

Contemporary Ghanaian Writers' Series

Issue IV

ROOTS

## ISSUE IV

An Anthology of Poetry and Fiction

Curated by Contemporary Ghanaian Writers' Series (CGWS)

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# ISSUE IV

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## Foreword

Poetry, I have discovered, is a way to breathe. It is a way to take in the world and give yourself back to it. It is the art of fellowship, of communion. Sometimes we can tell wonderful music by its ability to reach us in ways we did not know we could or even needed to be reached. It may be that its lyrics and melodies bear the very signature of emotions we are aware of but cannot quite name. I feel that every time the horns blast through while listening to “I FEEL IT” by Jon Bellion and Burna Boy. Likewise, I knew what the words ethics and morality meant. But when I watched the 2002 drama-thriller, *John Q*, starring Denzel Washington, I understood what ethics and morality could be. Exceptional art does that. It does not merely represent or reflect life, it inaugurates possibilities; new ways of being in the world with ourselves and one another. It fosters communion. This anthology is exceptional art.

Like my encounter with Denzel Washington’s *John Q*, the poems here yield distinct characters of life and color, bearing the ability to return experience to you as a newborn. Take the pristine sneakiness of the following lines from the opening poem, “Mother Mothered” by Adwoa Amankwah: “when she got confused, she’d shout / and we’d shout back, it was the only way / we understood each other over the wall.” Here we are at the foot of a scene that feels familiar and yet it oozes with a newness that begins and ends with what it means to behold an opening, to walk a path, to commune, to be together and apart. That “it was the only way” alerts us to the presence of an opening, a path. Yet, where freedom might breathe, the shackles of “only” as a qualifier for this freedom space foretells the barrier we encounter at “the wall” in the next line. As if this was not enough, the speaker does not permit readers to abandon hope, for despite the paradoxes of freedom that are expressed through a sole path toward the freedom of being in excess with one another, there is more than enough room to still “understand each other.” Is there anything that speaks to the character and color of our being more than this paradox of bound freedom? In the world of these lines the imperfections of a mother’s communion with her own, sneaks up to, as it were, shake the table upon which we presume the comfort of self-righteousness.

In their collective soul, these poems are hymns of freedom, of its heft and dread. They are the bones and sinews and sighs that collect at the altar of pursuit. They are a report on what it means to occupy motion as its own way of being, as its own home, as another path not outside of the darkness but beyond the overdetermination of light. The assortment of writers here so aptly express the depth and variety of freedom to us all. So even as I contend that at their core these poems are hymns of freedom, there is a striking uniqueness to each of them.

That perhaps offers us a useful commentary on the possibility of inhabiting a world where multiple and diverse freedoms can cohere.

Still, I suspect that this is not the immediate province of these verses. In the vast yet intimate cosmology of these poems, each offers us the gift of relearning how to be attentive. Detail, after all, makes character. So as the intentionality of detail with which the world of each poem is woven commands our intimate attention, we begin to learn something of ourselves and our own worldmaking as much as we do these poets and their gloriously chaotic minds. The surrealist *Ars Poetica* of Kodwo Hybrid, “Making a journey through poems” is a useful example here. As is to be expected with *Ars Poetica*, you enter this poem to behold its anatomy and the way it reflects or deviates from the universe of poems. In Hybrid’s universe—and perhaps the name is a clue—we awake in a poetry world where “a sea” with mouth “keeps looking at the sky” yet dolphins remain swimming. The personification of the sea and the realism of a dolphin swimming seem at odds, absurd, surreal, and yet they do not quite clash, instead, they make possible new ways of making worlds and being. The familiar expanse of the sea is rendered at once intimate in scale and yet even more expansive as we come to regard it beyond the confines of what we know and expect it to be. That freedom to be in excess of familiarity that binds, even if it has to exist in a surreal world, is the same that animates the possibility of a world where “the dolphins don’t swim this way.” In the world of a surrealist poem, we are confronted with the existential question: must we always swim this way? The writer says, “I’m trying to write a poem about / things I know / but not where they come from” and we are left to wonder, what does it mean to know that you do not know enough to limit yourself to the familiar, to the conventional and expected? How does such a dialogue between convention and control enlighten us about the possibilities of freedom?

We often mistake freedom to be nothing else but liberation. Sometimes, however, stepping into expectation while attempting to negotiate a way out, a way to insist on otherwise ways of being, becomes its own prison. For the speaker in “Last Sunday,” Ama Pomaa’s poem, “It’s an avalanche of bullets in an open field, and [with] nowhere to hide.” Like this speaker, sometimes this is the only possible world a soul fighting depression believes they can inhabit. Sometimes it is worsened by love so contorted that it becomes a noose, like the love of a grieving mother, or the repressive affection of family and church. What then? The speaker in “Last Sunday” wants to know. This is their world:

It’s almost like someone left a radio on in my / head, tuned to a channel that works around the clock to tell me everything that’s wrong with me. / I want to change the channel / but I can’t because the tuning knob is broken. The harder I fight / to block it out, the louder it becomes. So, I let it play, losing / myself into its razor-sharp castigation.

Perhaps it is our world too. What now?

Heaviness isn’t always oppressive; it should not be regarded as a mad thing to always avoid. Laughter too is heavy. And there is a poignant heft to the humor brought to bear in some of these poems. In “the man who wanted my nomba” for instance, Ama Afrah Appiah gives us a scene full of grace even as nastiness breeds in its underbelly. The speaker in her poem fetches humor with a purposeful precision by granting us a delightful twist at the end of the poem. That kind of humor is not taught. It is experienced. It is one that Appiah does not withhold from her readers. It is also evident, albeit in a sharper register, in Nenyi Ato Bentum’s “Faces,” where we encounter the bizarreness of political campaigns.

The poems in this anthology shift and slip and bend and evade, swerving with purpose. From the speed of depreciating faith to the density of joy. Especially impressive is the breadth of styles proffered in this collection. Some of the work here read like an ode to the early champions of traditional African and Ghanaian poetry. Nenyi Ato Bentum’s “Little Things Also Die” is constructed with a sophisticated clarity that is not unlike what could be expected of a Kofi Awoonor verse. The matter-of-fact pace, the wringing of depth from colloquial diction, and the irony of a relaxed urgency in tone, are but a few of

the traits that allow Khadia Alexandra Okai-koi's "december 25th in accra" such monumental pull. It reminds me of the wit in Ama Ata Aidoo's poetry. Lest anyone be misled, the brilliance of these poets and how they resonate with the legendary craft of our elders is not to be mistaken as mere replication. No. It is that their own genius shines so brightly that it lights both the paths forward and re-illuminates the continuity of a rich heritage. In this, something of who we are and who we are becoming remains and thrives. In this too, we find communion. There are other kinds of poems here too, of course. Some brief, some lengthy, all magnificent in their unique glories. The usual suspects of love and faith and family prevail. So too, new angels and demons to be wrestled with. There are odes and ballads, elegies and epics, gifts, as they say, that keep on giving.

Good poetry helps us feel our way through questions we do not know we have. Great poetry presumes nothing yet assumes everything in the ways that allow for us to reimagine what questions and answers themselves are. As the speaker in K. Asare Bediako's "Cityscape" declares, "Being a man is no grave!" What is it to be a man then? Bediako does not presume to have answers here. Only an invitation to consider. What would you be when there is not a how to be? Do we look to the grave of mothers for such answers or the grieving joy of queerness to reframe how we ask questions of ourselves? How do we teach ourselves to live when we have not figured out how to not grieve love? Or like the speaker in the poem "In His Chest, His God" by Kwame Boateng who says "His slow descent into madness and long suffering is what he calls his God ordering his steps," what does it mean for the God of a boy to mold love from madness? What does it mean for such a boy to die unremembered yet with his God still in his chest? These questions are not mine. They are the very table set before us by these brilliant writers to dine and reflect, to commune with self and other.

This is a feast full of bones yet hot with the fat of life. Chew slowly. Share generously.

Enjoy!

Nana K. A. Prempeh



## Mother Mothered

*Doris Amankwah*

*Do you know what your grandma put me through when I was your age?*

mother was not mothered very much, so  
she could only mother us the way she knew.

*I did not kill my mother so you children won't kill me too*

mother would not give up, she cried,  
she'd smack some flesh and move on.

*Do you people want me to come up there? You won't like it if I do!*

when she got confused she'd shout  
and we'd shout back, it was the only way  
we understood each other over the wall.

*Children will always be children, you just need a little spanking.*

mother does not give up, she smiles

when we throw our hands in surrender.

*You people cannot allow me enjoy any food in peace eh?*

we would stretch our hands in front of her

and beg for the food in her mouth;

the jollof she sneaks home from funerals.

*You are lucky I have not given you any scars but go on like this,*

*And you will soon find out!*

mother knew the language of touch and how it worked.

she bore the testimony in a scar that stretched

from behind her left knee to her ankle.

*Lord protect my children from evil eyes and bring them back to me safely.*

*“Amen”, we chorused.*

but she mothered us,

she mothered us,

the only way she knew.

## Grief

*Claudia Owusu*

In Ohio, fall ushers everything to sleep before I am fully ready. I tell myself that this too is a wilderness that God created—which is to say that I am tired of hoping without seeing.

How does a mouth form around disgrace? I utter as a joke:

“God, why do you keep shutting the door in my face?”, and then retract my words.

My prayers are full of wants. They go: “Father in the mighty name of Jesus”,  
followed by a weighted sigh

I want to believe that there’s a table prepared for me—that somewhere around the corner, my long  
dead brother dribbles a basketball with a teasing smile and no bullet wound

But this table I have is heavy with rotting fruits and leans on an uneven leg

Here is fruit for my father’s failed marriage  
fruit for the pot burn on the kitchen counter  
for the aluminum foil in the microwave  
for my brothers laughing at the blue flames

a dusty portrait of my brother sits alone in the living room

where the cable is cut off and the clock has never worked

my father travels and does not call

remarries and does no formal introduction

How do you forfeit a diseased tree?

Oh, Father, if you're willing...yet my will, yet my will, yet my will

/ the air swarms with gnats and I can barely make out an exhale

“Father in the mighty name of Jesus” / this is how I have been holding my breath

This is how I have been holding it all together

## A Boy Que(e)ries Death

*Kwame Boateng*

There's something about death  
That binds and -  
embalms and then bids farewell  
there's something about queer death

That rejects grief and -  
discriminates and  
then mocks the living as if to say:

*We have gone forth  
To peek behind the curtain  
where our ancestors drink Guinness*

*And wash their feet in libations*

*Some with pill clogged throats  
swallowed willingly to heal...*

*To feel...something...anything*

*Some with smoke filled lungs*

*From when Sodom simmered*

*Men cooked...women and children cooked...*

*and Praise be to God's barbecue*

*in the wrath of his children*

*Our bodies become a catacomb of blood and bones*

*We've prayed to your God to forget us*

*We are heathens undeserving*

*of his unrequited love*

*This love that rummages and splits the skin*

*We've learned to break, mend and then*

*break again*

*We've learned to be the healer and the open wound*

There's something about death

that continuously burns our irises

and recycles

And turns our closets into caskets

For aren't they all made of wood?

And don't we love the rot?

## **Cityscape**

*K. Asare Bediako*

My last night falls & breaks into pieces of sorrow. When I gulp memories, I get stranded. I choke with tears. Families are like mountains & mothers, fountains. I clutch into tears, again & suck it memories from outside. Father tells me to dig, dig & dig until I find courage. I recall the self talk, self cry, and self silence, on that thatched roof. Where I became a boy—the shoes of my father I wear now. Heaven's synchrony. I am here, after all. Being a man is no grave! You ask? Yes, you're a jobber & all those wild limbs. Say you get beards. Yes, I am a loser. Preach loneliness as a sermon. You say loneliness corresponds to a boy? Someday, I will offer my last song to this burnt down cityscape.

## Making a Journey through Poems

### *Kodwo Hybrid*

I'm trying to write a poem about  
the mouth of a sea and the skin of a dolphin  
but the sea keeps looking at the sky  
and the dolphins don't swim this way

I'm trying to write a poem about  
the face of a girl whose father  
just returned from war  
she is so happy to see him  
that you could feel the bubbles  
in her heart in your mouth  
but she has buried her face in his chest

I'm trying to write a poem about  
things I know  
but not where they come from

I'm trying to dream far away from home  
and it makes me happy

makes me hug myself in the dark and smile through tears

## Last Sunday

*Ama Poma*

I've never come close enough to contemplate options. It's always been a dance, a flirtation with the intrusive thoughts that traipsed around in my head. The first episode lasted a week, I think. It was almost imperceptible because it wasn't a deviation from my natural disposition. But it left a signature, a memento of our first meeting and a promise that it'd never be too far off. And the dalliance has continued the last ten years. If I'm being honest, I've always known this was building up to something, these little stints with melancholy that I explained away. Now that day has come, and I fear I'm unprepared.

*You shouldn't be here.*

My mother is sitting in front, in the first row. I chose the back seat to her displeasure. I'm here at her behest, worn out from days of her complaint, she must be thinking. I can't blame her. Her emotional blackmailing ways have been effective ever since the death of my father. That tragedy ordained me as the head of our small family and her partner in crime. We've grown closer since then, talking for hours on the phone when I was away, catching up on the rigours of schoolwork and her daily encounters with shrewd customers. Which is why I stretched the limits of my endurance. The day could have been a week ago. But I stayed, for her. And now, I'm scared. Because, for the first time, she's not enough reason. And I have nothing else.

*You're worth nothing.*

*You don't mean anything to anyone.*

My mother turns to look at me as members troop into the church. I try not to interpret her narrowed eyes, twisted lips, and the little shakes of her head. She has no clue. The last four weeks were chalked to a sudden onset of laziness. I hadn't left the house. Not once. She always came home to find me in my room, in the darkness. The first few days, she'd turn the lights on, her face full of concern. Had I

eaten? Was I sick? Then as the days wore on, concern turned to frustration. She knew something was wrong, and I wasn't telling her. I didn't know how. I didn't know what to say. I still don't.

*She's better off without you.*

*You know it.*

*I know it.*

I caress the rim of the cap in my hand. It was my father's. It's worn, coming apart at the seams, but it still smells like him. I fight the urge to slip it on, to hide what I can of myself as the church fills up with people who know me. But I don't want to draw attention either. Everyone knew my father so now everyone knows me. Everyone thinks I'm going to be him. It's how it's always been.

I mourned my father. I didn't cry at the funeral, but later, when the last of the guests left, my mother and I held each other at three in the morning and cried for the man we both loved. I understood the expectations that would come with stepping into his shoes. And I handled it. I did. But this thing has opened doors I thought I closed, and everything is coming at me all at once: my failures, relationships that ended, people I lost. It's an avalanche of bullets in an open field, and I have nowhere to hide. I used to think my father would be proud of the man I'd become. But the truth is, if he could see me now, he'd be ashamed to call me his son.

“Amen!”

“Amen!”

A girl is strutting across the stage, mic in hand. Elizabeth Mensah. We were friends. We could have been more. She was the first person I confided in when this thing started to scare me. I'd go days avoiding people I loved. Then after an episode passed, I'd have to explain all the unanswered calls and messages. I can't say she didn't try, but it got harder and harder for her to believe that my actions had nothing to do with her. Right now, she's another reminder of everything I have lost to this condition.

“Beloved, let's stand in worship.”

The people around me rise in obedience. I continue to watch her, wondering what could have been. If I wasn't a shell of myself right now, I'd be the one sitting behind the church organ, accompanying her voice with a gentle melody. For a moment, I feel like my old self again. There's a possibility, a faint thread of hope.

Someone taps my shoulder. When I turn, I'm met with the disapproving glare of an elderly usher. "Get up," she motions. Other members on the row turn my way. I hold on to the chair in front of me and pull myself up.

"Forever, ooooh Looord, thy word is settled, in heaven."

When I close my eyes, I'm comforted by the cocoon of pitch-black darkness. For a second, my mind is an empty slate. I focus on the words of the song, on the memories the music elicits; falling asleep in Sunday School, sharing fan milk with my friends, and leaving church early to watch Cantata.

*Nobody cares you're here.*

*You're nothing like them.*

*And you'll never be.*

I squeeze my eyes. There's no point fighting the voice. I figured that out years ago. It's almost like someone left a radio on in my head, tuned to a channel that works around the clock to tell me everything that's wrong with me. I want to change the channel but I can't because the tuning knob is broken. The harder I fight to block it out, the louder it becomes. So, I let it play, losing myself in its razor-sharp castigation.

*"Hallelujah!"*

I open my eyes. I'm the only one still standing. Pastor Dotse is coming up the podium. He looks at me briefly, and for a second, I fear he'll ask the congregation to welcome back brother Adam with a clap offering.

He doesn't. I lean into my chair, recalling our conversation last Sunday.

He'd come to talk to me about my suspected backsliding. I'd promised him it was nothing serious and that I'd be back. Everything was going well until, right as he was leaving, he looked me in the eyes knowingly and asked if I was sure I was okay. I don't know why, I can't explain it, but in that moment, I didn't want to hide anymore.

“Adam, what's wrong?”

*Nothing.* It's there on my tongue, but it doesn't come out. Was it a cry for help, a last-ditch effort to pull myself ashore, grasping at straws? I don't know, but I voice my suspicions for the first time.

“Pastor, I think my brain is trying to kill me.”

The sermon is over now. We go through the motions to the end, and the announcements follow.

“Our sister Roberta, we all saw her paralyzed from the accident last week. They are going to do an operation. Remember her in your prayers.”

Warmth flutters through the cold embers of my heart. How lucky. There's proof of her paralysis. No one's going to tell her to snap out of it, to get up and walk. She won't get blamed for choosing to stay in her wheelchair. Would it help if I could slice my cranium open? Would there be proof?

After my slip up with Rev. Dotse, he prayed against the spirit of depression and left. I wanted it to be enough. So badly. But nothing changed. That's when I knew it had to be done. I was that utterly hopeless and irredeemable, and there was nothing left to hold on to. Even God was on board. Why else wouldn't he set me free from this nightmare?

“May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with us now and forever.”

When the service ends, I'm the first to leave. It's dark outside. The azure sky of this morning is long lost. I watch the sun, the dark clouds creeping over it, slowly swallowing it whole. A wave of sadness washes over me without warning, and I run across the compound, finding solace behind a Neem tree. There, I let myself feel everything. I *have* tried. God, have I tried. Twenty-four-seven of this broken

radio in my head going off over and over again. I have been clinging to this rotting log of wood, waiting for a lifeboat. My arms hurt, my legs are sore, I'm in constant pain, and I just want it to stop. The chatter dies down as the church compound empties. My phone is ringing. It's my mum. I wipe the streaks off my face and emerge from the darkness. She's standing at the entrance, chatting with a friend. They say their goodbyes, and she turns to me.

"Your friends were looking for you. Where did you go?"

"Maa."

"What?"

I memorize the lines on her face, the glint in her eyes when she's mad at me. Like she is now. I think of something I could say so she'd understand. Something meaningful she'd remember. I draw a blank.

"What's wrong with you?"

"Headache," I choke out.

Her face softens. She touches her palm to my forehead. It's cold and warm all at once. I close my eyes, soaking it in.

"With those headphones on your head all the time, why won't you have a headache."

I chuckle.

When we get home, she brings out two tablets of paracetamol and watches me swallow. The hours go by in a blur, counting down, weighing on me. We finish supper and do the dishes together, trading stories like we always do. Then she settles into a sofa in the living room and commences her nightly ritual. I watch the Nigerian movie with her, laughing when she laughs, watching the emotions unfold in her expressions. One minute she's screaming at an actor's decision to throw his wife out of his house. The next, she's snoring softly, her head resting against the sofa. I fetch her a cloth from her bedroom, the large one that was my father's... She snuggles into it and lets out a long breath.

I'm in my room. There's a mug of cold Milo in one hand. On the other, a bottle of a fine powder I bought last week. I empty the contents of the bottle into the mug and stir.

*I was here.*

*I liked it here.*

*I tried to stay.*

I chug it down. I lay on the floor. I close my eyes and wait for the pain to stop.

## Mourning

*Nenyi Ato Bentum*

I am staring at SOMETHING:

Fascinating. Glaring. Plenty but in batches.

They've been paraded well with the expert's hands.

I can't stop gazing:

Teary although my eyes appear;

Nauseating although my throat feels;

Smelly although my nose sense

But I have no option but to stare at this morning's batch of detritus

& I hear zoomlion workers are on zoom demonstrating!

## **what i want to ask my mother**

*Ama Afrah Appiah*

why does the sea rise and fall?

why does it wash the sand

till it's clear-till it shines?

polished ivory receiving light and dispersing it

red-yellow-green-violet . . . why?

why is Woman a semblance of pain?

the pain of life flowing through a duct

or of life growing within-

then, after the ninth, deciding to tear its way out

like cydnidae digging through the earth. . . why?

why does Woman cohabit with pain?

sitting open-legged, sobbing into her thighs

as her thick hair is raked?

pain mating with her

one palm covering her mouth

and the other clutching her throat. . . why?

## **No Rivers in This Desert**

*Joshua Enam Semanyoh*

My heart is a desert,

don't come close.

My heart is that place

to come, to wither away, to die.

It has been for many years.

Broken skulls and dry patched hearts

are all you'll ever find here.

These sands have swallowed the most beautiful.

Many seekers and prospects drowned

in this sea of unfulfilled promises, for love.

My heart is a desert,

you'll find no joy here.

Only pain. Of my first real love

who drained all the liquid, the river from me.

I cannot begin to wonder about love.

Don't sell me any sweet stories,

even the soothing memories are long buried.

Let me dance in these sands alone.

There are too many songs about love

but none was made for me.

## **To Be a Mother**

*Roberta Amanda Yemofio*

is to be absolute

you gather worries at the feet of god

& beg for your children's redemption

you spit wisdom in your palms

& knead it into your daughters' heads

that they be modest & avoid knights

who only appear in places where

their faces are unrecognisable

to be a mother is to tell your daughter

to get over her fear of death

like your body did not wreck

when they christened your loss, a 'mis-carriage'

a term intended to blame you for the tumble

as if there aren't enough creative ways

to die

to be a mother is to be that therapist

who keeps asking “so what are you going to do?”

to the woman whose life her perfect son ruined

because her baby boy can do no wrong

and if anything good is to come from motherhood

it is for you to teach your daughters that

the spilling of blood does not depend on what you wear

but how you lie to sleep

## beatitude

*Elliot John Gyedu*

The year is 2008. The sun is high in the sky before 6am and the air is uncharacteristically warm. The car speeds along the newly tarred Kwesimintim road, the radio playing a Cindy Thompson tune. You bob your head gently, singing under your breath as you open the upper mirror in the front seat. You check your light makeup in the mirror and just as you pat your *duku* in place, the car jumps as it encounters a road bump, pushing the *duku* to one side. You sigh, not angry but also not surprised. The politicians were the embodiment of faux love. They throw just any type of asphalt on the road when election time nears.

You turn sharply, putting the *duku* in place as you warn your children at the backseat with a look to stop fighting. They become still and watch their father in the driver's seat to come to their aid. Boys and their fathers. They are five and seven and are joined at the hip to him. In his seat, he drives quietly, one hand twisting the steering wheel whilst the other lies on the sound horn absentmindedly. You look at him from the corner of your eyes and he does the same and quickly reverts his eyes. Soon enough, you reach the Takoradi Roundabout. When he makes a turn to the lane that leads to the Bethel Methodist Church, you find yourself splat in the middle of heavy traffic. The kids are now shoving each other quietly, grumbling about who to play the next game on their shared tetris device. You don't have the energy to warn them off again. It's already a hectic day anticipating what is to come.

On the pavement beside the lane, people pass by, all dressed in their Sunday best. Most of them had taken *tro-tros* to the roundabout and were walking to the church. There's a child who walks with her mother, dressed in a tutu dress with heels and socks. The mother walks fast, half-dragging the child with her. A couple is behind them and passes by your car. You don't notice them because your attention is now on your Sony Ericsson phone, trying to figure out the Bluetooth-something your niece taught you. The man is tall with a muscular frame and his hand is on the small area above his wife's enormous buttocks. You don't notice your husband's gaze on them. By chance,

your eyes flick to him and you pause. You turn to watch the couple. Back to your husband. Then to the couple again.

Understanding surges through you, alongside anger. You don't even think as you lift your exquisite Giorgio Armani knockoff handbag from between your legs. You throw it at him, knocking him out of his trance as you shout, "Kwasia, eye benyin gyimifo paa!" and follow by hitting him repeatedly with your soft hands. *Fool, you are a stupid man!*

The kids are mute now, afraid of you turning your anger on them. You would never but they are kids and you are attacking their favourite person in the world. One of them, Paa Kwesi, grabs the hand of his younger brother and pulls him closer. You stop abruptly, perhaps realising that you'll spoil your make-up and put the duku in disarray. You realise that the cars behind are honking loudly for you to move on in the free space that is now ahead of you. Your husband drives on gently as you mutter a litany of insults in Fante and pick the contents of the bag that are now strewn everywhere in the car.

"Sorry," he says.

The couple is now farther away from you but still in view. As you furiously put your *duku* back in place, your eyes search them, assessing what it is that draws them to him. What they have that you lack. A slither of pity surges through you, almost making you less angry. But you have been understanding before and now you are just frustrated. You know he's still tempted to watch the couple again. His eyes are doing that thing again where he's so focused on the road that they look vacant.

*He's trying.*

You quickly dismiss the thought. He was trying, but what of you and the kids? You hardly saw him during weekdays because of work and deserved the one day you did spend with him, not to be reminded that he didn't want you.

Presently, you have dabbed the sweat from your face and are reapplying the makeup. Anger is set on your face, undoing the effect of the makeup on your lovely features. The kids sit in silence, afraid of the tension in the car so strong you couldn't cut it with a knife. Slowly, you reach another roundabout and the car turns, the church looming in view. It's an elegant two story building

painted tan with a wide car park and a tower adjacent to it that was tall as the building was long. Most people troop through the main gate on foot and the parking lot looks lonely with a few cars. He parks a few metres on the right side of the building near the small gate that is now blocked with two kiosks, one selling pastries and drinks and the other selling fried rice. The shops aren't open though.

You quickly get out of the car and open the back door, ushering your kids out. They follow with grumpy looks on their faces and you ignore them as you bend down and straighten their shirts, tucking them in. The youngest, Nana Kwame, turns to his father and you do same. He's come out of the car and you can see his figure on the other side. Although his attention is on you, for a microsecond, you think you see his eyes flicker to behind you. You turn, knowing what you'll find. A couple is walking towards the entrance of the church. The man is of average height, in long sleeves and trousers. His wife walks beside him, a slender figure with small buttocks.

Sadness and dejection mixed with anger wash over you and you look back at him. He smiles and gives you a nod, full of reassurance that he would never do anything of that sort to hurt you. You know that. You know this isn't his fault yet you can stop the hurt rolling over you, forcing you to think of what those almost imperceptible lingering looks he gives them mean. You've held it in but you know if you let a tear fall, a geyser would rush out of you and the sadness would overwhelm you till all you saw was a futureless future.

You force the tears away like you always do. You shake your head slightly as you hold the hands of your boys in each hand. Tighter than necessary.

“Pray about your affliction today too. And ask God to change you.”

You march to the main door of the church, your kids in tow and him following you guys. Church has already begun and the first hymn, *Abide with Me* is being sung. A sash has been used to block the entrance until the hymn is done. The kids skip away from you to the children's service in the school building that shared the same space with the church and was behind it.

*The darkness deepens-*

A smile is plastered on your face-

*Lord with me abide -*

You exchange pleasantries with the other church members who are also late -

*Help of the helpless oh* - your breath skips when he puts a hand around your waist and draws you close, making the other church members swoon - *Abide with me*.

The hymn is done and you walk into the church together. The usher directs you to the first floor and there, another one directs you to the wooden pew that is in direct sight of the podium.

Everyone on the first floor can see you, the lovely couple dressed in matching traditional cloth. It was just a few years ago you had married in this same church yet you already have two wonderful boys. You and him are the role models for many of the youth. But no one sees the small space between you as you sit on the pew. One that mirrors something larger in your married life.

The reverend father is speaking, moving from making introductions to admonishing the church on following the ways of the world. How women had begun to lay with women and men lay with other men and the US was pushing for legalization of same-sex activities everywhere. How the same US was gradually becoming the nation of the Antichrist with hip-hop artists that sold their souls in exchange for fame. Your eyes flicker to him and he looks straight ahead, gaze unflinching.

Soon, the first bible reader comes to the podium. It was the muscular man you had seen on the pavement.

*Proverbs 6: 16-19*

You watch your husband as the bible reader reads slowly, pausing for effect at certain verses. He has a casual look but again as you stare at him, you try to find something to justify how you feel. What was going through his head right now? Was he thinking of someone else who wasn't you? Imagining life with someone else? Was this the tipping point where he would decide to let go of you and the kids and live the life you know he wants? When his hand moves to scratch an itch on his thigh, you dart your hand over his and retrieve it just as quickly, brushing it over his soft crotch area. He turns to you in surprise and returns to the pulpit, where it's the turn of the second bible reader.

Your situation with him has wrecked your mental health. You are always looking for signs that either he's masked or aren't there. You know you should talk to someone but who? Who would understand you and not judge you for rushing things with him? Who would keep this secret and

not ruin your reputation and his? You are tired of this loneliness. The breath you constantly hold in when you are around him threatens to come out and with it, uncontrollable silent tears.

When you met him almost 8 years ago at a popular food joint, you were in your late thirties and the prospect of finding a husband was low. They had started whispering behind your back that no one wanted you. And there he was; impossibly handsome, rich, and unwed with no children even though he was in his forties. You didn't waste time. You set your sights on him, wooing him even though you could feel his resistance. There was no way you were letting this miracle pass you by.

He finally acquiesced, picking up on your many hints and asking you to be his girlfriend. Everything moved fast from there. His family, mother particularly, had rushed him to take things more seriously. That should have been a red flag. But you were ecstatic. This was God! She had brought this woman to you! Together, you gently pressured him until he proposed. 6 months later, you were walking down the aisle, the largest grin plastered on your face and *Pachelbel's Canon in D* playing in the background.

It was during your honeymoon that things started to get weird. He had never moved to you in a sexual manner before you got married and you assumed that it was because he saw you as serious wife material. Not one of those bimbos he could easily have banged before he met you. On your first night together as husband and wife, he'd faked a headache and rolled to one side of the bed, away from you. You refused to panic, refused to listen to that inner voice that said you had forced someone who didn't love you into a long-life marriage.

On the second and third night, he'd faked a headache the whole day but went out on both nights to hang out with a friend of his. It was on the fourth day of your honeymoon, whilst you lounged on a sofa on the balcony of your hotel room in *Akroma Plaza* that he appeared on the balcony and pulled you inside. His penis was hard rock, stretching the light fabric of his shorts and you went on your knees, head going down on his member as your hands raised mentally, thanking God. That day, he threw you on the bed and rammed his rod into you. Although he was dry and you hadn't prepared, there was a smile on your face as the pain radiated through your body. He grunted as he thrust and after his seeds were released, he pulled out and turned away, falling asleep.

The next time you had sex was a few weeks after your honeymoon. By then, you had missed your period and knew you could be expecting. You lived together in your matrimonial home. A four-bedroom house in the quiet and plush Takoradi Estates. You were watching a rerun of one of the local telenovelas when he appeared in the living room, grabbing the underside of your tender breasts over the sofa. His touch was gentle this time, almost apologetic as he planted soft kisses on your face and his hands roamed your body. You gave in to him. It had been so long and you missed intimacy. As he gently thrust, he cupped your face with both hands and in his teary eyes, you saw it. Or rather, them. A range of emotions overpowers you. You reached for him, kissing him fully on the lips and whispering ‘I love you’, maybe to reassure him you understood him now. Or maybe it was just the throes of passion. You don't remember.

You do remember that after when the intimacy had waned, you became hyper-vigilant of everything he did. Every call he made in the house. Every interaction he had with a man. Each time he told you he was going to his best friend's house during the weekend to watch football. You were never homophobic but you didn't understand him. You'd ponder over it so many times when your thoughts caught you alone. Why had he married you then? Was he only using you as a stage wife? Someone, to use only for public functions and discarded?

But he became closer to you, talking to you more and more and sharing the smallest details of his life with you. He trusted you more every day, loosening up his rigid demeanour. You began to feel pity for him. This wasn't his fault. He was a lovely and responsible man and maybe he couldn't love you but he would respect you enough. But after Paa Kwesi's birth, when the postpartum depression hit you, this reversed and every act of intimacy he showed you was infuriating. It was all fake.

On the occasions you had sex, you would hold on tight, hoping that each warmth you felt as his seed settled in you would bring another child. And maybe you could focus on them and not the truth that was destroying everything you'd dreamt of since childhood.

The reverend father is teaching on the Beatitudes by Jesus Christ now. He takes them one after the other, explaining each one in-depth. Your mind is on data roaming mode as you think of your life. Your only sister and her family live abroad. Your children will grow and leave. Who would fill that void when the time came? Is this who you are to remain your whole life? The woman who would

never be loved? Was this punishment for being selective in choosing a mate when you were young?  
Could you leave him? What would you tell the boys? How would the world see you?

Your head drops as the reverend finishes and rereads Chapter 5 of the Book of Matthew.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, they shall inherit the kingdom of Heaven.*

A tear rolls down your face, falling on the linoleum floor in a single dark stain.

*Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth.*

Another tear drops.

*Blessed are the merciful, they shall receive mercy.*

Your husband puts an arm around you, squeezing your shoulder gently.

*Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called God's children.*

You push his hand away and stand.

*Blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.*

Maame Esi walks away from her husband and out of the church.

## **In His Chest, His God**

*Kwame Boateng*

There is a boy,

a young black skinned irregular boy

splayed like a frog to the scalpel.

A sign dangles from his neck,

reads "This temple is for lease"

reads "This temple has been leased"

His God fingered him,

His God names him Job,

His God chooses the shepherd and the sheep and they are both slaughtered.

His God chooses the sheep for the shepherd and this time the sheep is slaughtered.

His God occupies his temple and drapes its altar in rainbow then flees after the sacrifice is over.

His slow descent into madness and long suffering is what he calls his God ordering his steps.

When he dies, he is not remembered.

His death is unceremonious.

Everybody forgets the knife in his throat.

In his chest, a pharmacy of antidepressants.

In his chest, an over sung hymn of

"We shall overcome".

In his chest, His God.

## **the man who wanted my *nomba***

*Ama Afrah Appiah*

the white around his pupils was red  
like they wanted to bleed  
his head was too big for his neck  
the reason he supported his chin  
he wore a smirk on his face  
or the bone in his jaw was fractured

*Basia, fa wo nomba ma me*

it was not a request  
for a simple no  
he would've called me *Ashawo*,

i forced a smile, opened my mouth  
and gave him my grandmother's *nomba*

let him call her from the grave.

## Little Things Also Die

*Nenyi Ato Bentum*

Large eyes produce many tears//so// I stare with many tiny bulky eyes//at the shore//  
taking a sip of the salty breeze into my lungs//staring at the old and new bones//some  
clothed//others uncloaked//while they pull the *twiwuni*//with their hardened palms//in  
anticipation of a (bumpy) harvest//I sternly look// although not a novice to what this five-  
hour exercise will bring//excitement develops – just in anticipation -//eyes also wait while  
these young old men pull their net full of//rags//& polyethylene bags//meant never to get  
decomposed.

\**Twiwuni* is a Ghanaian Fante slang for a small fishing net

## ode to my breasts

*Ama Afrah Appiah*

they gaze at you  
even when i have you hidden  
they say you bring them comfort  
who told them i care?

they think it's okay  
to touch you without asking me  
because they say  
you were made for them too  
who made them co-owners?

i know you don't like  
how they grope you.  
like christians fold cedis notes for offering  
squeezing you with antsy grips  
catching you off guard  
making you flinch and wiggle

say no more  
i'll protect you

that's why these 32 are long and sharp!

## **If Tomorrow Comes**

*barbarah Degley*

Give me a new name. Change the color of my hair. Tattoo my thorax. Make four piercings into my pinna, three on my belly, two on my nose, and one in between my lips. I'd love one to be on my tongue but I want my words to be the center of attraction and not my tongue. Teach me something you didn't teach me today. I'd like to tell you what, but surprise me. Look for happiness for me and ensure that I am happy, happier than today. Make me flawless, flawless to resemble perfection. Ensure that I experience absolute love. Let love be love for me and not complication, pain, sacrifice, or endurance. Let me experience almost everything I didn't experience today if tomorrow comes and I'm still here.

## **When You Called Me: A Perspective On Life From The Other-Other Side.**

*Alvin Akuamoah*

Hello Ama,

I missed your call.

When you called me, I was neck-deep in a river somewhere I still don't know enough about to have a name for. Somehow, in all of the wailing and praying and tears, I was able to hear the phone vibrate, and I knew almost immediately that it was you. I imagined it - buried underneath my neatly folded clothes - as myself, buried underneath all of the expectations of what I was supposed to be but could never be for you, for my parents, and to some degree, for myself.

Every time those cold hands wrapped around my scalp and forced me into the cold water, I cried silent tears; tears buried deep inside of myself, independent of anyone else's suffering. From what I reckoned; I had hindered the lives of enough people with my being alive as it was. I closed my eyes and allowed the Diviner's hand bury me deep inside of the water, then held my breath and waited for the same hand to pull me up to the surface for air. I realize now how much of a metaphor for my entire life that single moment was.

\*\*\*

Hello,

I missed your call.

When you called me, I was draped in a towel beside a bonfire. The Diviner and his followers had disappeared into the night just as suddenly as they had come, and all that was left was my parents, the quiet, and me. My father had an arm around my shoulders and was doing his best to make me laugh. I was trying my best to convince him that I was laughing, but every few minutes, the façade would slip and he would catch me staring at the fire, lost inside my own head. My mother, who had gone to the trunk of the car to pick up the ice chest containing our food, came back with her eyes swollen, and as we had done so many times before, we pretended not to notice. She opened up

the ice chest and carefully dished out Jollof rice on the paper plates she had brought along. I could not taste anything at all that evening, but I told her it was wonderful. She smiled at me and then at my father.

For all of the 17 years they had been taking care of me, I wondered if they still remembered what it felt like to be in love. I thought of you in that moment.

\*\*\*

Hello Ama,

I missed your call.

When you called me, I sat alone beside the dying embers of the bonfire, thinking up ways to inform my parents that this was the last of these trips that I would be taking with them. I no longer shared in their aspirations concerning my health. I had not for some time, but it sank in that evening after all of the spiritual shenanigans had simmered down. I realized that I had been going along with their faith, subjecting myself to the humiliation, cold, and discomfort, more for their sake than for my own. It had suddenly occurred to me, as I watched my mother lift her arms in fervent prayer, her face soaked with tears, that they needed the hope these trips provided a lot more than I did. Maybe that was why they always seemed to cling on to the words these Diviners spewed a lot better than I could. It was all just words to me. I had made peace with my situation. I did not blame the devil enough for my ailments to seek solace in the arms of the God who had brought me into the world broken in the first place.

I will be honest and add that, although I had made peace with my situation, and that was all right, I also wondered what right I had to demand that my parents do the same. What sacrifices had I made really, outside of subjecting myself to their care, compared to all of what they had done to make sure I received said care? I caught myself wondering what their lives would have been like had I not come out wrong, and I realized there was no way that they too did not wonder the same sometimes. They fought the thought as much as they could. It was as obvious in the way they reinforced how much they loved me every chance they got, as it was in how well they hid their increasing bills from me. The deep whispers that would go on far into the night, the yawns at breakfast, the bloodshot eyes. There had been a heaviness in our home for as long as I could

remember. A heaviness born out of persistent dishonesty. A refusal to admit that perhaps, maybe, in some ways, everything would be a lot easier if I simply, just, died.

\*\*\*

Hi Ama,

I missed your call.

When you called me, it was early morning, and I was walking along the riverbank alone, waiting for my parents to wake up. It was cold and quiet, and I did not want to be alive anymore, even for them. My parents were wonderful people deserving of so much more than life had given them in me, and I was tired of being their test of faith. True, a valid argument could be made that I was in no position to ask that they give up on me, but still, I wished more than anything that they would fail their “test” already. I wished that they would let me go so they could stay on and finally be alive again.

I contemplated drowning myself in the river that morning and realised just as suddenly as the thought had come to me, that the idea of dying was a lot easier than the process itself.

\*\*\*

Hello Ama,

I missed your call.

When you called me, I was pretending to be asleep. We were on our way back to Accra from the “camping trip” and everything felt different. I was feeling better than I had in days, the sun was out, the radio was playing Sarkodie and I thought maybe this was it; maybe this one had worked somehow. My parents spoke about things other than my health for the first time in as long as I could remember; my father was being funny and my mother laughed so hard happy tears welled up in the corners of her eyes. I remember staring at the two of them from the backseat and wishing I could be so small they would forget I even existed. There was no heaviness inside of the car with us that trip back, and no pretending to be okay when we were not. My father’s eyes caught mine in the driver’s mirror and I shut them quickly, pretending to be asleep. I half-hoped that he had not

seen me. This moment was theirs. I kept my eyes closed and prayed that you would call me again; maybe this time I would answer, but I did not.

\*\*\*

Hi Ama,

I missed your call.

When you called me, we had been home only a few minutes and I was in the middle of the worst crisis I had ever had. My father, still in his shorts from the trip and in a small singlet that exposed the lower half of his pot belly, sped through traffic as best as he could, blaring his horn violently at any and everything on the road. My mother was in the backseat with me, holding my hands and praying. Oddly, none of us cried that afternoon. It was almost as if we knew. Between hot flashes, I felt the urge to let them know how I felt about myself, about them, and about going away. I panicked at the thought of leaving without them ever having known that I was really okay with dying; that I loved and appreciated them with all of my heart and that more than death itself, I feared that they would allow the memories of me define their happiness as much as my existence had. I squirmed an arm behind my mother's back and drew her head close to me. She leaned in with her ear, her hands grabbing at mine so hard I thought they might break and she waited, but the words never came.

\*\*\*

Hey,

I missed your call.

When you called me, I was gone. You said my name many times that evening when you heard. Over and over again, as if hoping to invoke my spirit somehow. I remember standing inside of your room, wondering if you knew that I could answer you if I wanted to. Yes, I was given the option to - one last time, they said, but then what would have been the point outside of probing at your hurt? I could not come back even if I wanted to, and I did not want to, at all. There are plenty of regrets I carry about things left unsaid, the things I was never able to express, and the goodbyes I was unable to say, but I can't say I have any reservations about dying. It was necessary. You should move on.

I do not know if you can tell yet from everything I have told you so far, but my entire life, I was plagued with guilt over things I could not control. I suffered every day of my life, and every day, I felt guilty for the effect my suffering had on the people I cared about the most. I thought that their pain and mine intersected at the point of my existence, but I know now, in my death, that everything about my existence, including my illness, was unique to me, and how everyone else felt as a result of my illness, was equally unique to them. I had no business adding your hurt to mine when I did not even understand it. I could only ever empathize with you and my parents in how you empathized with me, although I myself thought little of my own suffering other than it being something that had been happening and would continue to happen. My pain was ardent and seemingly everlasting, but it was mine, and it was different from everyone else who came to experience their own form of pain because of it.

If I had told my parents, again, one final time, that I loved them and that I hoped they would aim for happiness even after I left, would they have gone through their grief any different? Would I haunt them any less? I find this less likely to be true than yes. My parents are still struggling, each of them waiting for the other to announce his or her disinterest in staying married any longer, none of them willing to be the bad person who left their spouse after their child died. Needless to say, my theory about my absence solving everything ended up being false.

There's a lot of space to think, now that I am gone. My perspective on things takes on a new life (so to speak) all the time. I like the quiet. I like that I can focus more on myself as opposed to worrying about everyone around me and feeling so guilty all the time about nothing. I love you and my parents with all my heart, or at least the hollow space where it used to be, and I hope it gets better for all of you as it has for me, but please stop calling me now.

This is the last you will hear from me. I will not be able to answer you, and again, I would not even if I could. You would only draw me into your pain; and after all of what I have told you just now, what would be the point of that?

## december 25th in accra

*Khadia Alexandra Okai-Koi*

no stockings are stuffed today

only bodies

alight with regret by lights

that flash morse code melodies

instead of christmas carols

because this club is a mausoleum

we are full of ourselves

and devoid of each other

holding the next person

to keep from sinking into ourselves

we breathe wildfire

and sweat off the burden

of an endless tomorrow

where reality looms

lucid

on christmas day

tidal waves of time flow into the sands of forever

and the cork in this champagne keeps us from drowning

in what pours out of you

at 4am the sunrise is not an epiphany  
fears rot in your mouth like yesterday  
and morning breath festers  
where vows die  
buried underneath it all  
and forgotten

## Faces

*Nenyi Ato Bentum*

Seen. Everywhere –

On potholed pavements//

Right under the armpits of the newly constructed under-bridge

Beside the roadworthy trotro –

& on the width of the dusty road dustbins. These faces are

Men. Or our men? – aspiring leaders – of politics

Running – or maybe walking – in hired scallywag legs

Defacing. The streets. Ripping off the environment

Of its rights

Yet – these faces are campaign messages

Promising of hope...

Do they not see their faces on garbage bins?

## Nana Pokuaa

*David Agyei-Yeboah*

*Aninguase mfata okanni ba*

*Kwatarekwa se obema wo ntoma a tie ne din*

*Anyonkogoro nti na okoto anya tiri*

Grandma, you spun gold out of these words

I sink into an ocean of tears every time I wake

And remember I will never hear your faint voice again.

The innumerable Ananse stories you'd evoke as you sucked on a chewing stick

Are now grains of sand stuck on an arid Sahara.

I miss the flowers that formed a garden in your eyes

I miss your tender touch and prodding each time you'd call me up to embody characters.

I'd always be Okonore Yaa.

I miss the intricate tales that descended your lips

Like a waterfall

I miss a heritage left abandoned like crystallized fossils

Awaiting a reclamation and revival

*Nana Pokuaa, mafe wo yie!*

You would always help Adwoa and I cook *eto*, *mpotompoto* and *abom*

Eggs were your favourite

Especially when sliced, with pepper and onions.

But lately there is too much silence here.

Please indulge us, once more, in tales, proverbs and songs!

Rich folklore spines of books could never support.

Storytelling that would sweep Pulitzers and Bookers and Nobels

In an instant.

The world of my ancestors is fading

All I remember are the Ben 10's, Alice in Wonderland's,

Cinderella's and Powerpuff girls'.

Wonderful tales

But what is a tale if not a canon of culture, history and identity passed on?

What am I?

Who am I?

When the last Ananse tale is lost as the last veteran takes his/her last breath

And rustic tales mother stillborns

*Ebiom, mafe wo yie!*

*Nana Pokuaa.*

## **For More, Stay Tuned**

*Joshua Enam Semanyoh*

The world is ending my love,

don't you see?

I'm treated like a rebel

in my own father's land.

I am forced to dig and

each time I bury my heart again.

Dark clouds have gathered my love

and I must now jump a thousand hurdles

like I was a foreigner's son.

The way my heart pants

must be the need

I feel for a new life,

because in my mother's land I am dead.

The world is bleeding my love,

as you can now see.

But you know well

I am my father's son.

And in my father's land,

I will fight till we thrive again.

I am a rebel, am I not?

## Contributors' Bio

**Doris Amankwah** is a twenty-two-year-old accounting student who studies at the KNUST School of Business. She is an aspiring writer who hopes to write like Toni Morrison one day. She loves to talk about community, family, and friendships. When she is not spending time with her loved ones, you will find her head buried in novels, poetry books, or journals. She has no published works yet but hopes to be an accomplished writer in the near future.

**Claudia Owusu** is a Ghanaian-American Writer and Filmmaker based in Columbus, Ohio. She writes from these two liminal spaces, internally and externally, trying to make sense of them. She believes in the beauty of community and the intimate stories we share when we think no one is listening. Her work often engages the spaces that Black women and girls occupy, namely their relationship with safety, carefreeness, and self-ownership. Her writing has appeared in *Vogue Magazine*, *Clockhouse Magazine*, *Brittle Paper*, and Ohio's Best Emerging Poets. Her documentary short, "Ampe: Leap into the Sky, Black Girl" is the winner of Blackstar Pitch 2021. "Binz" by Solange is the theme song of her life; her favorite book, if she had to choose, is "Their Eyes Were Watching God" by Zora Neale Hurston.

**Kwame Boateng** is a self-taught poet and artistic activist with a deep love for performance poetry and theater. He will binge-watch a good anime or a good movie series. His favorite performance poets on the continent are Koleka Putuma, Zewande Bhengu, and Poetra Asantewaa. "The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion" by Kei Miller is his current favorite book. His favorite themes to write about are grief, protest, and loss.

Asare Albert Kweku, writing as **K. Asare-Bediako** is an up-and-coming Ghanaian writer, teacher, coach, poet philanthropist, and legal aspirant. He chose writing as a therapy to do away with the thoughts of his invisible father, where he builds unsaturated words into the wind. He is the author of the microchap, 'Portrait of many colors' (Ghost City Press). He is either singing or learning song, sleeping, or watching TV when he retires from writing. He tweets, @Asarewrites.

**Kodwo Hybrid** is a lover of literature who ardently believes that a poem a day is how you save a soul from perishing. He writes mainly to save himself from drowning and give voice to the things he can't openly and explicitly express.

**Ama Pomaa** is a Ghanaian storyteller and engineer. She's the author of 'A Time to Part', a novel. Ama's stories are a blend of the inspirational fiction, suspense, and mystery genres. Her work explores social constructs and the struggle of faith.

**Nenyi Ato Bentum** is a writer who is a Ghanaian by birth and identifies with He/Him/pronouns. He is an admirer of anything artistic. He writes about people and the environment. His writings have appeared in *Praxis Magazine*, *Lunaris Review*, and elsewhere.

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

**Joshua Enam Semanyoh** lives and works in Ho, Ghana. He is a young poet and spoken word artist who regularly writes love poems to God and his future lover. Other themes to feature in his works are life, justice,

and growth. He regularly posts short poems on his Instagram @kosi\_semanyoh and can be found actively enjoying and engaging in football banter on Twitter.

**Roberta Yemofio** is interested in poetry and whatever makes the world better. Aside from writing, she enjoys reading psychological fiction and memoirs. You can find her on Twitter @i Roberta\_ amanda.

**Elliot John Gyedu** is a biochemist, writer, and coding enthusiast. His work has been featured in Brittle Paper. When he's not busy procrastinating, he can be found watching nat geo wild, reading, or tweeting at @elxnt.

**barbarah Degley** is a midwife, reader, and story keeper. She intends to experience every fraction of this ginormous world with a vast variety of places, people, art, music, light, and every other thing she does not know of yet. She however is often overwhelmed with life. She's had some of her writings published here and there.

Kofi Akuamoah, writing under the pseudonym **Alvin Akuamoah**, is a lawyer and writer whose interest in literature spans more than 20 years. Self-styled as the Grandson of the Ananse-Man, Kwaku Ananse Akuamoah, his work was first published in the anthology, Adabraka Stories From the Centre of the World in 2018. Alvin is currently undergoing a Diploma program in NAFTI and hopes to strike the perfect balance between his professional and artistic pursuits in the near future.

**Khadia Alexandra Okai-koi** is a Ghanaian writer and student. She grew up in New York with a love for literature and curiosity about language, and she moved to Ghana in early adulthood to reconnect with her family. She weaves her worlds together in her work, most commonly in short stories, essays, and poetry. Like her life, her writing often explores themes such as identity, connection, and resilience.

**David Agyei-Yeboah** is a young creative from Accra, Ghana that believes in expressing gutting raw energy onto plain paper. A first-class honors graduate of English from the University of Ghana, he has work published/forthcoming on GUEST, Ethel Journal of Writing and Art, Icefloe Press, Praxis Magazine for Arts and Literature, African Writer Magazine, The Kalahari Review, Journal of the Writers Project of Ghana (JWPG) & elsewhere. An alumnus of the Tampered Press Poetry Workshop with Ladan Osman and Koleka Putuma, he has been long-listed for The Totally Free Best of the Bottom Drawer Global Writing Prize 2021.