



BENNY Wanjohi

Poetry should be simple, smooth and sweet!

“

Omadang Yowasi, my fellow poetry editor at Writers Space Africa (Uganda Chapter) then, developed the Omadang poetry style. This influenced me to also come up with a Benny poetry style, so credit goes to him. A benny poem has three tercet stanzas with a rhyming scheme of ABB, CAC, and DDA, where A is the refrain.

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Scholar Akinyi (Kenya)

Mornings come with endless possibilities, and as it is said, a new day is not truly new if we merely pick up from yesterday. While this might sound like common sense, life has a way of pushing us into dark corners, making it difficult to see the flicker of light. Getting stuck in a rut is easier than walking a straight path, and so is drowning compared to staying afloat.

The beauty of life, in its most natural state, is that we get to experience light every waking day; a new dawn on the horizon, patiently awaiting its perfect moment to bloom. And this phenomenon applies across all spheres of life: career, family, finances, education, human relationships—there's always something waiting to bloom.

The bleakest moments, even resembling an almost flat line on a hospital bed, have always surprised us with unforeseen comebacks. And that is the joy of life: the miracles

that find us in moments of hopelessness and helplessness.

New dawns don't imply that the nights are short or free of agony. Nay. New dawns, however, serve as a reminder that, even if just for a minute, there's a new possibility.

As we approach the end of the year, we challenge writers to reveal what, based on their experiences and knowledge, qualifies as a new dawn. There's no better time to center our theme, NEW DAWN, than in October when new year resolutions lose their excitement, and the looming year-end brings with it a sense of urgency.

Can we still experience a new dawn in the most unlikely of places and times? Read on. And as you explore, I hope you jot down a few things you aspire to see come alive again in your life.

Let there be light.



On the cover

→ This edition offers an insightful discussion with the outgoing Chief Editor of PoeticAfrica and originator of the Benny poetry style, Benny Wanjohi. He is a salient contributor to the growth of poetry and poets on the continent.

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- **Monthly Digital Literary Magazine of the Year - 2022/2023**
(The Corporate LiveWire Global Awards 2022/23)
- **Best Monthly Digital Literary Magazine (Africa) - 2022**
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AN IRONY OF YOUR BODY

Chinenye favour
Nigeria



Grief is a house where the chairs have forgotten how to hold us, the mirrors how to reflect us, and the walls how to contain us. Death is always at the door pacing forth and back waiting for an irony to catch up with you, so, tongues of metaphors could be twisted in your mouth. I have always wished to punctuate the word death with a full stop but it's like a mighty ocean drying, which can never be possible. Mother says in-between "When you have a close encounter with death, you'll appreciate life." I learned this the hard way.

Ever since Grandma's demise, the smile once adorned on my lips got swiped in seconds. It was a Monday morning when the unmelodious scream of my mother rang bells in my feeble ears. Sandwiched in between my bible and textbooks, I jerked on my feet in the direction of this commotion. My sight was still blurry but I managed to scale through obstacles on the way, to be welcomed by the scene of my mother rolling on the floor with a slightly loosed wrapper, veins popping out, hands out of order, and eyes forming a small pod

beside her. Dad stood aside void of emotions, nodding his head in different directions like a robot. My neighbours tried to get close to Mother but she recoiled at their touch like she wanted to seal herself from the world placed ahead of her.

My younger and only sister of about six years old kept on wailing at the top of her voice that I could imagine how distressed the roof would be. I panicked! Who will I go to first?

I found it hard to assimilate all these until words of curse repeatedly filled the air, "May her soul rest in peace!", "Death is a word that can never be understood!", others spat on the floor alongside each curse rendered. I didn't want to start comprehending anything.

I have to call Nana. She's in the hospital taking proper bed rest away from stress, she will equally be treated with the utmost care and attention. Dialling her number, it began to ring on a table beside the bookshelf. This attracted everyone like a bee allured by honey. I got entangled in a cobweb of confusion. I summoned the courage to ask questions because I was confused. I tapped Mother harshly, she didn't respond until the third tap. She looked at me with tears swirling in her eyes. She hugged me so tightly that I could feel my breath being squeezed out of my body. Father who stood still throughout the scene held my hands and directed me outside.

Grief is a house that disappears each time someone knocks at the door, that blows into the air at the slightest gust, and that buries itself deep in the ground while ev-

eryone is asleep. I was just 12, in junior school, When the news of Nana's demise filled the air. I felt a warm liquid in between my thighs. I solely refused to digest and allow the news to sink into my spirit, mind, and soul. My body began to tremble as fear gripped me. I screamed. She can't just come to the world, and then go back without any notice. I was her favourite granddaughter. She always boasted about me even though I couldn't measure up. What does faith have in store for me? Not only did Mother lose her precious gem but I lost my mystery box like I named her. Mother began to sit on her own staring at nothing in particular like an empty body whose soul had drifted away, she was lifeless. Mother breaks like dawn each new day. Sometimes, she would mutter some strange languages. I worried about her welfare.

Fresh tears rolled down my cheeks and slowly soaked my shirt. My head began to ache also, I held my head tight. My heart shattered. I unleashed words of prayers upon her at night. Father said I should give her some time to recuperate. I still consistently requested Nana's presence but my father strongly responded that it was no longer in his power to do so again.

Heartbroken, I realized Nana was gone forever when a grand burial ceremony was made in her name. I wasn't allowed to see her body before she was handed over to the soil to worship. I sat down on her most cherished crooked chair. The deliciously prepared porridge made by grandma out of the purest love and affection, all the folktales she fed me about the tortoise at

midnight before I slept off still fantasizing how it would feel being in a story world, all the advice and prayers she rendered on me, the moral lessons, warmth, and peace, I will miss them all.

Nana would take me on a journey to the village. She showed me kids my age who had been denied and starved of basic education. Stories and dreams are enclosed in the corners of their abode. Their dreams and aspirations could have built a gigantic house; she would mutter with a heavy face. I was broken and traumatized. I made it a priority, that soon, with my career, I will elevate poor children.

Sadly, Nana left without teaching me the technique of knitting a sweater nor did she tell me about the many mysteries hidden in her body.

Blessed are those who bless and curse you, she would end her prayers like this, but why should my enemies be blessed? As if reading the curiosity in my eyes- my dear, this society and its people know how to mold little children like you into pain, misery, and nothingness. Don't you think if prayers are whispered for the bad they will turn a new leaf? If they don't, still pray, pray like never before.

I always wondered how one person could be so full of wisdom. All these thoughts awakened something in me, I shivered. The colour in my life drained. I recalled when Nana said she would return to dust one day and become a twinkle in the sky. My lips curved into a smirk, I figured out all her proverbs and mysterious words as soon as she gave up. Can this life get any

worse? On a Sunday, my family and maternal relatives went to church for Thanksgiving. Thanking God for the success of the burial and for sparing our lives.

Grief is a house where no one can protect you, where the younger ones will grow older than the older ones. Days passed, weeks went by, and then a month since Nana's breath.

I later found out from my parent's discussion that Nana had high blood pressure accompanied by diabetes. It is unclear what brought about the BP.

Mother slowly began to adapt. Father and I put in all our effort to revive Mother's once enchanting smile. Each time she smiles, I look at Father happily like I just scored a goal. When Mother notices this she suppresses her smile. Grandpa tried to fill in Nana's space, and although he wasn't good at storytelling we appreciated his little effort.

Gradually, the death of Grandma drifted away from our minds but not our hearts especially my feeble heart. We hope that life will be good to us as we await a new beginning.

Presents

CREATIVE WRITING
WORKSHOPS 6.0



Funminiyi Akinrinade
(Nigeria)
Poetry



Nahida Esmail
(Tanzania)
Children's Literature



Khumoetsile Magonare D'Arcy
(Botswana)
Fiction/Spoken word poetry



Nicole E. Gandaho
(Benin Republic)
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Grace Tendo Katana
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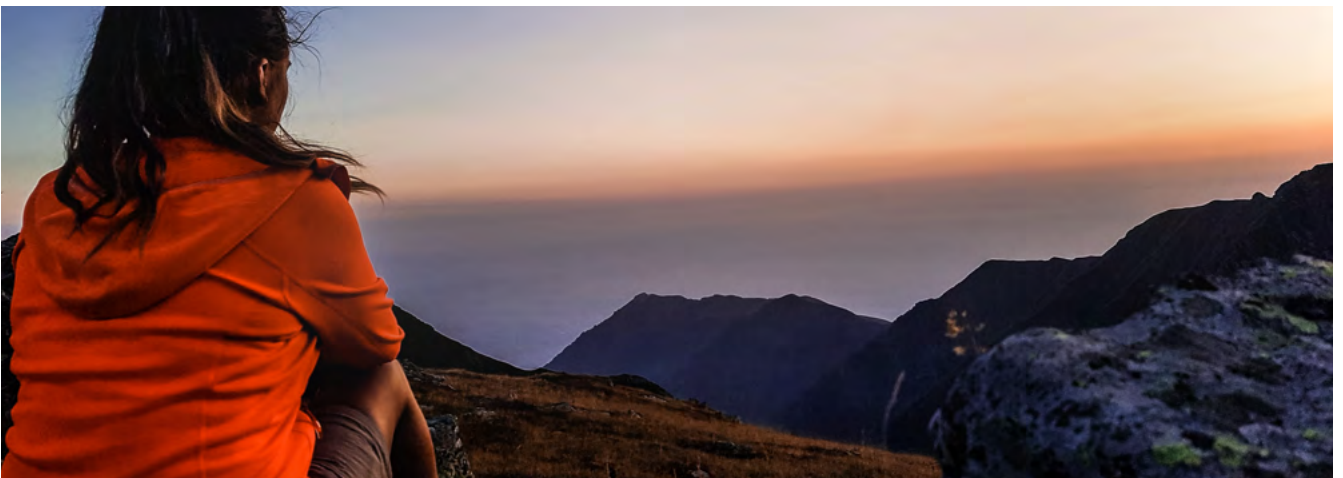
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GIRLS WHO LOVE LIKE THERE'S NO TOMORROW

Grace David Ojogbane
Nigeria



Baye sat on the edge of the roughly hewn rock. It was a cool evening in December, and Lokoja was welcoming the sun back into her watery wombs, its crimson glow dancing off the Niger River or was it the Benue River? She couldn't tell. She had grown up in this city but had never bothered to explore its desecrated and abandoned tourist sites.

This evening, she wished she had been a little more aware and curious about other things and

other people. To not be stuck here waiting on the edge of the rock where Yebo had left her. Her tears were not for the love lost, but for the days past when she had loved one man like there was no tomorrow.

Baye was still sitting on the edge of the roughly hewn rock, waiting for the day the sun would rise again, and she could continue this dance of the blind, of which she was accustomed.

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Creative Spotlight

- Benny Wanjohi



PPBlessing: How did you get into writing?

Benny: It has been a step by step growth throughout the years. I think the interest started growing when I was still in primary school writing compositions as assignments for the English lessons. At that stage I did not make much out of it, though I continued writing occasionally, until way later after college when I took writing a bit more seriously.

PPBlessing: Can you remember the year you took writing seriously? What necessitated the change?

Benny: It was very progressive to be honest. In 2015, with the establishment of WhatsApp I started writing poems to my friends with this new app that could allow chatting. In 2016, I wrote a verse which I posted on Facebook. I would need to check what it was all about. In 2017, I wrote and posted poems on Facebook regularly which led to a steady growth in followers. I still had not identified myself as a writer, though everyone else actually thought I was at the end of that year.

PPBlessing: When did you identify yourself as a writer?

Benny: At the end of 2017.

PPBlessing: You've been an editor for the Writers Space Africa magazine and one-time country coordinator of Writers Space Africa (Kenya chapter), in what ways has working in these capacities challenged

you?

Benny: In many ways. I will recall the highlights. When I joined Writers Space Africa (WSA) magazine as a poetry editor, I had not necessarily worked with a group of African writers before, especially those with serious diverse mindsets on thematic approaches such as the ones we published in the magazine. We had to discuss whether to publish poetry with controversial themes, for example. At such times inclusion was a particular consideration to solve different perceptions that emanated from different editors.

It was a bit different for Writers Space Africa (Kenya chapter). I came to the limelight in a very sensitive season when Wakini Kuria was ailing and when in a year's time we were just about to host the African Writer's Conference (AWC) 2019 in Nairobi. I pushed for the small group of writers that Wakini had brought together to meet in person. Only four out of about ten members met, but this little start gave us the foundation that we needed to build what became a group of 70 writers in three years. Sadly, Wakini Kuria passed on before she could see the fruits of what she established. We managed to host the AWC 2019, establish the first country chapter of WSA, and registered with the government. None of this was a walk in the park but thanks to the leaders who worked together resiliently.

PPBlessing: Let's talk about your poetry collections, Phases of Life and After Sunset. What inspired them and why did

you choose to publish both of them at the same time?

Benny: Phases of Life speaks of the hope that exists in God for every human as they navigate through various seasons of their lives. The muse was hope!

After Sunset has an African inclination as a result of working with many African poets over a period of time. The poems in the collections were written between 2018 and 2019.

In November 2019, when I had taken a six-week career break, and with more time to myself, I sorted my poems. I had about 250 written poems then, and picked about a hundred which I divided as per the theme of each book. And the collections were born.

PPBlessing: Seeing that you still have a ton of poems left, when should we expect another collection?

Benny: I have an unpublished collection titled 'Wings' developed before the twins, 'Phases' and 'Sunset' as I call them. I am working on a Pantoum collection. Maybe I need another 6-week break to work on this and something extra.

PPBlessing: So when are you taking the break so we can mark our calendars for another release from you?

Benny: I have big plans for next year. I will keep you posted, follow my Instagram page @BennyWanjohi for that and more.

PPBlessing: Why did you choose a hard-cover publication for your twins instead of the digital publication which is more common now?

Benny: There is a sense in which the smell of books is captivating to readers. I was also looking forward to holding my first tangible publication, as petty as this might sound. Interestingly, the demand is still high even after a fast-paced sale of about 500 copies. My team and I are trying to work on the next consistent publication. We also have plans in the pipeline to have e-copies available on various platforms such as Amazon.com.

PPBlessing: Godspeed on that. How did the Benny poetry style come about?

Benny: Omadang Yowasi, my fellow poetry editor at Writers Space Africa then, developed the Omadang poetry style. This influenced me to also come up with a Benny poetry style, so credit goes to him. A benny poem has three tercet stanzas with a rhyming scheme of ABB, CAC, and DDA, where A is the refrain. I always had this poem in the editorial notes of almost all 11 editions of PoeticAfrica during my tenure as the Chief Editor.

PPBlessing: During your time as chief editor, what were some of the significant contributions PoeticAfrica made to the African literary landscape?

Benny: The establishment of the magazine was a great platform for poets in Africa to showcase their great poetic talents. Poeti-

cAfrica offered this chance to hundreds of poets whose poems were published in these three years that I've served as Chief Editor of PoeticAfrica. It was not necessarily possible to offer developmental editing due to the high number of entries that were coming in for each edition. Therefore, a lecture section was included to offer a learning platform in areas that the team was identifying. The interview's section also allowed the voices of known and unknown poets to come to the limelight which was a marketing arena for their poetry careers. Notably, the magazine also sponsored poetry events from time to time.

PPBlessing: Could you mention some of these sponsored events?

Benny: Just to mention a few that come to mind is the Octofest Poetry 2022 and 2023, African Writers Conference, among others.

PPBlessing: PoeticAfrica is known for being a trilingual magazine. How did you manage the unique challenge of publishing in multiple languages, and what impact did this have on the magazine's readership?

Benny: We are the first to go trilingual. We went fully on this once we decided that it would be one of our unique pillars. We wanted to increase readership and had to make the hard decisions to settle on the three languages spoken by majority of Africans, while appreciating that there were other languages that were widely spoken which were not our preference publication languages for particular reasons. At some point we did a research on who was down-

loading our magazine after this move and to our surprise we had a long list of about 40 countries from all across the world.

PPBlessing: In your opinion, what is the significance of having a trilingual magazine like PoeticAfrica in Africa's literary landscape, and how did it contribute to fostering unity among diverse linguistic communities?

Benny: It is like serving a buffet meal. No one in the party is left out. Furthermore, French poets were thriving especially in particular Francophone countries like Cameroon and Rwanda. Kiswahili poetry named 'mashairi' has existed, and largely developed over the years. Africa is one and all these African verses needed one home which PoeticAfrica offered.

PPBlessing: Were there any specific themes or issues that you felt were particularly important to address during your time as chief editor, and how did you approach them?

Benny: The prominent one was the definition of African poetry. What did it exactly mean when we talked about African poetry? Over the years, I have observed that poets differ greatly on this issue. Particularly two schools of thoughts exist; one which believes that African poetry must include themes like thatched huts, semi-naked Africans dancing around a night fire, unschooled boys grazing etc. The other school believes in themes like African modern homes in the village that have electricity, cooking stoves, children who go to schools in towns by bus, work-

ing parents who come home in the evening etc.

Any enthusiast of literature must appreciate the existence of both and appreciate that a majority of Africans are adapting to the trends of industrialization and the out-play of technology. Poets have the freedom to write from either traditional approaches or contemporary approaches to African poetry. Readers and audiences must also be allowed to interact with their historical past while embracing the inevitable modernity settings in Africa.

PPBlessing: A balanced perspective is always very important.

As a Kenyan, how do you think your background and experiences influenced your editorial approach at PoeticAfrica, particularly in representing African voices?

Benny: There is what we call editorial bias and country writing styles and preferences. I am not an exception to these biases and preferences.

Firstly, to avoid this trap we were keen to specify, on all our calls for submissions, what we were looking for in the entries sent to PoeticAfrica. These provided a guideline of selection.

Secondly, I worked with a vibrant team of poets from all across Africa who all edited and made first selections of poems before these came to my desk. We made it very easy to challenge each other on which submissions we selected. I would always share

my final selection for editors to review and occasionally, I was put on the hot seat to explain the final choice of selected entries. So, at the end it was never a Benny's voice, but a voice of Africa, handled carefully by this entire team of PoeticAfrica editors, that we were releasing out there.

Finally, there are conventional guidelines about poetry that any editorial team for a magazine or publishing house cannot bypass and we were keen to observe these.

PPBlessing: This is great. I believe poets whose works have been rejected will understand better when they get to read this interview.

Beyond PoeticAfrica, you've been involved in the African literary scene. Can you tell us about some of your other literary endeavours and how they connect with your role as an editor?

Benny: I worked closely with Anthony Onugba, the founder of Writers Space Africa (WSA), when I was the country coordinator of WSA-Kenya. At the same time, I served in the Board of Trustees of both African Writers Development Trust (AWDT) and Writers Space Africa. As expected of the board, we made a lot of strategic decisions around the growth of the literary scene in Africa through platforms such as African Writers Conference, Penpen Residency, Writers Mingle, and Writers' Academy. These are events geared to the growth of writers in Africa, giving them not only a platform to interact but to also improve their art.

As an editor, these platforms gave me a chance to contribute through literary conversations, judging writers' events and competitions, and mentoring upcoming writers. I particularly thank Anthony for these opportunities to make my African literary society better.

PPBlessing: Could you share a memorable moment or article from your tenure that you believe encapsulates the essence of PoeticAfrica's mission?

Benny: A very recent one is the appearance of Kalekye 'Mish' Mirriam in the unveiled Longlist for the 2023 African Writers Awards. Mish has been published by PoeticAfrica severally and has been a mentee of mine. To see her growth to this level was exhilarating, and I was grateful that the platform given to her by PoeticAfrica built her confidence to write and submit more.

PPBlessing: PoeticAfrica has focused on poetry, but it also touches on various forms of creative writing. How did you maintain a balance between different literary genres and styles in the magazine?

Benny: As the title suggests, the idea was to keep it purely poetry. There is an appreciation that poetry does not exist as an oasis in a desert as a genre. Therefore, interviews and lecture articles existed symbiotically in the magazine to compliment poetry. There was no conflict as the best way to present poets was through interviews and the best way to teach poetry was through articles. There was no better chance to display the beauty of diversity in literature and the coexistence of its ele-

ments.

PPBlessing: Reflecting on your journey as the chief editor of PoeticAfrica, what were some of the highlights and challenges during your tenure?

Benny: One of the major highlights is the consistency of the founding editorial team: Esv Keks Funmininyi, Nnane Ntutube, Christina Lwendo, Lebogang Samson, Chipo Chama, and Liza Akunyili who was our lead interviewer. These editors remained put even in times when the boat threatened to sink in the raging waters of starting a new unknown magazine, inclusion of three languages, low submission numbers a couple times when themes were difficult, heavy discussions on thematic concerns, and so on. They were flexible enough to allow us to establish structures and take on particular chief editorial roles upon themselves. During that season, a few of them also published their own poetry collections.

As earlier mentioned they grew the readership to more than 40 countries in Africa and beyond. A virtual community of poets who submitted their poems and readers who followed us was built. The editions published are now a virtual library on our website <https://www.writersspace.net/poeticafrika> where generations after us can always go back to for reference for both academic and research purposes, especially if contemporary poetry takes center stage in the future of poetry in Africa.

PPBlessing: As you prepare to step down from your role, what are your hopes and aspirations for the future of PoeticAfrica,

and who will be your successor?

Benny: I was keen on structures and laying the foundation which was significant at that stage of the magazine. My successor Keks Funminiyi has the freedom of bringing in his vision. I have already discussed this with him the entire year as I prepared to hand over. We are also working closely together in the next four months of this transition.

That said, I look forward to a time when PoeticAfrica will hold a major competition for African poets, come up with anthologies, a residency and probably establish the biggest online and physical poetry libraries in Africa with faculties in the three languages. We believe that God who started this work will bring it to fulfillment.

PPBlessing: Amen. I'm looking forward to this time too.

How do you see the future of African literature evolving, and what role do you believe PoeticAfrica will play in shaping that future? Aside these that you've mentioned above.

Benny: African writers are more keen, than ever before, on mergers and platforms like the annual African Writers Conference are helping achieve this. While this is not without hurdles, it is speaking of a united African literature voice to a global audience. PoeticAfrica and other literary platforms are the labour pains towards this future.

PPBlessing: What message would you like to convey to the readers, contributors, and supporters of PoeticAfrica as

you conclude your tenure as chief editor?

Benny: Poetry should be simple, smooth and sweet!

PPBlessing: Wow! A short and simple poetic message.

What advice do you have for emerging writers and poets in Africa who aspire to get their work published in reputable literary magazines like PoeticAfrica?

Benny: Each magazine is particular with their requirements and taking note of this is key. Also check out the writing styles of the various editors and any interviews or conversations they engage in. Learn what they want to see in a poem and tweak your work towards that, especially for established poets. Upcoming poets can always find mentors who look at their work before they submit.

PPBlessing: Aha! Do you have a personal editor and mentors?

Benny: I have peer mentors. Christina Lwendo and Omadang Yowasi edit any work I am publishing while Anthony Onugba is my proofreader.

PPBlessing: Which writers have had the most influence on you and your writing?

Benny: Christina Rossetti, an English poet and Dante Alighieri, an Italian poet. They were both greatly talented ancient poets who acknowledged God as their help in their writing. It has been the same for my case, without Jesus no poem of mine could have seen the light of day.

PPBlessing: How have you been able to combine ministry and the diverse work you do in the literary scene?

Benny: I use a concept I call block-working. I compile tasks that are doable together and finalize that in one sitting, probably with tea-breaks. My day is divided in an 8-8-8 hours pattern. That is office work, free time and sleep time. My free time is not really free since it is pre-occupied with studies and church ministry.

PPBlessing: What are your hobbies?

Benny: Riding motorbikes, mountaineering, and graphic designing.

PPBlessing: If you were to change one thing in your writing journey, what would it be?

Benny: I would have started earlier.

PPBlessing: What role has being part of a literary community played in your writing and editing journey?

Benny: From the responses above, it is obvious that I owe my writing and editing journey to Writers Space Africa, Writers Space Africa (Kenya chapter), PoeticAfrica and Friendswhowrite, a former group of writers that I belonged to. There is a wealth of knowledge that other writers have which I have benefited from. For example, my works have been critiqued and I have found a platform of like-minded writers and readers. I would be miles behind in this journey if I never joined these communities.

PPBlessing: Aside poetry, do you also

write other genres?

Benny: I write poetry 70% of the time. There are a few occasions when I am writing research publications and development programs.

PPBlessing: What inspires you?

Benny: God is my inspiration all the time! There are times I experience writers' block and make short prayers that unblock it. He is my muse in many different ways.

PPBlessing: What do you intend to achieve with your writing?

Benny: I hope that in my short life here on earth and many years after I am gone, people will read my works and find hope to live afresh in this world of ups and downs. That the poems will evoke them to happiness, love, kindness and reason of their worth as humans.



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6.0

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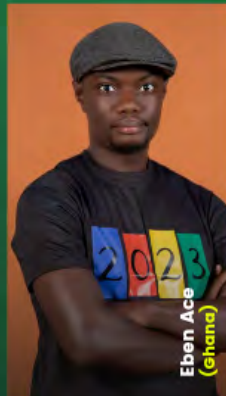
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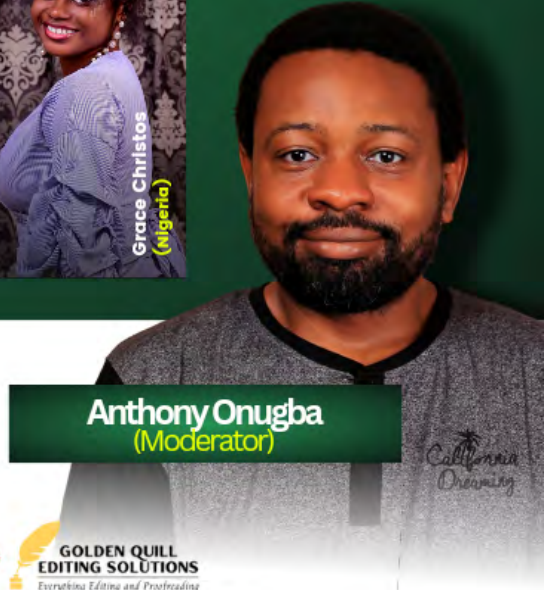
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(Moderator)

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African Writers
Conference
Ghana | 2023



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A NEW SONG

Steve Otieno
Kenya

I found a way
for my fingers to navigate me through the blinds,
where the dawn's sunrise,
the dusk's sunset,
and the full moon
peeked through my drapes,
spreading reflections and shadows at my feet,

"Be gentle with these",
they seemed to say,
"Just a light touch would do",
and I had to remove myself
from the deafness
of prescribed rhythms.

What I did,
was touch the shadows where they gleamed—
as gently as I could,
and I saw how I contrasted with the reflections
as much as I was immersed in the shadows,

"Be gentle with yourself",
they seemed to say,
"A light touch would do",
so I removed myself completely
from the deafness
and hummed to a new rhythm.

AT DAWN

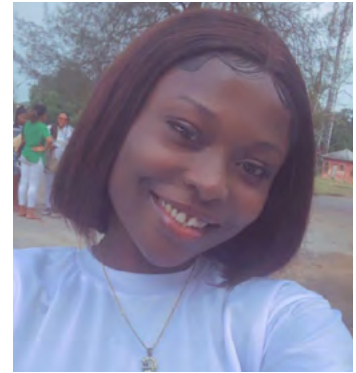
Francis Mkwapatira
Malawi

Over seas and rifts,
the sun emerges like a
weary soul, daybreak.



WE WILL RISE

Favour Edet
Nigeria



Enough of their scornful eyes
And deep breaths,
Their falsified voices
And chameleon hands,
“Take our rope,
Let’s help you out.”
Enough of their honest lies
And darkened corridors of power,
Brothers in sheep’s clothing
That had shattered our growing dreams.
Enough of this
Enough of that...

Our eyes are like the eagles’,
Blinded no more
By the deceptions from silver tongues—
There is a quake on this mountain
Atop our heads;
We can see the glow
Of the vibrant sun...
Tomorrow, unlike yesterday,
We will rise better and stronger.
For our children
And for ourselves.

SHADOWS AND LIGHT

Babirye Mary Namakula
Uganda

When the shadow visits
Don't let it prolong its stay;
Let the light ride it out.
Seldom sit with your darkness;
Always feel the light within you.

When the sun comes out
We don't know how high it rises
Or how far it sets
But it guides our steps at the break of dawn
And we look at the moon
To bask in the magic of creation.

The unknown calls unto us —
There could be beauty in its whisper.
How much we would miss,
If we let the shadows overtake us
And not reach out to the light slipping through.

LIGHT AND BLOOM

Thompson Emate
Nigeria

“Feeble hands don’t bring us to bloom lands.”
- Thompson Emate

The night has rolled its sheet,
Bloom has deemed us fit to meet,
Nature has embraced us,
We’re no more plagued by yesterday’s loss.

Gloom no longer sits in our hearts,
We’re not driven by despondent carts,
Light has come our way,
In our abode, it has chosen to stay.

The sun sits in our skies,
In this hope, we arise,
We no longer walk in the shadow,
We have found a path to the meadow.

We’re haloed with radiant colours,
As we traverse plains, terrains and contours,
The tides have brought us goodness,
Courage cloaked weariness.

JAM

Ngoni Chiwara
Zimbabwe

A syrup of blood
with fleshy clots of strawberry.

Brown bread
sugar smudged in red,

by a domesticated
butter knife;
'tis the grandson of a weapon.

Maternal instincts raised
pitchforks —

forks to champagne glasses
"Raise a toast...!" to the war veterans
now buried at Heroes Acre.

Liberation's new dawn is a party
that domesticated us into these pathetic
utensils so that we can consume that syrup of Jam
without the thought of blood.

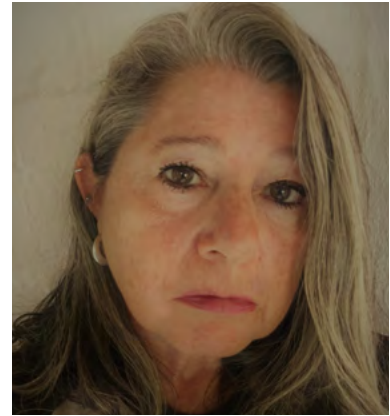


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PoeticAfrica is Africa's first trilingual poetry magazine published quarterly. The magazine showcases rich and diverse poetry in English, Kiswahili, and French from all over Africa to the world.

RED SKY IN THE MORNING

Marisa Kelly
Namibia



It was difficult for Fillemon to locate any remaining discarded bottles along his section of the shore once the sun was up. Long experience had shown that the harvest from the township's outdoor drinking sessions at month-end would barely reward his effort if he waited until he could see flashes of glass glinting at first light.

Two men who quartered the same area had contrived to rig up powerful head torches; they thus always managed to collect most of the bounty before Fillemon's

arrival, even if he did pitch before a crimson glow had started to smear the horizon behind the dunes inland. Yet with nothing else to occupy his time, and few other opportunities for earning cash currently, he'd been compelled to take up beachcombing before daybreak on his retrenchment from the fish-packing factory.

It was unpleasant work. Feral dogs harassed him as he used the torch on his cousin's Samsung to try to spot the tell-tale winks from bottles half-buried in the sand.

In the three years that he'd been engaged in this monthly task, Fillemon had stumbled over several other objects that – on closer inspection – had forced him to turn away and regurgitate his meagre breakfast of dry bread and cold tea onto the beach beside him. What's more, regardless of the weekend's takings, Erastus would demand an exorbitant fee from him for the loan of the phone and the cost of charging it.

At least during the winter months, the other gleaners tended to rise later, reluctant to leave their swaddle of blankets to brave the cruel easterlies – especially those individuals whose territory was the verges of the highway linking Walvis Bay and Swakopmund, where occasionally one of them might be hit by a car sideswiped off course by a sandstorm's particularly violent blast.

Fillemon had set out at 6:30, not expecting to have much company on this particular Saturday morning. He ought to have rejoiced at the lack of competition from his two fellow foragers but the reason for their absence was so disturbing that he had been unable to sleep as he dwelt on it through the bitter July night. The most recent shack fire – which had raged through a neighbouring informal settlement two evenings ago, destroying a large cluster of miserable dwellings – had killed the infant daughter of one of the other scavengers, a friendly character named Sebulon already brought low, like so many others, by the downturn in fishing activities at the port during the pandemic.

Fillemon supposed that the other man who patrolled the same patch of shore-

line as him would be out already among the still-smoking ruins of the half-dozen shebeens, gathering bottles that had been left undamaged despite the infernal heat of the conflagration, which had spread from shack to shack with almost unbelievable speed. The crime-scene tape around the areas of charred wooden beams and blackened corrugated metal panels had only been removed by the police combing the site towards dusk on Friday, finally allowing the former occupants to return to what was left of their homes and businesses – mournful little groups of downcast men and women, bundled up in donated blankets, kicking at the ashes to try and uncover anything salvageable they could take away with them, raising clouds of dirty cinders as they went about their grim work.

However Fillemon hadn't the stomach to join Shilongo, even though he knew that a few hours spent excavating through the wreckage of the illegal drinking dens would doubtless yield a valuable hoard; not only a great many empty bottles he could exchange for their deposit but probably some, still intact, that contained liquor he might sell.

Although shack fires were a distressingly common occurrence in the informal settlements surrounding Fillemon's own block, the most recent blaze had come closer than any previous one to threatening his half-finished breeze-block-and-wooden-pallet room. He and his neighbours had formed a human chain in the choking twilight, passing up containers of foetid water

from the wide ditch that looped around their section of the slum, managing to extinguish the many small flareups lit by embers flying across from the main fire. They continued to douse the piles of rubbish that might kindle at any second until the wind finally subsided. Then, panting and sweating despite the chill, the group turned to contemplate the calamity that was engulfing the community next door.

The panorama laid out under the bloodred mantle of leaping flames told a common-enough story. A welding spark from one of the chop shops 500 metres away across the stagnant gully had likely ignited a waist-high tussock of desiccated grass in the alley between the shacks, a passage-way doubtless filled with trash, cardboard boxes and windblown paper. The dull explosions Fillemon heard as he'd sat down to his supper of pap, oblivious until then of the drama unfolding nearby, had come from a cuca shop that sold gas bottles from out of a padlocked wire cage to the rear.

These two premises - the epicentre of the inferno - had soon been reduced to smouldering debris while adjacent buildings

combusted in seconds, sending towering columns of golden sparks and black smoke upwards in a widening circle. Loud clatters of falling timbers and some strange whooshing noises accompanied the scene as gusts of hot air had driven towards Fillemon and the other bystanders. Only once the wind had died down they could hear the shrill screams and hoarse bellows of terror coming from the running figures illuminated across the way. The arrival of a single fire truck an hour after the alarm had first been raised was met with a round of sarcastic applause from the spectators.

All of this Fillemon remembered again, padlocking the steel door of his home in the darkness. Twelve people had perished but already a rumour was circulating that it was going to be impossible to identify and arrest anybody responsible.

So why, then, could he now see a long line of blue and red lights flashing along the slip-road to his left as he began heading down to his regular beat on the shore? Police cars, maybe ten of them, parked silently between open-bed trucks, the latter containing groups of seated men crowded



together (although Fillemon struggled to see much in the lights' blinding glare).

He changed direction and was heading towards the off-ramp when the noise from all the engines stopped suddenly, as if on command. In the moments it took him to ascend the beach, the sky behind the procession lightened to livid pink and he observed that the workmen, all masked and wearing orange coveralls, were carrying an assortment of pick axes, shovels and pangas.

As a bulldozer rumbled past them down the slope, the lorries disgorged their occupants. Fillemon was now close enough to see the men standing about in quiet groups, shifting tools from hand to hand, their posture somehow sheepish. Each was looking in the direction of the razed homes and shattered little enterprises – all that was left of one portion of the pitiful sprawl of improvised buildings that they'd been scheduled to demolish this very morning. Fillemon's own block was earmarked for levelling at some point soon too; the residents had recently heard an official announcement to that effect on the radio.

Could it be that whoever was responsible for the order to dismantle the shacks today hadn't heard about the recent fire? That was surely impossible, so Fillemon had to assume that an urgent overnight assessment had been made and – incredibly – the powers-that-be had decided that the planned destruction should proceed regardless.

Perhaps it even seemed logical to do it now,

with half the families currently homeless anyway. Get the place cleared out before the wretched survivors have a chance to return, loaded up with donations of furniture, clothes and construction materials from generous people in the town.

Because it is a generous town thought Fillemon, wondering why he could now see several orange-clad figures hauling themselves back up into the trucks. Yes, a small place where people know each other and one person's troubles are felt by countless relations, friends, acquaintances and compassionate strangers. Including those lucky enough to have lowly manual jobs with the municipality but who also possess scruples that prevent them from participating in the obliteration of a thriving community of people very like themselves. Folk doing their best with the very little they have, against all the unjust challenges that life throws their way.

The clank of metal tools being hurled back into the lorries accompanied Fillemon as he retraced his steps to begin scouring the blustery beach. Somebody in one of the trucks waved at him, but he couldn't make out who it was through the still-fuggy haze.

Today wouldn't be the day that the neighbouring kambashus would be cleared out after all. And August might not be the month when his own settlement disappeared, either. But the day was coming he knew, just as night must always follow dawn.



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WSA Magazine REVIEW

September 2023 Edition



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Autricia Timti

This edition presents an inspiring conversation with Autricia Timti, an exceptional wordsmith from Cameroon who won the 2021 Young English Cameroonian Writers Awards (YECWA)



MY TRUTH

A Flash Fiction by Maureen Allandi, Ghana
Reviewer: Benita Magopane, Botswana



Usually, we experience many of our firsts in our adolescent years or young adulthood years; hence, I would like to presume that the main character in the flash fiction titled 'My Truth' might be in either category. A young lady whose older sister stole her first love. Being young is filled with tumultuous feelings, sometimes extremely cheerful, sometimes angry.

It's probably a period where one is prone to acting according to his feelings and not his head. And that's what happened to Kuks. She could have had her

seconds and tens in the future, but 'Efe was too perfect to be real,' hence she had to be eliminated. Simply because of this feeling of (as put most descriptively) red-hot anger in her heart.

This flash fiction brings out a thriller sensation. It is twisted yet captivating and ends just as it should without remorse. It ends with no pangs of conscience shown or hinted in the heart of the twisted character. It also ends creatively, with an ending well linked to the beginning and the middle of the story, all correlating very well.

IN PLAIN SIGHT

A Poem by Rebaone K. Motsumi, Botswana
Reviewer: Akuei M. Adol, South Sudan

Rebaone's poem "In Plain Sight" boldly celebrates cultural identity and self-acceptance. The central theme revolves around cultural heritage and the refusal to conform to external pressures. Motsumi highlights the profound truth that true beauty and worth are discovered in embracing one's lineage and authentic self rather than fitting into Eurocentric ideals often imposed as the standard of splendour. The poet proudly declares their Botswanan inheritance as "adorned in a culture unparalleled." Nevertheless, the reference to "sun-burnt fingers" underscores the value of tradition over modern standards.

The poem, structured as free verse with twenty-three lines, lacks rhyme and meter, enhancing the sincerity of the author's message. Rebaone uses metaphor to vividly convey the rejection of cultural identity as "forcing tenacious African coils into submission," illuminating resistance against societal pressures.

The language is passionate and forthright, mirroring the poet's unflinching loyalty to truth. Lines such as "Balking at salves and oils, Burnt scabs will not be my normal" firmly rejects the notion of yielding to a false ideal, reinforcing that authentic-

ity holds more significant value than conformity. Terms like "Caucasian hair" and "afro" further emphasise the contrast between African heritage and external influences.

The poem's mood shifts from celebrating cultural pride to assertive rebellion, showcasing Motsumi's implacable self-confidence and determination to cherish their identity. The author's emotions run deep throughout the piece, from the initial pride in Botswanan culture to the anger and frustration directed at societal pressures. The author's characterisation portrays an individual determined to stand firm and refuse compromise on their identity, thus resonating deeply with readers facing similar challenges in embracing their cultural roots.

In a nutshell, the poem imparts a vital lesson about self-acceptance and cultural pride. It encourages readers to reject external beauty standards and wholeheartedly accept their true selves. Congratulations, Motsumi, for this excellent work. Keep writing to inspire other poets.

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