long that I forgot to wake Junior and get him ready for school. Mama was very angry and said that I was letting the family down. I felt bad about that so I will fry some plantain for her when she gets back from work tonight.

Tuesday, September 21st

I had the flying dream again last night, but there was no breeze to carry me and I had to flap really hard to stay in the air. My wings got tired and I searched for somewhere to land but I was over the ocean. I sped toward the city lights and flew past the window of a tall building where I caught sight of my reflection. I was a silver-gray owl with a flat, white face and yellow feet that ended in wickedly curved talons. I was so enamored by my reflection that I flew straight into a billboard and almost broke a wing. I couldn't hunt after that and limped through the air to a large neem tree. There was a hollow near the top of the trunk that would be a good spot for a nest.

When I woke up this morning, my arm was sore and I had a pounding headache. I must have slept on it wrong; at least that's what I'm telling myself. The flying dream was just a dream right?

Junior keeps staring at me and didn't eat his breakfast this morning. I tried to get him to finish his food before taking him to school, but we were running late so we had to go. He didn't hold my hand on the walk today, he's becoming a big boy now I suppose. I know boys like to feel grown so early, but I have always been his big sister and I don't want to stop now. Maybe I'll get him some ice cream after school? He always liked that.

Wednesday, September 22nd

I have had a fever all day today and I'm exhausted. I can barely remember if I dreamed but I feel like I haven't slept in days. Mama took time off work to take me to the clinic. She didn't speak to me on the ride there, and kept on sighing in the way she does when she is frustrated. She gave me a dirty look when she pulled cash out of her purse to pay for my consultation.

The doctor said I have fatigue symptoms but Mama laughed and

said I sleep the most in the house. I think she was just joking but it still hurt. The doctor said I need more rest and fluids, and suggested I take some time off school. Mama wouldn't hear of it. She knows that if I'm sick, she will have to take Junior to school so she wants to believe I'm fine. She thinks I'm faking it to get out of class, but my fever doesn't lie.

When we got home, she made light soup full of goat meat but I wasn't hungry. I asked Junior if he wanted to come and lie down with me like we did when we were younger but he said he had homework.

Friday, September 24th

I didn't go to school yesterday or today on the doctor's orders and lay down in the living room. I'm home alone and I've been coughing a lot. I fell asleep on the couch but when I woke up I was outside on the porch. There were gray feathers on the floor around me. I dragged myself back inside and tried to eat some of the light soup Mama made but it made me feel sick.

My fever isn't breaking and I'm scared. I remember when Junior got typhoid, he had to stay home for 2 weeks and I don't want to stay cooped up here. He was vomiting and shaking and couldn't leave his room. We have a school dance coming up next week and no one will ask me to go with them if I'm not around. Junior has been avoiding me. Mama warned him against getting too close in case I infected him with whatever was going on with me, but he always used to find ways to sneak time with me anyway.

Monday, September 27th

In my dream last night, I built up the nest in the neem tree. I found little strips of cloth, twigs, and leaves that made the nook comfortable. Then it was time to hunt. I floated high above a group of twittering

sparrows and dropped on them like a brick. I took my quarry back to the nest and ate it whole.

When I woke up today, I was on the street outside the house just before sunrise with a stray dog licking my foot. I was covered in dirt and my whole body ached as if I ran a marathon. I snuck inside with a bucket of water before Mama and Junior woke up to wash off. When I looked at my face in the mirror, my eyes were bloodshot, and I had huge bags under my eyes.

I also coughed up a gray feather.

I nearly fainted when I saw it. I panicked and flushed it down the toilet, I didn't want Mama to see it. I'm afraid she will send me to a prayer camp. I heard one of her brothers got sent to a prayer camp because they said he was mad and he lived there for the rest of his short life.

That won't be me. I'm not mad.

Wednesday, September 29th

I haven't slept in two days. I don't want to dream again, but I don't know how long I can keep this up. Junior went away on a boy scouts trip so it's just me and Mama here, and she is too wrapped up in her work to realize that I'm losing my mind. I'm having a hard time telling what is real and what isn't with so little sleep. I'm starting to see feathers everywhere. I scratched my arm until I bled earlier because I thought I saw some poking out. I swear the sparrows outside my window are watching me from the trees.

The doctor came to the house today to check up on me and gave me some pills to help me sleep. I pretended to take them but I spat them out when he wasn't looking. I don't know what's happening but I'm pretty sure the grownups don't either, and I've seen the way they deal with things they don't understand. A few weeks ago, one of the older girls got a nose piercing and the grownups kept her in a prayer circle

for three days. They didn't even let her eat. Mama said fasting cleanses the soul. Do I need my soul cleansed?

Thursday, September 30th

Day three without sleep. I can't talk to anyone about this except you, journal. What if they think I'm crazy? What if I am crazy? I miss Junior. I feel so alone here. I've started going to sit in his room to read his comic books to feel better. He is always working on little contraptions that he learns about online. He has an old slingshot that he made out of some branches and a piece of rubber. I remember he chased me everywhere with it for weeks until Mama made him stop.

I was digging through his closet to find the next X-men issue when I found a little package wrapped in cloth, tucked underneath a stack of comics. I unwrapped it to find a bird's talon with strange symbols carved into it. He's coming back tomorrow; I have to talk to him about this.

Friday, October 1st

I confronted Junior today before Mama came back from work. I asked him why he has been avoiding me and where he got the talon in his room. His eyes went wide when I mentioned the talon and he got very angry. He started yelling at me about privacy and then broke down in tears, saying he was sorry.

I couldn't get him to tell me what he was sorry for but he kept saying it over and over. He covered his face with his little hands and wouldn't stop crying. I slapped him. I'd never hit him before, but it was the only way I could think to get him to calm down.

He said some of the older boys gave it to him at school and told him it would give him powers, like the X-men. He gave them his lunch

money for it. They told him if he hid it in his room, he would be able to fly.

I felt sick when he told me, and had a coughing fit. I threw up more feathers right there on his bedroom floor. We cleaned them up and I threw the talon away in the trash outside. I'm exhausted, and still terrified to sleep.

Saturday, October 2nd

There are feathers growing out of my arms and legs. I have hidden them as best I can by wearing long sleeves despite the Accra heat, but I don't know how long I can keep this secret. My fingernails are darkening and have grown a lot. It's a bit more difficult to write. I find myself staring hungrily at the sparrows outside and losing track of time. Mama is at one of her jobs, and I've shut myself in my room, under the blankets to block out the sunlight which has started to hurt my eyes.

Junior can't stop crying. I can hear him now in the room next door. I am starving but I can't get myself to eat anything at home. The sun will set soon so I'll go outside to get some air. I can't stay in my room forever.

Friday October 8th

My sister has been missing for a week. I found her journal in her room the day after she left. When I read about how much she suffered, I felt horrible because I know it was my fault. I should never have bought the talon. This journal and I are the only ones who know the truth, and I think she was right; I can't tell Mama. Her prayer circle is outside, speaking their funny language to bring her back. I don't think that will work, but a part of me hopes it does.

I made a mousetrap with a bottle and a coathanger and have been leaving mice on her window sill every night. I usually fall asleep long before morning, but last night I managed to stay awake and saw a huge gray owl swoop down and snatch it. I like to believe that Afia is coming to visit, but I don't think I will ever know.

Kwasi Adi-Dako is a writer and learning designer from Accra, Ghana. He has worked in education design leadership in South Africa, Kenya, Rwanda, Mauritius, and Ghana, focusing on curriculum design, teacher training, and student experience management. He loves reading and writing science fiction and is always looking for ways to build connections between varied African contexts.

Prose

THE MASTERY OF THINGS

Fui Can-Tamakloe

1

The call comes a little after 9 PM. You have just put your youngest child to bed after much persuasion and running around, and are about to settle into a meal of cut fruits your wife left on the kitchen counter for you. It is a little tradition. Anytime she has an overnight shift at the hospital in which she works, she makes two bowls of fruit. One for herself, and one for you. Whenever you enter the house after a long day of whatever business the government throws your way, the first thing you do is kiss your children and check the kitchen. A bowl of fruit on the counter means an empty bed. No bowl means you get to spend the night with the love of your life.

Your phone rings, and glancing at it, you almost don't pick up. Akwesi, the live-in help for your old man, likes to call at the end of every month to remind you about "the death of the moon." The end of a month. A new month means monies owed; salaries. As if in your meticulousness you have ever forgotten him. You are the one who takes care of all the finances involved in running your father's household.

You appreciate the reminders, but you don't appreciate being called after hours. It feels intrusive, mildly annoying. You pick the call on the fifth ring, instinctively.

"Yes?" You ask curtly, trying to register your annoyance.

"Hello boss, good evening. I hope sey you dey cool?" Comes the uneasy reply. While you are one to go directly to the point, Akwesi is the normal Ghanaian who throws a salutation in the form of a question, waits politely for a perfunctory response, before moving on to other matters.

"It's fine. Why are you calling so late, Akwesi?" You ask, not changing your impatient tone.

"Hmm. Boss, sorry sey I dey disturb you. But you for come house. Your old man...e go." Akwesi says as gently as he can. You can hear an apology hovering in the air, as if waiting for the right time in the conversation to be dropped. You understand, without really understanding. Despite being the one handling your father's upkeep, you don't particularly have a good relationship with the old man.

"I dey come." You say, resignedly, then hang up. The old man sure knows how to pick his moments, you think to yourself. You don't feel shocked by the news of your father's death. You have been waiting for the call since the day he was diagnosed with cancer. But waiting for something doesn't necessarily prepare you for it.

2

Your old house – Mills-Robertson Villa – sits in the quietness of 7th Street, Ringway Estates. To you this house is, was, and remains a cocoon. The old building itself is a bit worse for wear, something that everyone blames your father for. But the house, grand and beautiful in a quaint way, is not the magic of this place. The magic exists in its greenery. Trees, hedges, flowers grow beautifully in this house that is now bordered by more modern houses whose owners prefer hard con-

crete to plants. Your old house stands out, an island of growth in a sea of cement.

A cocoon.

In this space, you and your family existed in peace. Your father, a humble civil servant, earned a salary that kept you just at the edge of the middle class. Which, to the world, was failure. His father before him, your grandfather, had been of the old Gold Coast elite, owning a merchant business that put him at par with British, Syrian, and Indian business counterparts. It was his money that had built this place, at the time an ambitious statement of ostentation. Growing up, you heard all sorts of stories about this mystery grandfather of yours. The man who rode around town in the same Rolls Royce as the British governor. The man who threw parties that saw in attendance such international oddities as American jazz musicians, the elite bon vivants of the Commonwealth, and British royals. His wealth was so vulgar it inspired rumours. Rumour had it that Frederick Mills-Robertson had sold his soul to the devil to make money. The more those rumours spread, the more colourful they got. Some said it wasn't his soul he sold, it was cocaine from the United States he so loved to frequent. Others said he had sold the destiny of a close family member in order to be wealthy. And with that one rumour, it didn't take a genius to figure out who that family member was.

Maybe the last rumour spread farthest because, in comparison to Frederick Mills-Robertson, his son, Joseph Mills-Robertson – you father – had failed at life. Despite growing up rich, going to the best of schools in England alongside young dukes and earls, he had made nothing of himself. According to everyone that mattered, and even those that didn't, he had grown up to be a nobody. Once, in his university days, he seemed destined for politics. A student of law in the 1970s, he had organised students to protest such grievances as fascism, neocolonisation and capitalism. But that fire had died out as quickly as the Limann presidency. Despite attaining a law degree, he

settled first as a teacher, and later as a civil servant in an obscure department of the government. There he, by all accounts, failed to excel. A little corruption here and there and his family's status in society would have been quickly restored. But Joseph never took a single paise if he hadn't earned it, and so he never earned much. Because of this misplaced honesty, you had to suffer the horrible humiliation of growing up middle-class while surrounded by wealth.

3

"This is how you found him?" You throw the question into the air, but the boy latches onto it and responds as if accused.

"Yes please, sir. He came to sit here to get fresh air as always. When it was time for his supper, and I came to call him, he was like this."

You look down at Joseph, sitting dead in a wooden chair underneath the coolness of an Indian Almond tree, and become suddenly aware of everything. The half-burned mosquito coil scenting the air, the rustling of the night breeze through the tree leaves, the dim light of the night sky, the heavy breathing of the traumatised boy standing next to you, and your own racing heart. But Joseph sits, oblivious to the world, looking peaceful; more asleep than dead.

When you were younger, you referred to the tree as Daddy's Tree because, for as long as you could remember, Joseph took to sitting under the tree every day. A memory forms in your mind. You recall asking your father why he spent so much time under this tree. The question had led to a short conversation which, as was usual with Joseph, had ended in a lesson.

"Do you know what *kungfu* is?" Joseph asks, tapping his pipe against the wooden arm of his chair to pack the tobacco.

"Like Chinese fighting styles?" You inquire, young and terribly interested. Joseph grins.

"Yes, and no." Comes the response. Joseph clears his throat and

strikes a match to the tobacco to light it. He purses his lips as he drags on the pipe, puffing smoke like a coal pot. Joseph is an intentional man, and this whole process of lighting his pipe before answering you properly provides him with a chance to organise his thoughts before speaking. And when he does, he sounds like writing.

“Kung fu can be about martial arts, sure. But the true concept lies in harmony and balance. Kung fu is about mastery – learning how to master something through patience and dedicated practice. Every day, without knowing it, we witness kung fu. The coconut seller effortlessly shaves a coconut in seconds. The seamstress can tell your measurements without using her tape measure. How do you think they both got there? Around us, people practise their craft day and night, becoming masters of it, becoming perfect. To answer your question, what I do here is this - I practice kung fu underneath this tree. It helps me breathe, in a world designed to rob me of air.”

You hadn't understood it then. But what you knew was that it was under this tree that Joseph always learned how to master things.

If you were to speak of the seasons of your father's life, you would most likely do so using the things he mastered under this tree. Here, Joseph went through several periods of his life. The first thing Joseph learned to master was an atenteben. This was, ironically, around the time he also got into trouble for blowing the whistle. You were a little boy when it happened. The atenteben was fashioned out of bamboo by an artisan in a village your father visited for work. He had bought it on the way to check on an expensive building project that the government had been undertaking in the area for three years, with regular payments to contractors. There was no such building. The country erupted into silent chaos when his report was leaked, and the military government, which preached anti-corruption and prudent spending became embroiled in a scandal people were too scared to speak about but was nonetheless embarrassing. And while all this happened, your father sat under the tree every night, torturing his household as he

learned to play the atenteben.

It took him four months to learn to play the atenteben decently, two of which he spent home on leave without pay as the soldiers-turned-politicians investigated how such a sensitive report leaked to the press. He practised diligently almost every day, sitting underneath his tree, trying song after song. Sometimes he'd sit with your mother, basking in their ethereal connection.. Other times you would sit together, with you engrossed in a book, tuning out his occasional off-tune blowing. After a year, none of you could remember how bad he had been when he started. He got tired of playing songs he knew and took to composing his own. And then one day, he packed the atenteben into its case and set off for another challenge.

It came in the form of a koshka. This, he bought off a small boy not too far from your home. The boy was very willing to part with his koshka in exchange for a few cedis. The koshka offered a very different sound, and a very different skill to learn. It wasn't just about sound anymore; it was about movement. Joseph worked tirelessly to be able to play the koshka while singing folk songs. After three months of hard work, he could play it like a natural. By then he had resumed work with the government, albeit in a different department. He would never tell you, but the only reason he wasn't dead in a ditch somewhere was that the report had passed through at least thirteen hands before reaching the press, and no matter how callous the military government was, it wouldn't be able to explain the sudden deaths of thirteen of its government employees. His hands were a blur as he played the koshka. On days when he wanted to impress you and your mother, he would try to host a "concert" combining atenteben with koshka. It always ended in disaster, but you loved it nonetheless.

After the koshka came the violin, a dondo, a kora, and a balafon. Sometimes he would invite teachers into the house to show him how to play. Other times he would teach you. It went on for years. Outside of Joseph's bubble, the world moved. And the man you found awe-

inspiring for his constant dedication to mastering things was thrown into sharp relief. The Mills-Robertsons were barely scraping by, in a city that was fast becoming too expensive to live in. At work, Joseph was a stubborn tree that refused to bend to the wind of corruption, and his seniors punished him by withholding promotions. A calm man, he never took the fight to them. In later years, you would come to understand your feelings for his father. You loved him, but you were not proud of him. Joseph lacked ambition, and his family suffered for it. His inertia was the downfall of a once-great family name. And you, who wanted a comfortable life, were left with the realisation that you would have to carve out your own slice of the earth because your father had no interest in passing down wealth.

4

Darkor, your mother, loved Joseph in a way that wasn't romantic, and perhaps therein lay the romance of it. You know this because you have never, not since finding your own life partner, seen two people exist in such perfect balance. Darkor and Joseph's brand of love was not giddy. It wasn't characterised by spontaneous dancing and kisses, and whatever hand-holding existed between them was more metaphorical than physical. Their brand of love was quiet, soft, and wrapped in duty. Darkor lived for Joseph, and he lived for her. They understood each other, revered each other, and never was an unkind word spoken between the two.

She died when you turned fourteen years and were now navigating how to become a man. By society's standards, you failed. The sudden death of your mother – your world – from malaria had sent you into a spiral of depths you could not have ever, in your short life, fathomed. Every day felt like waking up to a part of your soul gone. The finality of death provides an occasion for retrospection, and you had hated yourself for never getting to know your mother. You knew her as she was,

your mother; but you didn't know her as a *person*. Had she loved men before meeting your father? What was she like at fourteen? Who was she? You never got to find out.

For Joseph, the loss was unbearable. You remember how, for almost a year, Joseph never sat in his chair, and never attempted to continue his daily ritual. He made sure you were well-fed and focused on school, but if the death of his mother hurt you, then seeing your father mourn broke you. And in some ways, Joseph never stopped mourning.

You call your wife to give her the news. Her voice carries all the sadness you should be feeling. You are reminded of why you married this woman. She makes you feel like you can have what your parents had. Love, pure and simple. She sends you the number to a private mortuary. As a doctor, she's used to dealing with death. You call the mortuary.

"Hello, Blessed Rest Funeral Home. Mortimer Osei speaking," comes the gruff voice.

In as sober a voice as you can muster, you give the details of your father's passing and request for a car to come to pick up the body. Mortimer Osei provides his condolences, and informs you that there have been multiple deaths around town. He makes a joke about witches being busy – and as a result of this, his cars were unavailable until early morning. You discuss rates with Mortimer Osei and mull over how inconsiderate it seems to treat death as another transaction to be made.

You and Akwesi carry Joseph's light body up the stairs to his bedroom. At your behest, Akwesi covers the bed with large plastic bags. Dead people leak, and it was no use ruining a good mattress. Even in the face of your dead father, you are calm, logical. After laying Joseph down, you turn to observe the room. The dusty books on the shelves, the carpet, the drapes, everything looks like it has for the last thirty years. There are a few items that were new additions to the room. A blood-pressure monitoring device, different kinds of walking canes, a table-top full of medication, an oxygen tank from earlier days when

Joseph had been in worse condition. You suddenly see the irony in that thought. What's a worse condition than death?

At Joseph's bedside sits the *atenteben* from your childhood, still looking as solid as it had the first time you saw. Finally, sorrow fills your heart. Like it was with your mother, you are suddenly aware that the man you knew as your father and the man your father was, exist in two separate, occasionally colliding worlds. You find that your dislike for your father is fading suddenly, as if the negative feelings, now without any living target, have exited your body. Memories of failures are replaced by warmer memories of laughter and imparted knowledge. Tears roll down your face. You hear the door close softly as Akwesi, ever perceptive, gives you some privacy. Or maybe what you mistake as perception is just Akwesi's discomfort with being in the same space as a dead body. Either way, you're grateful for his exit.

The plastic crinkles softly as you sit on the bed next to Joseph. Picking up the *atenteben*, you fidget with it. You chuckle through your tears.

"You know, I never told you this, but I used to steal the *atenteben* to practice, just like you," you murmur. You smile and look at your dead father as if expecting him to respond.

"It's funny. I always say I don't want to end up like you, but there's so much I do that I learned from watching you all these years." The tears continue to fall. Some get caught in your greying goatee, and some find a way to land on the *atenteben* you hold. You realise suddenly that the first song you ever learned to play was actually a funeral dirge written by J. H. Nketia. You chuckle again.

"The irony." You say, as you put the bamboo flute to your lips, and begin a befitting goodbye to a man who taught you to master things.

Fui Can-Tamakloe is a writer based in Accra, Ghana. In 2017, he co-authored and self-published *Made in Ghana: A Collection of Short Stories* with Rodney

Assan. He was also a contributor for *Kenkey For Ewes & Other Very Short Stories*, an anthology by Flash Fiction Ghana. In 2020, he was a judge for the maiden edition of the Samira Bawumia Literature Prize. In 2021, he served as a mentor for the SprinNG Writing Fellowship. Fui is Creative Director for Contemporary Ghana Writers' Series (CGWS), co-founder of The Nami Podcast, and an editor for Flash Fiction Ghana. He loves hosting conversations about writing on Twitter Spaces, questioning the government on social media and drinking beer on the beach. His poetry, short stories, essays, and articles have appeared on different online and print platforms. He writes in English and Ghanaian Pidgin.

Poetry

Sarpong Osei Asamoah

ARS POETICA

If I say I'm a poet, people say 'oh no'. — May Ayim

People say:
With all due respect, here's some disrespect.

They want us to go straight to the point: I love you.
But, if you spill the blood of words, words die.

Everything is dying
But poetry is a struggle against singularity.

To wear the holy feathers of a poem is majestic,
and majesty is not always merciful.
Its strangeness — like first contact with black horse from space;
I rode into language on its alien technology.

You feel about for every button on this spaceship,

Then, serendipity, you flick the FLY button
And you're a brown-dust moth in orbit—body opening on the other
side.
The poem is like riding a dragonfly through Space smoke
and landing it here: at the final full stop.

ODE TO HOME

I always wanted to start a poem with wow till I got the
pink paint of your gun on my shirt, and its nude spit leaked.

The way it rings the water, eternity must be a bell bleeding balloons.
I left Accra and didn't miss the thing between its thighs— some metaphor
for the pink people.

Their rifles, a sudden gif where I come from.
The taste of its thirst is alkaline and a pillar of salt.
A rainbow with knife edges that slice my thighs open.
While Accra was inside me, and I inside her,
I pushed my fingers into myself
and it became a damp policy that sank my last name.

Mother says pray the way Accra wants to be made love to.
Accra can be a disastrous diva.
And survival is how well the blood on a bruised lip passes as lipstick
if you do not kill us.

ANANSE'S COAST

My neighbour is my brother by osmosis.
I prod the water, grey-white like the salt-skinned castles at Elmina.
Its palms are the blood alcohol of translation.
His mother told him the value of anything fluctuates after good coitus.

They tried to embalm the little birthday girl inside her son.
She is a blood crucifix, I give her all my miscarriages.
Who mourns when a girl is trapped in a boy
and not even he can see menstrual blood leaving his body?

I know the blood like I know bloated boys like him
washed up shore: a dead laundry;
Bloated boys in a minaret. Bloated boys in a gun.
Bloated boys in Christiansborg Christians.

A bloated boy in me in a bloated girl.
A bloated girl in a bloated boy.
A bloated language in a bloated body.
A bloated country in an open casket.

Sarpong Osei Asamoah is a bi-ethnic Ghanaian who writes in Twi and English. His work has featured in Tampered Press Magazine, Agbowo, Olongo Africa Magazine, Lolwe, Protean Magazine, The Hellebore, IceFloe Press Magazine, (Twi poems) at WriteGhana.com, and elsewhere. He is a founding member of, and was poetry editor, at the Contemporary Ghanaian Writers Series (CGWS). He is the host of the forthcoming “Canon Podcast” (a poetry podcast centred on Ghanaian poetry), and has been an intern at the Library Of Africa and The African Diaspora (LOATAD) based in Accra, Ghana.

Poetry

K. Asare-Bediako

SPELLING MY TONGUE

How do you name hunger in your tongue?

Kɔm—ɛkɔm?

hell no!

this is my mother's gift from the ancient tongues

I mentioned broken as strange to a stranger

I said bro-ken

or bubu – b-u-b-u?

Oh yes!

that is how I learnt hardship from infantry

& hyping grief in my house is a norm

you say, it is so. it is so

because I have a reason

Me da w'ase!

bravo to all the screeches of parsimony
Or would you say a boy weeps into his mother's cup
waiting for the days his tears should be judged?

I am not a shard
mewə ahooɔden – I am vigorously built

don't chase my words like the ghost thunders in the clouds

I only speak what is moulded on my tongue.

K. Asare-Bediako. Asare Albert Kweku, writing as K. Asare-Bediako is a young up and coming Ghanaian writer, teacher, coach, poet, philanthropist and a legal aspirant. He chose writing as a therapy to aid him breath away the thoughts of his unseen father from birth.

He is the author of *Portrait of Many Colors* (Ghost City Press) 2022. His recent works can be found in African Writers Magazine, Ngiga, Fevers of the mind, The Stripes and elsewhere. His forthcoming works are in Goatshed Press, Contemporary Ghanaian Writers anthology, and others. He loves singing, reading or watching TV for leisure.

Poetry

Araba Ofori-Acquah

GROWTH

You don't see how I push
Against the darkness that swallows me
Child in womb, corpse in tomb,
So fully consumed
That I'm not sure if I am in darkness or of darkness

You don't see how I work
In my waking, in my dreaming
Not seeing any change
Not knowing there is light
But knowing there is light

You don't see the giving up
Giving in
Feeling helpless
Drained within
Clasping hope, building strength
Until it's time to try again

You see a 'sudden' breakthrough
As finally
I pierce the veil between dark and light
Soil and air
Womb and world
Peering out to what I couldn't see
But knew awaited me

You see my slow but steady awakening
First steps, new wings
Clear vision, heart sings
Of freedom

You see me become me
Uncurling, unfurling
Stepping into who I am
Aligning, light shining
And you think
"Maybe she's born with it"

You see me take up space
As I own my place
I become a believer in myself
And vindicated in my faith
I stand taller and taller
Seeking out
Reaching out
Speaking out

And I say

I made it

Araba Ofori-Acquah is a Ghanaian-British healer and writer dedicated to making wellness accessible for Black people around the world. Her writing centres on healing, the female experience and the many shades of Black-ness, taking the form of creative non-fiction, fiction and poetry. You can find her writing in the recently published *Lockdown Diaries* anthology from the Ama Ata Aidoo Centre for Creative Writing, and her first book *Return to Source: Unlock the power of African-centred wellness* will be published in Spring 2023.

Poetry

Estella Esinam Apenuvor

UNCUT ME

She's been tampering, staggering
lingering as the pain
– brown, black ... red –
messes with my brain

today, a silhouette of an animal I can't name passes for my grandmother
the bumps spiraling down my inner thigh barely miss a kiss from her
razor
and my blood, louder than the waves I cherish so dear,
speaks across the floor

I will survive this. I am not Bintu
who with all the fire in her belly
had drank the valor from grandma's lantern;
burning with a momentous glow;
dying the death of a useless child.

my eyes – soft or wet
part open and close
the beast that burst my teenage bubble
first glared at me
cut my clitoris like yam
and beckoned me to honour what was left of it

smile. I no longer feel the urge to dish out unevenly chopped yam
to the muscular folks of our land

for our clan and my father's honour
I can tie the knot while I'm pure underneath

my mother. she smirks proudly at me
from the broken window

as if she can send my virginity on an errand
to buy an orange without seeds

Estella Esinam Apenuvor is a graduate of the University of Cape Coast and an English Literature teacher in the Eastern Region of Ghana. She was the 2nd runner-up for the Abena Korantemaa Oral History Prize in 2020. She was also one of the shortlisted entrants of the maiden edition of The Samira Bawumia Literary prize (Poetry). Apart from managing a literary blog (estella19.wordpress.com), she spends her time outside of work reading, observing nature and learning how to groom her afro.

Poetry

David Agyei-Yeboah

THE EFFRONTERY

My boss cleared the desk. Said he wanted my skirt up for briefing and not the regular documents. Said I was a sight to behold. My silver bangs reminded him of the salt and pepper heads he liked to jerk off to every morning before he made it to work. Felt the lime mucus slide down the roof of my mouth as I peered at this edifice of a man. Here was a man I adored. Surrogate father that now wanted to make me dance to the bebop of his lewd virtuosity. I remember my first day at work, he bought me flowers. Shoot! I failed to realize he was prepping for this day – to cash in on me, to make me his most decorated bumblebee. That I cling to his manhood like flea on a skin bleed. I was terribly mistaken to have thought this man was somehow smitten by the tulips of my brain. My valedictory certificate sewed into the very fabric of my skin; my legal chops dug from the deepest wells of Accra's law agencies.

How dumb I was to have expected him to understand that a woman is a full package. A woman is more than a sensual being; she can

look challenge in the eye and leap over all its hurdles. I should have slapped Onyina that day! I was just too shocked to assimilate all that had happened. Can you believe he had his son come over to lock the office doors so all he could do was rope me in and seize my womanhood, as if I was a felon he'd clasp after a robbery, a stray horse he'd straddle wherever he pleased.

I saw his eyes. They were bloodshot with desire. Desire that overflowed like an overfilled ice cream cone melting away at its crisps. Desire like a pool of grimy fluid congested in a gutter now being fed upon by houseflies. Desire that couldn't curtail the fact that he was looking at his only niece. He had failed to bridle desire so much so he now sought to conquer his own kin.

David Agyei-Yeboah is a young creative from Accra, Ghana that believes in expressing gutting raw energy onto plain paper. He believes art is sacred and should be expressed with utmost care, beauty and craftsmanship. A first-class honors graduate of English and Theatre Arts from the University of Ghana, he enjoys art in its intricacies and loves to express himself through words and music. He is published on Praxis Magazine for Arts and Literature, African Writer Magazine, The Kalahari Review, Icefloe Press and A Voice is a Voice – Resistance Issue by Contemporary Ghanaian Writers Series (CGWS). He was long-listed for The Totally Free Best of the Bottom Drawer Global Writing Prize in 2021. A graduate of the Tampered Press Poetry Workshop in 2021, he is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Communication Studies at the University of Ghana.

Poetry

Elikplim Akorli

i.
truth
dey like fart
nobody big pass am

ii.

art is

childish

simplicity

made profound

for appreciation.

don't grow up /

there's everlasting

beauty in being

a child.

iii.

a kiss
is the heart's
pouring into
the mouth
of another heart /
expanding the mind,
feeling large in the body.

[two tongues
like wicks
hold the flame
of life at their tips]

it's the sharing
of possibilities
experiences
acquired /
refined
and stored
for the subtle.

[it is the harmonies
of two expressive bodies
rippling for an effect]

Elikplim Akorli lives and works in Accra. He has a Bachelor's Degree in African Studies from the University of Cape Coast (2010) and an MBA in Human Resource from Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (2015). As a writer, he has published two poetry anthologies: *A Heart's Quest* and *Purple Harmattan*. His first book has five of the poems translated into Japanese, and his second presents all the poems in both English and his mother tongue, Ewe. He is very interested in investigating and developing the oral traditions and art forms of the Ewe people to contribute to the imaginative history of the people. He is also a seasoned performer. He has presented and hosted a number of events in Accra.

Poetry

Ama Afrah Appiah

ME NNKA NKYERE OBIARA

There's something on my chest!
let me talk to you Sista
my voice is no longer a pleasant song
it's a dirge!

I hate the government!
wɔ ye pɛɛmankomenya dodo!
adwen fi nkotsee!

Don't tell anyone I said this!
they will crush my skull
or let me starve
until I eat out my tongue!

I JUST WANT TO DIE WHEN I AM DEAD

i have lost my soul
searching for god in all corners
the cathedral and temples
every place there was supposed to be god
they turned into cages with lianas
tangled my neck
took out the light in my eyes
i did not have to bow
i was forever bent
they told me
everything will be fine when you get to heaven
so after the suffering –
the pain of living a life
i have to live again
singing and praising
like i have not done enough already
i am tired
i just want to die when i am dead

Ama is a writer, an educator and a gender activist born in Breman Asikuma in the Central Region of Ghana. Her work focuses on equality, sexuality, identity and Pan-Africanism.

Ama believes in creating a safe space for people to feel a genuine sense of belonging no matter their difference. She is passionate about protecting people's histories from erasure by writing to elevate the voices of those whose stories have not been heard.

Poetry

A'bena

EVERY SUNDAY

A man without honour, Our Prophet
A tragedy of divinity
Every Sunday, a Man prays
Another cargo of slaves

A distant incantation, Our faith
A hollow groan from far off
A monochrome creed
The choir dares to chant

A receptacle of godless power, Our Priest
The gavel at an auction
None so blind as him
Who only sees the colour of copper

Slaves sold for a song, Our sisters
Securities without security

Our spirits will no more sing
What is life, but a loony tune

A burning prayer, Our vengeance
The censer at the altar
Trembles, every Sunday morning
Our most violent passions
Our darkest desires

We have no reverence within our hearts
The lights have long been snuffed out
We will show no mercy
Forgive us, Holy Virgin
We will grasp Heaven's lightning by its tail
Drag down divine punishment
Upon the sinful head of the Man who prays,
Every Sunday

A'bena is a legal practitioner, a writer and an artistic activist whose work centres on energy, climate, power dynamics and women. She has been published in the Equanimity Anthology by the CGWS Series and co-runs the Happy Monthlies Project, which advocates on women's issues. She is an alumnus of the 2021 Mo Issa Workshop and is enthusiastic about what the future holds for the Ghanaian literary space.

Five Haiku

Priscilla Arthur

moonlight...
waning with the tempo
of the dancing cymbals

sirocco-
the chrysanthemums toss their heads
in no direction

morning sonata
in the repetition of broom sounds
a lark's melody

Summer solstice
a scrub-wren sunbathing
on the cattail

dangling leaf...
grandma's off-beat twerk
behind the adowa

Priscilla Arthur, born by the shores of Tema and bred near a little tent is a Ghanaian writer and Haijin. She emerged winner of the 2022 Haiku Society of America Nick Virgilio Haiku and Senryu Contest and second runner up for the 2021 Africa Haiku Poetry Prize. Her literary works have appeared in Mamba; Journal of Africa Haiku Network, Haiku Universe, Wales Haiku Journal, South Wales evening post, Haiku Society of America and elsewhere. She loves to bring to light what cannot be seen in mere sunshine. If she's not found swinging the tennis racket, or reading, she's carving words on a bone. Her works are included in the Ghana Poetry Festival Anthology, Best New African Poets Anthology, and a Tampered Press anthology about protest.

Non-Fiction

REPATRIATION OF LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY

Amy Shimshon-Santo, Mamle Kabu,
Sabata-mpho Mokae, Nii Ayikwei Parkes,
Michaela Paulette Shirley, and Ana Rita Santiago

As part of the 2021 edition of *Pa Gya! A Literary Festival in Accra*, Ghana, we convened a global panel of writers who are catalyzing creative projects that forge new relationships between local and international languages within educational and publishing systems. We see languages as having a unique operating system that structures knowledge, assigns value, and reflects perceptions of time, place, and community. This discussion is timely given the ongoing conversations about reparations for communities malign-ed by white supremacy, patriarchy, and colonization.

The panel title centers Sabata-mpho Mokae's concept of the "repatriation of languages" to spark a global discussion on the value of mother tongue, amplifying black and indigenous women's voices, writing from the land, and polylingual publishing for children and adults throughout the diaspora. Mokae is a bilingual (Setswana and English) scholar, writer, and professor in Kimberley, South Africa. The panel includes Ana Rita Santiago, a professor and publisher from Salvador da Bahia; Michaela Paulette Shirley, an indigenous planning expert from Kin Dah Lichii in the Diné Nation who resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Nii Ayikwei Parkes, a bilingual Ghanaian poet, editor, and social commentator. This panel proceeding summary exposes readers to powerful ways of reimagining writing with an eye to education, publishing, and place. The speakers point to the liberatory potential of repatriating language and culture to restore our authentic relationships to self, family, and community.

REPATRIATION OF LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY

A global discussion with Sabata-mpho Mokae, Ana Rita Santiago, Michaela Paulette Shirley, Nii Ayikwei Parkes, and Amy Shimshon-Santo. *Panel moderation and transcript editing by Amy Shimshon-Santo and Mamle Kabu.*

Sabata-mpho Mokae (SMM): The politics of language in African literature comes from the idea that language is not just a means to communicate. It's a way to see, a way of knowing, and a way of facilitating human relations. It is a philosophy. A language is a body of knowledge, and if you ignore this body of knowledge, you ignore the people that it represents. When I say that language is a facilitator of human relations, I'd like to give an example. In

English, every older female member of my family is ‘Auntie.’ But in my language, I have a title for my mother’s younger sister, which, if directly translated, means ‘Junior Mother.’ I have a title for my mother’s older sister, which, if directly translated, means ‘Senior Mother.’ I have a title for my brother, for my father’s brother, for his sister. All these titles relate to the responsibilities these people have towards me, and to the family. So this is an example of how language itself facilitates human relations differently; how language glues societies together in different ways.

In 1962, there was a massive conference in Uganda called the ‘Conference of African Writers of English Expression’ which did a lot of damage in many ways. In 1907, in Lesotho, a man called Thomas Mofolo had given us the first three African language novels including *Chaka* read in translation from Cape to Cairo. If Thomas Mofolo had been alive in 1962, he would not have been allowed into that conference because he was writing in Sesotho, a language the white men did not understand. Basically, what that conference said was that it is not literature — it is not even African literature until it is written in a language understood in Europe. That has set us back so many decades, even centuries. Because then, the new educated class in Africa started ignoring their languages, disregarding them. The emerging idiom was that language was a carrier of cultural values. The history of the people was thus ignored, and we started leaning towards European languages.

I think something that needs to give us sleepless nights on this continent now is that the languages, the default languages — not only of storytelling, but even of intellectual engagement on the African continent — are not African languages. That is where the problem is. To try and address this at the university where I work, I came up with an idea called “The Repatriation of Letters” where we identified six titles written in English by authors who also speak African languages, and then commissioned translations back into the official mother tongue. Because, as a Setswana speaker reading a novel in English written by a fellow Setswana speaker, I completely understand why s/he ends up over-explaining. I am very much aware of the limitations of the English language to express African pain, African experience, African aspirations, and so on. I’m very much aware of where the author is trying to look for European equivalence. But this European equivalence cannot adequately convey what

s/he wants to convey.

I realize that what we now call “repatriated translation” basically liberates the story, in so many ways. For the first time, you realize that the author — who for many reasons could not fully convey what they wanted to convey — is now completely free in their expression. There are many reasons why people around the world write in English. They were taught in English. As colonized people, English was forced down our throats. We were even put in jail for not using English. When we read repatriated language, what we are saying to the author is - we understand that this is how you would have written, had you been free.

Ana Rita Santiago (ARS): We meet during times of unrest that surround us worldwide, in the difficult and complex times of Covid-19, in which millions of lives have been lost in the world (and more than 600 thousand in Brazil), and in which we live the drama of distances — not only social, but also economic, and cultural. This panel is about communication, and about repatriating our very existence. I welcome the challenge of socializing and mobilizing languages, cultures, and communities from the pains — and joys — of living. Repatriating our existence is a constant exercise. We share geographies of affection, encounter, and resistance through experiences of the arts and literature. Our aim is to strengthen the humanities, and our sense of (re)existing, and to establish dialogue.

Living is a political act. Therefore existing presupposes forging paths to (re)exist! As a person, teacher, researcher, literary critic, editor and social activist, I have always built myself socioculturally through collectivity. Thus, living and being, whether in the university, in the community, or in any other space that circumvents our existence, is permeated and intersected by “I and us” through our sociocultural and community agency. The absence of black women writers in artistic-literary circuits does not indicate their inexistence, but rather reveals the silencing of their authorial voices in the face of racism that structures and sustains the relationships and living conditions in Brazil between blacks and non-blacks. There is power in (re)writing oneself, and us, to reinvent our existence. Literary language becomes a battleground in favor of the authorship of black men and women, thus a political and resis-

tance act. Write to exist and resist! It is important to stress that realities, and the search for truth and self-knowledge, include knowing and inventing other worlds, landscapes, utopias. Writing means rethinking our humanity and, also, promoting pleasure and enjoyment.

As escape routes, the acts of writing, criticizing and publishing (un)silent voices, break the armature to ensure inscriptions in literature and editorials. As a revolutionary becoming, the literary word and literary criticism become a “way of exercising freedoms,” as stated by the Angolan writer Luis Kandjimbo. It can be the power of resistance and invention of (re)existences that are emancipated, dissident and insurgent, pregnant with love, desire, life, utopias, while also aware of present dystopias and disaffections.

It is necessary to understand the need to repatriate languages, cultures, and communities as daily work that moves and mobilizes our existence. Therefore, we need to build connections and bridges between us to strengthen and uplift artistic and literary practices and provocations, activating the multiple dimensions of repatriation that trigger modes of (re)existence, boost the powers of life, and promote transit and dialogue between us. This panel is a good (re)start!

Michaela Paulette Shirley (MPS): I am from a nation called the Navajo Nation. Historically and culturally, we have our territories located within four sacred mountains. The name for our community, Kin Dah Lichii, translates as Red House, which refers to the sandstone used to construct that Anasazi Pueblo home. We’re one of over 500 indigenous peoples that occupy and live within the United States.

I come into my writing practice, and my philosophy around engagement, with scholarship from being able to walk the land. The lands that I walk on are places where I’ve herded sheep with my Nali, Isabel Shirely. Similar to Sabata, we have different names for different people in our families. My Nali is my paternal Grandma. When I am on the land, we prepare meals and tell stories. It’s an important part of the passing on of knowledge. A lot of my youth was spending time at sheep camp. It’s where I learned a lot of Diné values around family, animals, and our own philosophies around Hozhó (Harmony & Balance).

Part of what I do as an indigenous planning scholar is having my work be informed by these tenets. First: “We are not Minorities” — because you could go into an indigenous community and not see one outsider for a whole day. Second: “We do not need Translators” — because we have our own voices that we want to articulate our dreams or passions in — be that in English, or within our own indigenous, oral or written languages. Third: “We do not suffer from Cultural Amnesia” — because we know and remember who we are, what we value, and where we come from. And lastly: “The People are Beautiful already.” That tenet is really important to me because oftentimes, indigenous people, or non-white people, are relegated and marginalized as being the other, or like ugly people because of our culture, and because of where we’re coming from.

It is really important to mention the tenets because, of course, there was attempted assimilation of Diné people. The U.S. government advanced assimilation policies around education. This led to the experience of lived realities of being in a colonized landscape. When schools have come into our communities, they have begun to turn the landscape into the white man’s way of how they want to look at the land. If you travel through the Navajo Nation today, what you’re mostly going to see is a landscape authored by the U.S. government — one where there’s paved roads, centralized housing, and schools. There’s also a lot of uranium extraction which has led to displacement. The Navajo community of Red Water Pond, who continue to occupy their ancestral lands today, are in a fight with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, to stay on their land. Actually, the fight is being led by the matriarchs of the community, who are advocating that they want to stay, and, additionally, to move from the contaminated area below the mesa to the top of the mesa, where there are no traces of uranium.

As part of the writing process, through my work as an indigenous planner, we do a lot of community engagement. In Zuni Pueblo, we work with artists to help them develop ideas around a piece of artwork that they already envision. This is really important to the theme of repatriation — repatriating arts and crafts — otherwise it will be culturally appropriated to other places that claim that it’s native made by Zuni Pueblo people. The Zuni Pueblo are not the only indigenous people facing such cultural appropriations. It’s an issue

that's happening globally.

The last thing I want to say is about our hemispheric aspirations, because indigenous people live all over the world, and we occupy some of our ancestral lands, or are working towards the reoccupation of our ancestral lands. It becomes very important for us to have these cross-cultural conversations, and stories, and to communicate and work together.

I want to end with the concept of Hozhó. It's a Navajo philosophy around our way of life, about us being able to achieve balance. All the roots grounding me in my writing are the matriarchs of my family: my Nali Isabel, my mother Dolly Shirley, my maternal grandmother Mae Bia, and my great grandmother Alilah. We plant corn every year, and we harvest it. We live by, or aspire to live by, the Hozhó prayer, even in the face of the attempted assimilation of us. Ultimately, what I'm trying to do is share beauty because beauty is all around us. I'm writing to share beauty for the land, language, community, family, future generations, and of course, my ancestors.

Nii Ayikwei Parkes (NAP): Hello everyone. It is good to be here. I think that the work I do is fairly simple, and I like to think of it that way. What Michaela Shirley shared - that thing about "No Minorities" - really resonates, because this is one of the ways in which languages are pushed into the background, through these kinds of narratives of hierarchy, which is actually where a lot of my work is focused as a writer, editor, publisher, and social commentator. So, it is really about what is given value, or what is given velocity.

The fact is that languages also carry cultural dignity. So, when you erase a language, you erase the dignity of the people and of their cultures. Unfortunately, we are in a phase, in many African countries that were colonized, where people are dispensing with their languages, not realizing how much they're losing, and how much history those languages have.

In my language, Ga, the word for hour is *ɲmlɔ̃twah* which means 'the ringing of a bell.' This tells you automatically that the notions of hours only came into existence when we had churches. And that means, they came with the colonizers. So, something as simple as a word or a phrase in a language can tell you so much. When you lose the language, you also lose bits of history that are not written but are coded in the language. Languages are coded his-

tory.

When I wrote my first novel, and I was not italicizing Ghanaian words, but italicizing English words, my editors in England were completely confused. Until I explained to them: if I am centering who I am, then the words which are foreign are the words that came into our language from English. This is what they have been doing for years: othering our languages. So, if I am transliterating from a Ghanaian language - and even the notion of 'Ghana' is up for debate) - say, from Akan into English, then the words that enter from English are the ones that should be italicized. This is something that I carry into my work as an editor and a publisher. I have just written an article in which I put a Ga phrase, and the editor italicized it, and I wrote back and said, "Listen, this is a big deal for me. Can you not italicize it? Because it's a word like any other."

This whole notion of 'Modern Languages,' which is the title that is given to your English and your French, your Spanish, and your Portuguese... I mean, what are our languages then? They are as modern as any language, and they evolve just like any language. So it's really about the language around language. It is the language around our languages that reinforces these things, and makes people feel like they don't have value in their own languages; and then they start to leave them behind. People will say, "Well, we don't have a word for computer so why should we bother?" But if you understand your languages, and you understand how the words are built, then you can always make new words. The word for 'grey' in Ga is lamulu. If you break it down, it means 'fire dust' i.e. the dust from fire, which is ash. It tells you that grey is not abstract. It has a meaning within the culture in the way that we operate. After a fire had burned, what we saw was this color. It's not just that some random thing is grey.

When I started writing for children I also realized just how much, and how early, this marginalization starts. One of the books I worked on is called *Tales From Africa*. I was retelling a Madagascan story, and when I wrote the names of the characters, the editor asked me if I couldn't shorten the names, or explain why they were so long. This is something that comes from Madagascan culture, in which the names are extended to show a historic link to the ancestors. I said to the editor - "If you can let me, in the same book, explain why

the European names are so short, then I'll be happy to do it." Suddenly, they didn't know what to say back to me.

One of the books I worked on is a Ga picture alphabet, because you realize that our governments are so indoctrinated into the colonial projects that they feel like the only way they can show their value is to show how European they can be. They don't really create any teaching material that is appealing to children, to teach our languages. I met a native Peruvian illustrator when I was in Peru, and she illustrated what is now a Ga picture alphabet. There is a lexicon at the back in which I have put Ga, Akan, Dagbani, Spanish, French, Ewe and English translations from Ga. A lot of people would never have expected me to put Dagbani side by side with Spanish, because of this hierarchy of languages that we create. Those are the kinds of things that I do. I'd like to think of them as very simple things, but, actually, I think they are really important things. When my first novel was published and people read it in Ghana, they said - Why are you making the village cool? Actually, all I had done differently was not to denigrate them. The philosophy around our villages, around our native cultures, is infused in language. So, all I was doing was making it be as valid as anything else that is being taught to people.

Those are the small things that, if we continue to do, will make languages evolve and maintain their place in our societies. I have no problem with people having multiple languages. I don't have a problem with the fact that I speak English, but I do have a problem with someone suggesting to me that English should be more important than Ga. That I cannot live with. Thank you. Ana Rita, I really like the project you are doing that also recognizes — beyond just language — the marginalization of women's voices. It is taking positive steps in terms of women's voices in the lusophone world.

ARS: I spoke in the beginning about my joy and hope for this encounter. I value the possibility of being with people from other territories, thinking about modes of repatriating languages. The chance to meet each other again fills me with tremendous hope.

MPS: I was intrigued by what Nii had to say about the word 'hour.' For us Diné people, our language was only written because the book of Mormon

was being translated into Navajo, in order to convert Navajos to that religion. And so, that is one thing I am taking to heart. But the last thing is not to forget that not all indigenous languages can be written, and that we must respect the objections that certain communities might have to having their languages written. Those are things that actually need to be hashed out with the communities themselves.

SM: If we give languages an opportunity to grow by writing them down, developing new terminologies, borrowing from other languages, and so on, they will all have enough words to express what the speakers of those languages want to express. In a time like this, when there is a wave of wokeness around the world — or a second wave of decolonization because the first one was political — the second wave of decolonization is us reclaiming that which is ours, in order to understand ourselves better. For me, we do that by repatriating our stories, ourselves, our dignity. There is no liberation of a people that is complete until it is also a liberation of the tongue.

Amy Shimshon-Santo is a poet and teacher at Claremont Graduate University. She is the author of *Even the Milky Way is Undocumented* (Unsolicited Press, 2020), the chapbook *Endless Bowls of Sky* (Placeholder Press) and the poetry phonics books for children, *Alphabet Quest*. Her works have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize in poetry (2020), Rainbow Reads Award in poetry (2020), Best of the Net in poetry (2018) and a Pushcart Prize in creative nonfiction (2017). Her writing has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *ArtPlace America*, *GeoHumanities*, *Zócalo Public Square*, *Tilt West*, *Boom CA*, *GeoHumanities*, *SAGE*, *UC Press*, *SUNY Press*, *Public*, among others. Her teaching career has spanned research universities, community centers, K-12 schools, arts organizations, and spaces of incarceration. She believes that culture is a powerful tool for personal and social transformation.

Mamle Kabu, a Ghanaian/German writer, has been published in various anthologies and journals in Africa, the UK and the US. Anthologies include *Mixed: An Anthology of Short Fiction on the Multiracial Experience* (W.W. Norton, 2006)

and *African Women Writing Resistance: Contemporary Voices* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2010). Journals include Sable Litmag, Obsidian and The St. Petersburg Review. In 2009, she was shortlisted for the Caine Prize for African Writing for her story The End of Skill. In 2011 she won the Burt Award for her children's novel, *The Kaya Girl*, published under the name Mamle Wolo. She is a director of the Writers Project of Ghana (WPG), a member of the editorial board of the Journal of the Writers Project of Ghana, and co-editor of the WPG anthologies *The Sea has drowned the Fish* (2018), and *Resilience* (2021).

Commentary

PLANET EARTH: WAKE UP!

Manu Herstein

Wealth Inequality is one of the most pressing challenges of our times. Wealth, and therefore power, is increasingly in the hands of a few, widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots. To this day, the bottom 54% own less than 2% of global wealth. And if trends continue, the top 1% will own 39% of global wealth by 2050 (<https://www.wealth-inequality.net/wealth-inequality-today>).

... in order to survive as a human, moving, moral weight in the world, America and all the Western nations will be forced to reexamine themselves and release themselves from many things that are now taken to be sacred, and to discard nearly all the assumptions that have been used to justify their lives and their anguish and their crimes so long (James Baldwin, Letter from a Region in My Mind, November 10, 1962).

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin ... the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights

are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered (Martin Luther King “Beyond Vietnam” speech at Riverside Church, New York City, 4 April 1967).

We live in unprecedented times that open up possibilities for unexpected politics. We have to believe that we can organize and muscle the power to start building a different world, one that gets slower by muddle-through design, not disaster (Giorgos Kallis <https://roarmag.org/essays/roar-roundtable-covid-19-and-the-climate-crisis/>).

This is a political piece. You might regard it as utopian nonsense and find it hard to swallow, so I’m going to set it in a frame of science fiction. O.K? Let’s go.

Activists in the inhabited planets of our galaxy formed a Milky Way Council. The Council got to learn of the deep malaise affecting Planet Earth and decided to send an Inspector to report back and recommend reforms. The Inspector travelled the planet, listening. Rather than listen to politicians and bureaucrats he chose to seek out people of the word, mainly writers. From them he collected bad words and phrases, signifying the malaise, and good, signifying the possibilities. I’ve copied these lists from the introduction to his report. I urge you to read them out aloud, with appropriate expression.

First, the bad.

abuse of power, aggression, apocalypse, arrogance, avarice, bias, bigotry, bureaucracy, cadre deployment, coercion, concentration of power, consumerism, corporate lobbies, corruption, cynicism, deforestation, dogmatism, dominance, elitism, entitlement, envy, exclusion, exploitation, factionalism, famine, fundamentalism, gentrification, global warming, greed, hatred, homelessness, homophobia, hubris, hunger, hypocrisy, ignorance, illiteracy, incompetence, injustice, inordinate wealth, mass incarceration, militarism, mistrust, money laundering, monopoly, nar-

cissism, nationalism, nepotism, oppression, outdated attitudes and customs, patriarchy, patriotism, patronage, pesticides, plastics, pollution, poverty, profit motive, racism, rent-seeking, self-deception, self-enrichment, selfishness, sexism, surveillance, thirst, tyranny, violence, war, white supremacy, xenophobia.

Feel free to add your own. You might want to delete some that you feel don't belong to this list. I urge you to think deeply before you do so.

Now the good words and phrases. Again, please read them aloud, read them slowly, reflect on them, celebrate them, sing them.

ADJECTIVES: accountable, bio-degradable, bonded, caring, climate-conscious, compassionate, competent, considerate, cooperative, creative, decent, democratically accountable, empathetic, fair, gender-sensitive, generous, grassroots, green, honest, hospitable, humane, inclusive, innovative, just, organic, responsible, transformative, transparent, worker-driven.

QUALITIES: artisanal skills, Bio-diversity, bondedness, collaboration, common good, community, consideration, dignity, diversity, fun, globalization (as redefined), healing, inspiration, joy, internationalism (without nations), mutual aid, mutual respect, participation, participatory budgeting, peace, positive change, public interest, safety, security, selflessness, solidarity, sufficiency, transformation.

VERBS: dance, disarm, organize, sing, recycle.

AGENTS: activist, citizen, organizer, smallholder, volunteer

ACTIVITIES: rethinking history

Now, the essence of the Inspector's recommendations and his vision of a reformed planet.

UNDERLYING EVERYTHING

Respect for the environment, sustained, repaired, and held in trust for future generations.

WHO MUST BENEFIT?

Every individual world citizen.

POWER

All concentrations of power contain within them the seeds of corruption and abuse. All concentrations of power will be diluted or dissolved.

NO RICH, NO POOR

From birth to old age, every human being will be:

- entitled to receive a living wage, a universal basic income
- assured of a balanced diet, adequate in quantity
- assured of adequate medical attention
- entitled to live without fear of discrimination on any grounds and without fear of violence or other abuse
- entitled to free education

Top professionals in all fields, managers, inventors, researchers, sports men and women, actors and musicians, authors of best-sellers and the like will no longer receive special monetary rewards.

HOUSING

Every family and individual will be entitled to adequate shelter. No one will be homeless. Palaces, the mansions of the formerly rich, hotels and cruise liners will be converted to rent-free multi-family occupation. Space will be matched with need, based on family size.

WORK

With the introduction of the universal basic income, no one will need to work to survive. The development of robotics will reduce the need for human labour. Both work and retirement from work will be voluntary. Unpleasant tasks will be shared. Jobs will be created for all who wish to work. All working parents will be entitled to free child-care.

PRODUCTIVE ENTERPRISE

Monopolies and large productive enterprises will be broken down into small cooperative units. The members of each unit will elect its management. The managers will report back to the members and will submit themselves for re-election at regular intervals. All units will be subject to regular independent external auditing. Excess income ("profit") will be paid into a decentralized Universal Fund. Funds for research and new developments and for the establishment of new enterprises will be drawn from the Universal Fund. All information concerning the operation of enterprises will be transparent and available on request. Research and development will be encouraged and the results will be shared and freely available. Copyrights and patents will become obsolete.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

Large, industrialized farms will be broken down into smaller units, managed in accordance with sound ecological principles and practice. Agriculture and food processing will be organized to meet human needs, not profit. Smallholdings will be encouraged. Every flat city roof will accommodate a small vegetable farm, tended by volunteers. There will be a potted herb garden on every balcony. Vegetables and fruit will be grown in home gardens and in parks. There will be no hunger or thirst. Water will be a publicly owned and managed resource. Thirsty lawns will be outlawed. Industrial fishing will be banned, allowing the oceans to recover from the damage we have inflicted upon them. Artisanal fishing will thrive.

ELECTRIC POWER

The roof of every building will be equipped with photovoltaic panels and solar powered heaters. The major source of power for the grid will be solar, wind, geothermal and existing hydro. Fossil fuel and nuclear powered stations will be retired.

ADVERTISING

Advertising will be used to convey information to consumers, with-

out competitive promotion of products and services.

FOOD AND DRINK

Restaurants will be managed on sound nutritional principles. Junk food will become obsolete.

NO WAR, SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES

Manufacture of all weapons of war, conventional, nuclear, biological, chemical, robotic, land-based, airborne and seaborne and in space, and all other lethal arms, will be discontinued and prohibited. All such weapons will be disarmed and destroyed and the materials recycled. A small number of samples will be retained for display in museums for the edification of future generations. The armaments industry will be converted to the manufacture of items designed to satisfy legitimate human needs.

All armed security forces will be disbanded.

MONEY

There will be a single universal currency.

THE UNIVERSAL FUND

The administration of this Fund will be decentralized using the banks. Stock exchanges will become obsolete.

SECURITY

Local communities will determine the collective means of ensuring the security of persons and of property. Security agencies will be manned by a combination of professionals and volunteers. The emphasis will be on the prevention of crime.

THE LAW

A simple universal code of law will be developed, based upon the set of Basic Principles established by the United Nations. The primary objective of the local judicial system will be the understanding and reform of those deemed to have committed crimes against persons or property and their re-integration into the community. Restorative justice, involving the injured party, will replace the use of imprisonment. Justice will be administered in local courts, manned by teams of

elected professionals and volunteers.

POLITICS

Every adult will belong to one or more political unit. The units will be based on geography (village, suburb, city street or block, apartment block) or workplace or profession or educational institution or common interest. Leaders will report back to members and submit themselves for re-election at regular intervals. Units will draw from the Universal Fund to support their operations. Units will cooperate with one another in the management of physical infrastructure and shared services which extend beyond their borders.

LEADERSHIP

No one over the age of sixty will be eligible for a position of leadership. The energy and experience of the elderly will be mobilized in advisory bodies. They may offer voluntary service but will be free of political and administrative responsibilities.

WORLD BODIES

The United Nations Organization will be reformed to bring it into line with the obsolescence of nation states. The new body might be called the United Peoples Organization. Technological developments will allow meetings to take place without the delegates leaving their home areas. The useful U.N. subsidiary bodies, such as World Health, UNICEF and UNESCO, will survive and thrive in modified form. The IMF and the World Bank will have new and different functions, subject to democratic control.

TRADE, TRAVEL AND TOURISM

International trade will be limited to the supply of items which cannot be produced locally and for which need can be demonstrated. Travel and trade by air will be restricted. There will be no borders, no passports, no visas, only IDs. International long-distance tourism will be discouraged but local tourism will be encouraged.

INSURANCE

A central universal insurance fund will provide rapid relief from the

effects of natural and man-made disasters.

LEISURE

Facilities will be available for participation by all in all types of leisure activities including sports, creative arts and education. Participation in all sports by citizens of all ages will be encouraged. The “sale” of sportsmen from one club to another will not be permitted. Sports clubs will be owned and managed by their members and supporters. Organized gambling will be outlawed.

CREATIVITY AND ENTERTAINMENT

Communities will encourage a plurality of diverse voices in all creative fields. Artists’ work will be shared widely. Local live theatre, music, dance, tv, and radio will be supported, as will museums and art galleries. There will be no new, expensive block-buster movies.

COMMUNICATIONS

Access to the Internet will be free for all. Payments of the Universal Basic Income from the Universal Central Fund will be managed by a secure on-line banking system with decentralized local management. Payments to and from productive industries and services will be managed in a similar manner. Universal on-line referenda will be used to authorize (or deny) major investments.

EDUCATION

Lifelong education, both on-line and face-to-face, will be free and available to all, from kindergarten to advanced levels. Published research in all fields will be widely circulated. The elderly will be invited to participate in kindergarten education.

TRANSPORT

Private ownership of vehicles will be rare, except in remote rural areas and by the physically handicapped. Inner-city travel will be by automatically guided vehicles, summoned when needed. Expensive fossil fueled modes of travel, such as air travel, will be restricted to use in emergencies. Airships will become common. Power for ocean travel will be supplemented by sun and wind. Most intra-city travel will be

by rail, powered by electricity.

POPULATION

Over-population is a burden on our planet's limited resources. There are just too many of us. Wiping out poverty and giving women control over their fertility, should help to stabilize the world's population. But how might that population be led to decline without affecting the rights of families? Solving that problem in a non-coercive manner will require some innovative thinking. The security of the universal basic income might help.

SURVIVALS FROM THE WORLD THAT WAS

Maintenance and improvement of existing infrastructure and buildings will be undertaken before embarking upon new construction.

IMPLEMENTATION

After ensuring wide circulation of his report, the Milky Way Council's Inspector has departed, leaving it to us, citizens of Planet Earth, to realize his dream.

Manu Herbstein was born near Cape Town in 1936. He left South Africa in 1959, returning for the first time in 1992. He lived and worked as a civil engineer in England, Nigeria, Ghana, India, Zambia and Scotland. He has lived in Ghana since 1970 and has dual South African and Ghanaian citizenship. His first novel, *Ama, a Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, won the 2002 Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best First Book. A sequel, *Brave Music of a Distant Drum*, was published by Red Deer Press in Canada. His novels *Akosua and Osman* and *The Boy who Spat in Sargrenti's Eye* have both won Burt Awards for African Literature in Ghana. *The Boy who Spat in Sargrenti's Eye* won the African Literature Association's 2016 Creative Book of the Year Award, and was granted a Children's Africana Honour Book Award by Africa Access in 2017.

Poetry

Shainah M. Andrews

RESIDUAL (PIECE OF WE)

I am the remnants of red red that stain plastic containers
could not be removed from ships beginning in
what the dream snatchers colored coconut flesh
called Gold Coast
I am the bone marrow that ocean nor his-story could wash away
Regal is my birthright and it began
before most books acknowledge
before Black bodies pasted onto white postcards
Cornrows stitched into scalps still storytell in North Carolina
Lyrics and literature flow throughout the Diaspora with habitual nods
towards home
Feet never stopped moving to sounds echoing throughout West Africa
And melodies etched into Ghana that model sankofa let my soul know
it can rest

——not wrestle——

Here

Finally

'Cause home is more than just faces and where we go
fine china kept in cabinets that only know dust
It's the song my spirit sings out in Accra and Hohoe
places like Cape Coast

('cause Mother's tongue was clipped)
(Wings did not survive the journey to North America for I)
(so my ancestors' vocal folds found refuge in Englishes so often and
incorrectly called broken)

It's the way my skin soaks up the sun the closer it gets to equator
the way red red won't let plastic containers forget
about it
that like me,
it was there
IS here
to stay

Shainah M. Andrews (ShaiYaa when she speaks her poetry) is a Black artist and educator who has been dreaming and writing as early as second grade. The 24 year old writes, performs, and speaks primarily through the lens of food, linguistics, and heritage travel; her time spent in England, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Colombia, and at East Carolina University (where she earned a BA in English and TESOL certificate) largely inform the Connecticut native's work and entire being. Through her creative lane of informing, Shainah M. Andrews/ShaiYaa hopes to point people towards healing and their own purpose. She currently lives in North Carolina, using her pen to uplift and voice to bring light to a world desperately in need of it.

Poetry

Nana Yaw Sarpong

MANY LOVES

The sun loved the moon
The sun loved the clouds and loved the night sky
The sun yearned for Jupiter and Saturn
Shed the love in the multiverse
The sun loved many
Earth adulated in the monogamy

Many loves later
Water touched land
Beneath it mushroomed many siblings
Many abortions and murdered jealousies
Innumerable species and soulful rhythms
Homophiles and heterophiles and heterozygotes
Water transforms the plants and woman and man
Water was power and loved the singularity

Many loves came around
Hearts spluttered by the waysides
Jerked beats and melodies of bodies crowned
Woman and man are here with the tragedy
The cerebrally imposed limitations
Of the complications of many loves
Of unfinished loves and broken loves and infinite yearns
Of fears of possibilities of many deaths of love
Of rebirth and reincarnated loves abandoned

The sun and water and woman and man
Witness the tragedy of all that is singular love
Transmogrified and etched in many many worlds
Terraforming multiple loves and more tragedies
Into many loves of killer jealousies
What will the Earth do with many loves?

Kwabenya, 20th October, 2021.

Nana Yaw Sarpong is a poet who is resident in Ghana and has lived in the Netherlands. He is a long-term literary activist, promoter and organiser. Nana Yaw holds a postgraduate degree in International Affairs from the Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy (LECIAD).

Poetry

Gabriel Awuah Mainoo

LEARNING THE ART OF HURRICANES

would you stay still
& breathe as peaceful as a skull...

for these are the days
you'll only find yourself

through the thin thread of sunlight
gently darting into the idle boughs

there is you
storm, water, gossamer lights,
striving to make their rainbows, for the winter months
of blackouts, the spinning of icicles in your spleen

you are learning to survive/remember
the meaning of each hue/cramp

inside your glass cubbyhole
you carry a stone, swing from the past
& let yourself out of the bolts
crashing into the lobe of a sister
returning from the crumbles of Troy

turning a blunt blade on her sunken shoulder
she pierces you with a big laugh

GRACE! that is all you get. have the machete
now take the leech down from the cross.

14:23 AT GEORGE PADMORE LIBRARY

/A woman breaks the silence rule with her body/

in the luster of a long yellow room
we smell her from behind in
onion cool & jasmine hot cologne
eyes rattle against her back
as thoughts crisscross many others in
my Makola-muted-mind
boy, take dem eyes off!
steal a glance one more time!
the remaining hours i think of her in a book
on each page i sketch her with the voice of God
on a mimosa tree
fantasizing... as she sways...
she slips into our stare, her sleeveless
piercing red, velvet, velvet-red
i am thinking of circles: calabash,
Adabraka coconut, mangoes, Techiman oranges
green or ripe, juicy at the mercy of the sun.
Nana Nyame must have beaten her silky hair
out of a dark wolf's fur.
blonde, thick & plump
the way i love my fruits
her river drifts me away
feeling warm waves seeping through my pores
i arrive – a cool place of cyclone.

Gabriel Awuah Mainoo is a Ghanaian writer, poet, editor & lyricist. Winner of 2021 Africa Haiku Prize, Forty Under 40 Awards for Authorship & Creative writing, special prize winner of Soka Matsubara international haiku contest, LFP/RML/ Library of Africa and the African Diaspora chapbook winner. Prize winner in the 2022 Stephen A. Dibiase Poetry Contest & semifinalist of the Jack Grape International Poetry Prize. He pursues tertiary education at the University of Cape Coast and is a recipient of the West Africa Writers Residency. He's the Author of *Travellers Gather Dust and Lust*, (Mwanaka Media and Publishing, Zimbabwe), *We are Moulting Birds*, (Light Factory Publication, Canada), *Chicken Wings at the Altar*, *60 Aces of Haiku*, *Lyrical Textiles* (Illuminated Press, US) & *Sea Ballet*, forthcoming. He edits poetry for Goat Shed Press, UK & WGM Magazine. Mainoo's writing has appeared in The Cicada's Cry (US), An attempt at exhausting a place in Leicestershire volume (UK), Writers Space Africa, Fireflies' Light (Missouri Baptist University), aAH! Magazine (Manchester Metropolitan University), Wales Haiku Journal, EVENT (Douglas College), Prairie Fire (Canada), The Haiku Foundation, Best New African Poets Anthologies (2018, 2019, 2020), Black Bamboo, among others. Mainoo is a tennis professional in the morning, a student in the afternoon, and a writer in the evening.

Prose

NOTHING HAPPENED

Ama Pomaa

You're sitting on the floor, naked. Your hands are clasped, shoved between your thighs. You close your eyes, breathe in and out. Your mind is blocking it out. All of it. You pull your hands out, stare at them. They're still shaking. Without warning, you start to cry. It's loud, mournful, ugly. But you can't stop.

You're hurt, livid, scared.

An hour earlier

You get home from work, tired, resolute that you'll turn in early today. But old habits die hard. You turn on the TV and settle into bed with your phone. When you check your time in the middle of watching a skit, it's half-past nine. Your head starts to ache, and a haze of drowsiness sneaks up on you. Once again, you ignore your body's call to surrender.

Your phone rings. It's Albert. You are supposed to help him with a project he has to submit in the morning. You tell him you're not well,

but you hear the disappointment in his voice. It's urgent, he reminds you. You reconsider. The two of you live in the same neighbourhood. Of course, you can come over for half an hour.

You hang up. Albert is the kindest person you know. He recommended you for the job you have now. He's been a big brother and friend, all wrapped in one. And in the ten years that you've known him, he's never asked for anything. This is the least you can do for him. So, you change out of your pyjamas and throw on a pair of jeans and a shirt.

When you knock on his door, it opens almost immediately. You tell him he's going to have to pay for your services one day. He shakes his head and says, you're growing horns. His wife is visiting her folks in the village, he says, when you ask about her. You get a bottle of water from the kitchen and settle into a sofa. He hands you a printed copy of his proposal. You scan the document, page after page and note down your comments. Soon, he takes a seat beside you, holding out a box of cookies. Chocolate cookies. You dig in immediately, careful not to drop crumbs on the sofa. Maa Linda, Albert's wife, would be sure to sense that transgression from wherever she was.

You're about halfway through the box before you realise he's looking at you.

"What's up, boss?"

"I need to tell you something," he says.

It sounds serious. You put the papers away. Did someone complain about you to him? Is he going to ask you to advise his son again? That boy is going to have to crash and burn in order to learn the lessons you had failed to get through his thick head.

"I have feelings for you."

You curse.

No. Not him. Not again.

You stare at him in silence, lips pursed. You tell yourself not to panic. It's just a confession. He's not going to follow this up. He just wants

you to know.

“Okay,” you say. “Thanks for telling me.” You reach for the papers, your attempt to change the topic not so subtle.

He’s still staring.

“What do you have to say about that?” he asks.

Your brain is still working overtime to maintain the poker face. “No cause for alarm”, the message board in your mind reads. “All stations remain calm.”

“Um... Thanks for telling me. We’re human. I understand. It happens.”

“I don’t want things to get weird between us.”

“It doesn’t have to.” You shrug. “You just had to say it, right? If it ends here, it won’t get weird.”

You wait for him to move on, to change the topic. Work. Family. The price of fuel. Anything.

“So, what do you have to say to me?”

The hope you’re clinging to turns to mush. There is cause for alarm. It’s not going to end here.

“I don’t feel the same way,” you say.

There: clear, concise, direct. This time, with him, you know better. You don’t attempt to sugar-coat your words in order not to hurt his feelings. You don’t remind him that he’s a married man because then he thinks you’re saying ‘no’ because he’s married.

“Really?” He raises his brows. You’ve never...?”

You shake your head with conviction. “I’ve always seen you as a big brother and a friend. Nothing more.”

He’s surprised. Why? Did you do something to make him feel this way, you ask. He says no, he might have misunderstood. But he continues to tell you how his body reacts to seeing you. He talks to you about what happens to his penis and hiding erections when he’s around you. Your expression stays deadpan. You wait for it all to stop. You

wait because you want to salvage this relationship. You've already lost one. You don't have that many to spare.

He'll respect your position, eventually. You know he will. If you just hold on a little longer, this will all go away in a few —

What is he doing?

His hand reaches out to brush cookie crumbs from your thigh. Higher and higher up your thigh, he brushes away. You pull back, away from him, out of his reach. Please, stop, you think. There's silence. You say nothing. He says nothing. You wait. You hope.

"Can you give me a hug?"

What the hell? He really thinks you're that girl? He thinks you'll stoop that low. Unbelievable. There's nothing to salvage here. They're all the same.

"Goodnight," you say with a smile, respectfully.

When you get up to leave, he holds your hand and begs you to stay.

"Goodnight," you repeat it, trying to wrench your hands free. He doesn't let go.

And that's when you start to panic.

What if... What if he...

God... You look around the room, planning your escape. There's a bottle of water in your hand. You could spill that in his face and bolt. The door is not locked. Ten seconds. That's all you need.

"I won't let you go," he says, pulling you to him. His voice is playful, but it doesn't matter. You're done giving him any more rope.

You push back with all you've got. He swiftly wraps his arms around you, asks if you think you're stronger than him. You wrestle with him. Your back hits the cushions. You feel his hands creeping between your legs.

You scream.

Albert jumps back, eyes wide, frozen. Here's your chance.

You gather what you can of your scattered self and run out the door.

The keys shake in your hand as you open the door to your home. Adrenaline is coursing through your body. You can hear the questions already; what were you doing in a married man's house at night? Why were you wearing a shirt this tight? What did you think would happen? It wouldn't matter that you trusted him. Or that you never in a million years thought he would do... this. Your heart is pounding. Your hands are shaking. And then, when you're safe inside your room, the dam breaks.

What happens now? What do you do? He's not a stranger. You have to see him again. Talk to him. Work with him. Every day.

Your phone is ringing.

It's him.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

"Hello."

"Goodnight," he says. You grip the phone tighter to still your hands which start to shake at the sound of his voice. His voice does not carry any of the weight that yours does. There's no shame, no fear, no regret. Nothing.

"Goodnight." You end the call while he's still talking.

He doesn't have to spell it out. You know this part well enough. The two of you are going to carry on as if this night never happened. You never visited him; he never touched you. Everything's fine. You'll just have to be careful around him now. No more teasing him about his social skills or discussing your personal life. You can't have him misconstruing your actions as an endorsement of what he did or an invitation for more.

A part of you wishes you could tell him how betrayed you feel. How you thought he'd be the last person to ever do this... thing to you. How angry you are at his assumptions, his assessment of what you would

be willing to do. But there's the other part that wants to make everything go back to normal. It tells you, maybe it was all an accident. Maybe you're overthinking this. What if he was just being playful, and you took things too personally? What if none of it happened the way you think it did? The hands brushing your thighs, pulling down your bra, between your legs...

You close your eyes, squeeze them tight, praying the memories fade into oblivion.

Breath in, breathe out.

Ama Pomaa, known as Leticia Oppong, grew up in the Bono region of Ghana with her parents and three sisters. She started writing in Senior High School, sneaking short stories, mostly clones of the rom-com and action movies she watched, into her exercise books. Her writing has since evolved into a blend of Inspirational fiction, Suspense and Mystery. In 2018, her debut novel, *A Time to Part*, won 1st prize in the Ayi Kwei Armah Novel Award of the Ghana Association of Writers. Ama is an alumnus of KNUST, where she studied Electrical/Electrical Engineering, and a controls engineer. She lives in Ghana's capital, Accra, is still a fan of thrilling action movies, and is passionate about self-development. She uses her writing to explore societal constructs, the struggles of faith and to propagate the reckless love of God.

Prose

TRANSCENDENCE

Akua Serwaa Amankwah

She only meant to make a brief stop at her childhood home in Ridge, relive and purge memories, and give the nod to Broll. They had reached out after Mama's death, and their argument was plausible—most of the houses in her neighbourhood had been torpedoed to create ample space for sky-high luxury apartments, and their lone colonial home stuck out like a sore thumb. They knew she had no intention of settling there, and their overgenerous offer thrust her onto the next flight to Ghana. She was supposed to be thrilled... those extra zeroes were what lottery dreams were made of, yet she felt weighed down by something she could not explain.

There were several downsides to the unexpected visit; the heat and the internet were a special kind from hell, and her favourite food brands were unavailable. She was eager to return to lecturing, academic conferences, editing monographs, mentoring her favourite PhD student Naminata, those bi-weekly intellectual conversations with Akua Busby, Ato Quayson, and Kwame Anthony. The other thing she dreaded was responding to her daughter's lengthy message about making time for her grandchildren. You had kids, and they had kids and somehow you had to relive the motherhood experience all over again? Wasn't once enough?

But then, she opened the glass front door to find her childhood staring at her: her mother rushing to make it in time for a *Drum Magazine* photoshoot, her father religiously poring over every word in the *African Morning Post*, her brother Kobena dismantling a miniature building model.

“Effia? Have you seen my diamond earrings?” Mama asked, frantic, her angelic face etched into a frown. This was the first photograph that greeted you at the entrance, a spontaneous shot of their family. It was a Saturday afternoon in 1950, and she had just turned eight.

“Effia? Say something eh? Ah,” Mama shook her head and returned to her search.

Papa looked up. “Where have you been? Tetebe was looking for you. She said your breakfast is getting cold.”

“Ou-outside,” Effia stuttered. Her love for exploring knew no time limits.

“It’s too early to be outside.”

“Yes, Papa.”

She sat by him. It was an unspoken morning ritual. Over his piping hot morning tea, he told her about the arcane art of Gold Coast politics. She didn’t always get the intricate details of the conversation, but his passion was infectious. Things got even more heated when Uncle Joe, Papa’s favourite cousin, who was studying law in England, visited. He helped Papa secure an enviable managerial position at United Africa Company.

“You know today’s exactly two years since the riots happened? I still get angry when I remember all that madness,” he said, taking a sip from the tea whose vapour swirled up in a blurry dance.

They segued to a confidential letter Uncle Joe had sent—he was all over the place in England, joining protest movements, attending political conferences, supporting freedom fighters. Effia secretly marvelled at all that confidence. Even Papa was awed by him.

Mama, the chocolate whirlwind, and a very welcome distraction re-

turned. Papa had nicknamed her Somebody's Darling, and she loved it. She was glowing. Her voluminous natural hair was teased into a bouffant, eyeliner ending in an upward flick, ears glittering with diamond studs. Her navy velvet dress accentuated her curves, and she struck a pose, tucking her cat-eye sunglasses between her breasts. She smelled of Yardley lavender talc and good dreams.

"I will be back as soon as I can. James will have a fit if I don't get there any time soon," she said, but then she paused to make a quick call with the telephone before waltzing out.

"It's like living with a showgirl," Papa muttered under his breath, but only Effia heard it.

She disappeared to the kitchen to find Tetebe, and later when she came back, Papa was buried in work.

The next was Papa's favourite, a framed black and white photograph of himself and Mama at Uncle Joe and Lady Peggy Cripps' wedding. Effia had had to stay home, but she closely followed the ceremony at St. John's Church on television, marvelling at the resplendence which unfolded. She was enthralled with the groomsmen shining in kente, their afros carefully combed and parted either in the middle or at the sides. There were the agbadas, smocks, sarees, waistcoats and frilly frocks, and in the midst of it all a smiling Uncle Joe and his equally excited bride.

"Look at Papa and Somebody's Darling!" Effia crowed, nearly knocking down the small television encased in wood.

Tetebe's eyes widened. She was lost in her own world, fascinated by the black and white figures moving on the screen.

In the newspapers, the backlash at Uncle Joe, the coloured man who had dared marry a white woman was troubling, but she knew he would be unfazed. Mama gave vivid details, and Papa was full of updates about Kwame Nkrumah, Convention People's Party, and Uncle Joe's plans of returning to Gold Coast after his Paris honeymoon. She knew her father would soon transition to politics.

She also sensed his budding indifference about Mama. In the beginning, he complained incessantly about her constant absence, but politics began to fill his free time. Mama took advantage, attending soirees, weekend parties at Jamestown, exclusive parties at the Rodger Club and occasional movie nights at Rex Cinema. Her companion in outings, Auntie Frema, the wife of Papa's racehorse owner friend Kwame Awuah, brought her little gifts. Effia would experience the dance through photographs that emerged after—men in kaleidoscopic kente, others in formal suits, Fuji silk shirts and meticulously tailored trousers, women in swing and shirtwaist dresses, floral and polka dot silks, and African textiles transformed into magical pieces.

The next photograph was Mama's favourite, the day that Uncle Joe returned. Papa was at the airport with James, and what serendipity that not just Nkrumah was there, but also Papa's idols Edusei, Bot-sio and Gbedemah to welcome Joe. Barely a month later, Papa sent in his resignation at U.A.C. and followed Uncle Joe to C.P.P. In the beginning, it was bliss. Nkrumah, Uncle Joe and Papa were on the same page, and it seemed as if the trio would conquer Africa, and subsequently, the world. The smooth friendship began to curdle, and disagreements became their anthem. Papa and Uncle Joe accused their dear leader of nepotism, and it riled him up. It seemed that leaving C.P.P. for NLM would bring some peace, but it only worsened their relationship. When Nkrumah orchestrated the deportation of their journalist friend Bankole Timothy to Sierra Leone, they severed ties with him for good. It was one torture after another, and Effia watched Papa shrivel in fear. She wished for the earlier years when politics was far removed from them. When Effia thought of home, she remembered the photographs that framed the wall, most of which were born out of their Sunday rituals. After lunch, Mama would cajole them into dressing up, and they would head to Jamestown, to either James' Ever Young Studio for photographs, Felicia Abban's Day and Night Quality Art Studio, or Deo Gratias. Home was teeming with photographs in volumi-

nous albums, storage boxes, trunks. They were not the only ones capturing each stage of their lives; the air was charged with excitement with the anticipation of independence, and photography, with a side of highlife music, was all the rage.

Kobena would include her in his obsession with buildings, and they would explore their two-storey mansion which was elevated about fifteen feet above the ground, on stilts. Papa had bought it from Sir Allan Scott, the younger brother of a past colonial governor, and said the elevation was to improve aeration and prevent mosquitoes which used to plague them. She loved its poshness, from the white wood and glass windows to the chiffon curtains. A blue-grey Dansette record player was the showpiece of the lounge, and then there were the camel Mid-Century modern sofas designed for aesthetics rather than for comfort, a wall adorned with the best selections of framed photographs, a sideboard filled with china, books, and records from E.T. Mensah's Tempos band, Appiah Adzekum, Kwame Asare to Kwaa Mensah. The kitchen boasted of the latest appliances shipped in through U.A.C., and to go the bedrooms upstairs, you had to use a grand, winding staircase. On some evenings, Somebody's Darling would gather them to listen to records while sipping imported juice. Sometimes, she danced.

Those were years she should have savoured, because with Papa in politics, and his subsequent opposition to the ruling party, came challenges. Then came changes, Mama's transition from modelling and partying to taking the reins of her family cocoa business after her parents passed in an accident, Kobena's fascination with buildings and structures leading to architecture, and subsequently a scholarship to Cambridge. Her parents supported each other for the first time. Teteba taught her to be independent and strong, traits which became necessary for all the hard times that followed.

In October of 1961, Effia returned to an empty home and to the news that Papa, Uncle Joe, J.B, Uncle Patrick Quaidoo and others had been imprisoned. Mother and daughter walked in circles, looking for help in

every place they could find, but it eluded them. Effia spent Christmas with her cousins in Kumasi, and spent her days crying and moping, to her aunt's exasperation. Papa was finally released the next June, and on his return, she clung to him, unwilling to let go.

He would retreat from politics, transition into law and build his practice, while Mama would take her cocoa company to an international level. They were free until the inception of the late 1970s coup. Papa had gone back to being outspoken after Nkrumah's death, and he knew he would be an easy target. They closed up shop, fled to a tiny rental in California and were forced to begin life afresh. Effia began a frantic search for schools with postgraduate scholarships and moved immediately after she secured one. She made friends involved with the Civil Rights Movement who inspired her to become a miniature Uncle Joe. Papa and his darling returned to Ghana, but she stayed on, even after school. She visited sparingly, but each moment at home was precious.

Papa died first, and a decade after his darling followed.

Now here she was, all those heavy years compressed into memories which lay in a house she was about to sell off.

Her ringing phone startled her, for she had lost her sense of time and place.

"Prof. Asafu-Adjaye? This is Barima from Broll Ghana. I was following up on our conversation regarding the sale of your house."

She fumbled to string the right words together.

"Yes. I meant to call. I'm sorry-I-I... ju-I can't sell this house. I'm so sorry."

Barima's response was courteous, and he realised she was a meld of emotions and did not linger.

"That is fine. Thank you for your time, Professor"

"Thank you", she whispered. "Thank you".

Effia stepped outside, her breaths heavy and uneven.

There was only one person she knew she had to call, and she had not spoken to him in years. Her hands trembled as she fumbled through her emails for his number. They had exchanged emails for years, none willing to be the first to reach out. Decades ago Kobina shelved his enviable architecture degree and

made his entrance into politics... into C.P.P. Papa and his darling had been insulted, and Effia, disgusted. It was the only fight the family ever had, or would ever have.

"Effia? I... Effia?" Kobena could not hide his surprise when he heard her voice.

"Hi. Hello. How are you?" Her laugh was nervous.

"I'm okay. Effia... It's been years".

"Yes. Kobena...", her voice trailed off.

Then she told him, about the house, about the sale that she had botched.

"Can I come see it for the last time before you decide?" he asked, and by the time she responded, she felt her face wet with fresh tears.

When Kobena opened the squeaking gates, she saw a portrait of him at age 11, a mischievous smile playing on his lips. He was approaching her with one of his many structures, eager for her approval. Only now he was some five decades older, with the gait of someone who was sure about himself, like Uncle Joe. She squealed, opening her arms wide so he could fall into them, but he had that extra strength to carry her after the hug. "Put me down!" she shrieked, laughing and crying, not meaning it. For the first time, she was not thinking of all the inconveniences she'd had to endure, or how she would frame the perfect response to her daughter. She was thinking of all the times they run through the house, through time, through memory, through history, through life. She was thinking of the times Papa and Somebody's Darling danced and played and teased each other. That warmth flooded her, and she was light, and she had wings, and she could fly.

Akua Serwaa Amankwah is an academic, author and creative entrepreneur. Her research interests include (Digital) African Literature, Photography, and Photography Criticism. Her stories have been published in *The Mirror* and *Flash Fiction Ghana*, as well as *Kenkey for Ewes* and *Resilience* anthologies. She won the Inspire Us Writing Contest by Worldreader in 2019, and the imagining Early Accra competition in 2021.

Akua is the creative lead of the company “Create with Mansa” which produces reading and writing resources for children aged 2-12. She anticipates an MPhil degree in English (Literature) from the University of Ghana, Legon, by June 2022.