

Poetry Series

Echezonachukwu Nduka
- poems -

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Echezonachukwu Nduka is a Nigerian poet, short fiction writer and essayist. His literary works are published in Black Communion African Poetry Anthology, From Here to There: A Cross Cultural Poetry Anthology, A Thousand Voices Rising: An Anthology of Contemporary African Poetry and several other reputable and print literary journals. He is currently a postgraduate music scholar in Kingston University London, United Kingdom.

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Echezonachukwu Nduka

Beadwork

i

from the hills of udi
to the creeks of nembe;
beads knew and named her footfalls.
running a test, four cracked
under the sole of her sollarret
and she saw more symbols.

ii□

that noon when heat rose
with a crescendo
i watched her wimple wane in folds
soliloquies stole her silence.
she dropped black beads
and counted:
one
two
three
four.
'return', four of you
'return', she muttered
and like a poem, set the beads in fits.

iii

four black homeward birds
dropped from the sky and rain
fell amidst sunshine.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Beside The Shattered Chandelier

Staring longingly at the starry sky
brings solace's bed to lie in my bosom, troubled.

Beside the shattered chandelier,
each blast of bombs and bullets wake sorrow's sonorous voice.
At midnight, when darkness slumbers,
It sings until my heart shatters again like the chandelier.
Bloods flow on our streets crying, wailing
in anguish, but the voices of bombs swallow their cries.

Beside the shattered chandelier,
Terror counts the number of souls
trapped in its grip, yearning for rescue.
Sleep escapes the eyes of folks and makes its
Way into abyss, hiding from sounds of blasts and lies from crowns.

Beside the shattered chandelier,
We await redemption.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Chronicles Of Miss Dungworth

I

A red handbag, fluttering eyelashes
And sounds from stiletto heels
Are mere baits—enticement is sin in heaven
But we live in hell.

II

Dear Love Doctor:
How does one explain how love's pain
Pierce? Or how it becomes a balm that
Heals aloneness in the worst manner?

III

Prescriptions are for the dying.
Two pills are experiments.
Several pills are wrapped goodbyes
With inscriptions for strict adherence:
Once daily
Twice daily
Then death drives in via dark fragrances.
I saved myself after Mr. Willingcock's last kiss.

IV

Flashback:
At Ellie's engagement dinner
When time delayed itself—leaving Louis Armstrong's
Trumpet riffs to count seconds and minutes,
Mr. Willingcock handed me a note:
Forgive me, but my cock is unwilling
To crow or cough out more cash.
There is one more love not to die for.
Ours will neither be made in heaven nor hell.

V

I am Miss Dungworth,
But I am worth more than dung.
A little patience and you would
See how love is the syringe on the butts
Of the child wailing in Ward 9.

VI

Go, teach all patients how love is the
Pain that heals all wounds.

VII

When love becomes Mr Shufflebottom
Who knocks on my door at odd hours;
I turn off all lights
And sing myself to sin once more.
For life could be a postman with wrong mails.

VIII

On that winter night
When the moon was cold and shivering;
Carols rent the air but none could keep me warm
Mr White came with Jingle bells that died after ten seconds.
Cold ate all of me.

IX

I am no more than a lady
Bargaining with love—purchasing memories
With lost kisses as a legal tender.

X

Dear Love Doctor:
Prescriptions are for dying lovers
And lonely souls.
On my bosom, there are two warm rivers to swim.
Taste.
Drink.
Swim.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Cold Is A Country

Dear son,

I got a report that when yesterday's downpour
was seconded by the wind that made you shiver,
you ran indoors and wore thick coats,
a head-warmer that swallowed your ears
and gloves that made you look like a leper.
You smoked cigarettes and sipped spirits,
claiming that cold had armed itself with swords
and you were not ready to die.
Perhaps, you would have fought if you
were a knight with the mastery of swords.

As you await your visa to join me here,
I write to let you know that planet earth
births countries in minutes and seconds.
They require no leaders and battle-ready armies;
nor do they require flags and political parties
to paint lies like portraits.
They exist on their own and rule everyone they meet.
Unfortunately, taxes are much more than coats,
head-warmers, spirits and cigarettes;
there are more heaters used for the service of such countries.

Son,
As you await your visa,
I also await your arrival to your dreaded phenomenon.
Here in my apartment, cold is a country.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Die In My Arms

last night's whirlwind has
become an unsolved riddle;
as i stare into the blankness
of this sorrowful morn,
i stretch forth my arms to you.

i knew when your tears dried
and left traces on your face.
like footprints in a virgin forest,
they told stories of yesteryear's agony.

tell me, what manner of love stopped
the songs you sang?
was love not meant to be bliss?
was it a blissful feeling turned
sour on your tongue?
pray, even as you close your eyes
may the songs never die in your heart of hearts.

on this morn that lost its dew to dusts,
i sit beside your bed, craving for one last
tune; though they be not as pure as an ice,
they shall make my heart clean.
i stretch forth my arms to you;
that you may die in my arms
and live in my heart forever.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Drifting

It wasn't the peck on my left cheek
that brought tears to witness the wrong
you've done to my heart.
Rather, the loudness of your silence when my
heart yearned for your soothing words.

Your words became dry like a desert thirsty for
a drop of spittle.
To quench my heart's thirst, you offered a peck
and forced my tears to this alter of judgment.
Now they flow gently down to my lips
searching for the warmth which your kisses
left there like an abandoned luggage, waiting for its owner.

What name do we now call those pictures we
took at Eagle Square when your friends were
shouting: "Love birds! Love birds! "
And you were smiling like a kid clutching a gift of candy?

□

Remember those two parrots you bought me for
Valentine? After you left home for your holiday which
turned to a sort of farewell, they both spent days talking nonstop.
What they were saying, I had no clue.
If you were here, I would have seen the meaning of their
words through your eyes as they glitter under the white
bulb in our room.
What next? Your absence killed them and the words
they said has become history, but stares in my face.

Today's peck marks the beginning of our
love's journey to a dark cave where kisses, fondling,
thrusts, soft moans are artifacts for aliens to feel and imagine.
Never again shall our truths and lies tango to the rhythm
of cacophonies along boulevards of sweet smelling guavas.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Etude

If I be the bread that feeds every hungry soul on earth,
I would make each crumb the stones that bruise
Stubborn toes when the eyes choose to see less.

Yes, when the stone brings forth blood from your toe,
Within the stone and the blood, you would see the bread
That sustains life, eat and be merry, for that's satisfaction itself.

What food puts hunger to death?
What blueprint arrests death or resurrects its victims?
Worry not yourself that death places hurdles before those
Who have fewer dreams to run and jump; Bruise your soft skins
And make pathways where footprints die in the eyes of many men.
Find everything. See everything. Touch everything.
There are answers to every unasked question which finds
Solace in your mind's room. But, why does your mind host
Questions which hide their faces from answers?

Answers are not written in dreamland as eyes close in sleep
When they should be wide open like daylight, searching for the charm
Of darkness; let those who know the right crumbs eat the bread of benediction.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

For This Kindhearted Night

I

To you kindhearted Night, I come with clean hands
and lyrics of praise. My guitar is tuned. My voice is cheerful.
I sing not the praise of kings who on battlefields become shadows;
Theirs is nothing but a reign of no rains. I have felt their breath of fresh air.
I died twice in its neglect and lonesomeness. Their freshness is seeing but blind.
I chant no songs of freedom amidst warfare. Freedom is vague, its songs are
consolations.

II

Seers are not the ones with wide open eyes.
Even when their eyes are closed, pictures become clearer.
Night, you bear gifts of comfort in your palms.
Your calmness is Tee-Mac's flute melodies.
I play with words as stars twinkle in your presence.
You send the moon to illuminate my tunes and I.
I am bereft when the moon sleeps in your chambers.

III

But Night, are you the same as darkness?
Do you stretch your arms against the poor?
Do you shut your ears to laments?
Are you the home of death or the bringer of strife?
Do you delight in dirges?

IV

I am not your stranger. No one is.
You know all songs before their birth.
Your ears have consumed the sweetest melodies.
Night, you are poetry. No Muse lives in your absence.
In your presence, words are not the sole properties of those
who utter them. Your serenity gives life to every word.
You give birth to new mornings and keep hopes alive.

V

Night, you are the lovers' haven.
To you, I come with the love of my life.
Take us.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Funeral Symphony (For Professor Dora Akunyili)

I

threnodies are no meals that i should have thrice a day,
for no one laughs on a day of tears.
we have stepped on thorns while wading through these paths.
the ikoro's cry and the iroko's fall confirm this day of departure.

II

my eyes have seen your light which now shines no more.
as your light goes home thus,
please, carry my tears with you.

III

like a fraudster, death has cheated us,
stealing our light in these dark times.
this voice that echoed near and far, revealing hidden truths;
now journeys to join celestial voices.
we shall hear them again as thunder,
and their blinks as lightening.
here i stand, shedding tears that tear my thoughts.
as you journey, please, carry my tears home.

IV

uncertainty has made love to me,
leaving me heavy with sorrows.
on the day of delivery, shall i give birth to death's antidote?
Dora, no death can dent your dignity.
no grave can hide your prowess.
my tears are towering testimonies;
please, carry my tears home.

V

when chalks hid in capsules as drugs,
you gave them as burnt offerings;
sacrifices for life and health.
although bullets sought your head,
they found their way to nowhere.
you won death, this i know.
even as you lie speechless, death is vanquished.
i shed tears for the lives you saved, not you.

but please, carry my tears home.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Ghost Lover

Through my half-open window,
She breezes in unguarded, wearing warmth
As gloves and whistling atonal tunes: Lights out.
My radio sleeps too.

Her touch on my forehead calms my spirit.
She slips through my pajamas and makes
Love to me till cockcrow.

Erect hairs
Goose bumps
Fluttering eyelashes
Intermittent soft moans
And body stretching
Are pictures to content my ghost lover's libido.

As I feel your arms caressing my body
And tearing through my mind as if
Searching for a strange story,
I long to see those arms, but no.
They are invisible.

As you whistle into my ears,
The tunes embrace my whole being.
I long to see your lips,
But they are invisible too.

In a fortnight when
Vivaldi's Siciliano would
Keep me company,
Wouldn't you spread your arms and wear
Me like a gown?

This gentle wind that rocks me
Back and forth at nightfall,
Are you not a lovelorn lover?
Oh phantom lover
There's space for you in my room

And everywhere; fill me with your love.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Have You Met My Poem?

If cats are said to have nine lives,
Lives of poems are above nine times ninety-nine.
If poems have no life, let me not be counted as a penman.

Poems are beyond metaphors, similes, alliterations,
Hyperboles and iambic pentameters;
They have lives and rule in their kingdoms.
Poems are spirits. Those they love they ordain,
Posses and make spirits too.

Have you met my poem?
My poem is a glass of wine with bubbles
Rising from its bottom and owning your
Tongue after each sip;
You keep the glass, not sure of its taste.
Soon after, you yearn for another sip.

She is the old woman you meet on a
Rainy day begging for alms,
As you stretch forth your hand to drop a coin;
She stretches hers and gifts you a bag of treasures.

Have you met my poem?
She is that remnant ash from a burnt
Library that converts a non-kindred spirit
To muse for pen warriors.
At noon, when the sun is awake
She wails: "Rub me! Rub me!
I am the ash of immortality! "

It is the tempest that hits sailors
When vodkas and rums dictate tunes
In their heads,
But is appeased by the flute melodies of one;
And afterwards, like abiku, the tempest returns
Again and again and again.

You, have you met my poem?
It is the smile on the lips of a fair lady

You meet at the cinema;
You make haste to say hello
But the smile turns to frown, and then tears.

My poem is like the wings of a bird in flight.
They summon space and drop their feathers at will;
Yet they reach for the skies and perch on the trees
They choose.

Have you met my poem?
It is the fountain that springs up
In the midst of deserts,
Giving succor to wounded souls,
Strength to the weary, sight to the blind
And sleep to the sleepless eye.

It is the rage that burns the tongues of
Foul scepters, setting thrones on fire.
It is the voice of a lad wailing in the streets;
Calling for justice but gets none.
My poem is a slice from the loaf of wealth.

Have you not met my poem?
As you amble along the banks of Niger,
It is the calmness that rests on the face of the river.
It is the rainbow that bows at the sight of sea creatures.

It is the drumbeat that cues wriggling waists
Of maidens to rhythms;
My poem is the covey of the seer.
It falls to the ground and tomorrow shows her belly today.
So, have you met my poem?

Echezonachukwu Nduka

If I Do Not Love You

If days are totally gone when
Flowers brought with their scents that
Charm that is love-
Even if all flowers die and there are no scents
To grace our presence,
I smell the charm of love in your smile,
Your eyes and all gestures you never knew I had noticed.

If I do not love you,
Why then do I suddenly smile amidst my troubles?
Why then do I see your face each time my eyes are closed?
Why then does my heart leap each time you ring my phone?
Why then do I have to wait for moments, not minding how many minutes had
died, just to see your face?

There are songs that shoot love like arrows in the air,
Piercing every ear that care to listen, every eye that care to look, and every mind
that care to ponder,
Are they not the same songs that envelope the room when couples exchange
kisses and flowers in the morning,
Then curses and blows at night over what love should have forgiven?
What if we choose no love songs written and performed by another?
But the ones written by us from the depths of our hearts
And performed even when chaos knocks on our door?

I need no new love song. You became my love song the very day we met.
You have become the very song that shows me the true meaning of love.

In your words, they show.
In your eyes and smile, they show.
In your warm hug and caress, they show.
In your gait, they show all that I had never imagined.

If I do not love you,
Why does your touch mean several miracles at once?
Why do I feel I had missed you for so long even before we met?
Why do I have to wake my muse to pour these verses from my heart?
If there's no healing in your love, why does your voice bring comfort?
If I do not love you, perhaps, there's nothing called love.

I love you because with you, love is alive.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Invitation

there is a pathway between
your breasts that leads somewhere;
wherever it leads must be heavens-gate
or somewhere close to paradise.
let me walk those paths and leave traces
of scents that will sing to your soul
of poems that will not perish in penury
of footprints as fences and fenestrae.

there is a season in your eyes
that calls for a holiday.
invite me.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Let Us Pray

For those whose tongues wear different garments
in confusion, dying and waking to die again while
speaking to please those whose shadows are same as theirs.
For those who threw their beads and cowries in the sea
hoping to pluck leaves of fortune from magic trees on arrival,
For those whose arrival turned to sudden departure,
whose departures are lessons learned by less than a handful:
let us pray.

For those who deny their names
screaming and trembling at the sight
of small gods which we all have been,
carrying cards that sell both them and
theirs for no more than a pence,
For those whose names now have a bitter
taste in this conference that has no end,
those who do not seek to end a love that
kills itself and its own for no cause:
let us pray.

For those who see these signs and strive
to find excuses on the internet,
those whose days have become nights like
books which have dusts and roaches as readers,
For those in whose dreams new alphabets are created
that form no word nor world,
Those who only see sins on screen
and read piety from books and Naira notes:
let us pray.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Libretto For The Niger Delta

I

First, we were tagged 'the minority' by men who
gave names without ceremonies.
We buried our grief in shallow graves,
waiting for time to exhume carcasses of speeches.
Time did its bit. Words became actions. Vows were broken.

II

Rhythms of drumbeats altered when here, crude
Found a home.
Pipes raced from all cardinal points.
Sapping of strengths and fortunes silenced our songs.

III

Our Water's:
Sacrosanct bodies which hosted hopes spoilt
amidst violations.
Fishes floated and denied our waters.
We questioned black liquids on the waters' surface.
We got no response.

IV

Our Lands:
Terrains of noble findings, forced to sudden squalor.
Bereft of harvest, we searched for answers
in the rising smokes from the neighborhood.
Since our earth started birthing black liquids,
Wafting of thick smokes muted our serenades.

V

When darkness sprouts at mid-day,
What name do we call it?
When cantilenas filter through wafting smokes
And emerge as dirges, to whom do we sing them?

VI

Today, a new song lives in our tongues.
Not for us only. Posterity shall sing with us:
This is the land of our birth
Nothing more shall spoil our earth!
No strange liquids shall kiss our waters
Let dust and doom visit all oil plotters!

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Love Is Death

Dry petals, broken filaments and anthers
Make mockery of my balcony,
These frowning flowers tell poignant tales.
On Val's eve, they bloomed. Their scents wafted
Beyond my rooftops as love; now, death is theirs and on me,
They also beckon.

Death hides its face in love's lyrics
As these songs melt my heart; I follow
The tides and crash in the arms of death,
This love is death; I'm free from its embrace.

When love storms the hearts of men,
What weathers it?
When the hearts of men break in love's battlefield,
How are they healed?
Death knocks on our hearts after love's sting.

This ticklish passion sang Calypso's dirge
As Odysseus bade her farewell; Romeo and Juliet
Embraced death in love's paradise; Love is death and
Death is love. Let it flee, I shan't sing its songs.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Mask

Days are normal
that see brothers
and sisters walking in twos and threes,
sharing tracts like gifts
and receiving nods in return.

Morning bears witness
to godly gestures, preachments
and unwilling melodies forced
into submission.

Night cries of beds
creaking to glossolalia,
cries of Peter's fresh denial
and Thomas's second doubt.

Tomorrow is another day of rest
We will be in church again.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Morgue Portraits

Anomalies are signposts held high and recited
As anthems when values have no definite definitions.
When laws obey their makers alone,
Boundaries are made for the blind.

Obeisance sends forced signs when morning
Counts her loss in thousands.
For this course, all gestures are under scrutiny
And death becomes the perfect cure for all maladies.

Our instincts become primordial warnings
Sighting the sea of tears that flow at funerals
Even before these bodies grow cold and stiff.
In this room where lips and skins kiss unknowingly,
Schedules are rescheduled for heaven and hell's sake.
And all there is to life's struggles, shuffle their feet to oblivion.

This death, like a stage diva, invites folks to tango.
Rocking the microphone and swaying to brass-filled
Highlife, posterity shows its face on obituary posters.
Morticians become instant artiste managers of stars
Whose songs are muted by eternal silence; concert stages grow cold.
Their songs inhale hell's breath and all return to dust.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

My Sin On A Sunday Morning

Sinners must go to hell or so I'm told.
That is, if they repent not.

Preachers' picture of hell is doom. Hell is no home.
Its tenants are homeless. If that be the only abode,
I need none but a pen to build a weird world.
Winds shall carry my words and I.

In my dreams, I wander like an oji onu masquerade
with whips for sinful consciences.
An udala tree provides me shelter. When its fruit falls,
I write a verse and read to willing ears.

Burgeoning daylight hold stars captive. As darkness takes
to flight, a voice pierces through the morning silence:
Hey! Sin no more.
Do not work but worship your maker.
Those who hear God's calls and heed not are sinners!

St Peter's bell tolls tirelessly.
God's call is the tolling of church bells.
To her members, the bell says:
Hey! Come to church.
It's time for worship.

Tolling of bells incite my muse.
Towards me, she flashes her charming gaze.
In her bosom, poetry lives.
To me, this tolling of bell says:
Hey! You've one more poem to write.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

One More Bottle (For Yvonne)

Gaily, we walked into Rockview and made the
Ambiance ours; the still air welcomed our laughter□
And cameras saved no space for new pictures.

The call for the waiter on bow tie was accompanied
By soft oldies that save the DJ's tongue for a lager per day.
No beer cheers a buffoon for a lifetime; we knew.

The waiter soon arrived and stories embraced
the cold evening; soothed by foams that form liquor.
Those lights on Wetheral road played pranks on your
Eyes as one bulb emerged as two. A peck answered the
Request for one more bottle and the DJ slammed a song.

But who stole those whispers from the muse led by Guinness
And set ablaze by Snapp and punctuated dance steps?
Salsa knows no cure for hangovers. To Latin Americans, all lovers are tipsy,
Save for a few on telemundo.
Salsa brews perfect beers. They claim dance steps that suit their rhythms.

One more bottle.
You danced to the tune of aloneness
Embraced by night's slight touch, no song sufficed.

One more bottle.

Dreadlocks aroused memories that will fight
Fate's taste and courage; passions birth new differentials.
If there's Kente in Ghana, there's one more textile in Akwete.
Hands will weave, monies will buy and bodies will wear.
Are there no red carpets in dreamland?

One more bottle.

The DJ will face your wrath.
And again, no song will suffice.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Orthon Palace

Barely a month after Grandma's death,
We drove to this inn to soothe our vibes.
Cars queued like voters in a polling place.

Fishes on fire, skimpy skirts and bare chests,
Rex Lawson's highlife and many brands of booze
bid us welcome.

On the wall hung the painting of a fair lady
With smiles on her lips and a note which read:
Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden
and swim in our sea of liquor.

We dropped our burdens on beer and fish.
An ambiance of cigarette smokers, snooker players
and horny whores are the devil's heartstrings,
so we learnt.

Behind us, an albino man strummed his guitar
and sang lyrics that fetched no money.
That palace of memories needs an angel
to tame its turpitude.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Renaissance

now that the streets are stripped
and keys lock themselves in defiance,
should nudity blind the eyes of minors?
now that the streets are filled with dry tongues
and streams dry at daybreak,
from whence should spittle flow as fountains?

you are a lad whose songs suspend all chaos
as every tongue is tempted to test a divisive theory;
your lyrics are now dead that lights the lone candle.
plucked from thorns—dry are the roses thrown at your feet.
yours is a blind eye that tell stories of yesteryear;
yet, these stories rename themselves every passing day.
a strange cloud fills your head and forms a note:
the keeper of this mind has lost his job.
go home and await a worthy rebel.

when you let your sweat drop on a photo
that fetched you fame, your mind's keeper died again.
forlorn, there were no tears to celebrate your foolery
and i still plead—let your rebellion be vanquished.
while you have your eyes closed and your ears sold;
your muse is in labor and awaits your repentance.
you are not a rebel.
embrace a new birth. a new song.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Say Me A Prayer

If in my sleep tonight I cut the ropes
And hear not the bell that wakes the day
Say me a prayer
That all may carry my songs to dark
Corners and sing light to their sight.
That the dusts which gather at my feet may
Paint pious portraits on all walls.

Say me a prayer
That my hands may once again feel
the warmth of garlanded pens.
That my fingers may never forget the bond
They shared with white and black keys.
That the strings of my guitar may guard their
tunefulness to serenade celestial beings.

You who war against awful memories
Flying the flag of time's rotten toes,
How does your fight pacify wailing bloods?

Those who are gone are bade farewell and presented
Prayers as gifts; their routes to spirit lands are free of thorns.
Over there, they sit atop sacrifices and feast on libations.
When my ancestors send signs
Say me a prayer
That the paths which I shall cross be laced with roses.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Say Me Well To My Long Lost Love

Very well, my dear

Bless you, for the years I hung on your heart's hook

Like a wet cloth spread under the scorching eyes of the sun

I knew the name we called love. But now, I know not my name anymore.

I'm a somnambulist wading through the pool of your heart where our songs

Are written with the ink of distrust; fear's ugly hands stabbed my heart where our love lived.

Alas, I caught its hands, snatched the sword and it turned to yours.

Very well, my dear

Bless you, for the soothing songs you sang when you sold my love

And I knew not. We danced to the rhythm of the owl's hoot when it perched

On the silence of our yearning lips, secrets were boldly written on your forehead.

Pity, I knew not my love's buyer. But the seller is the fear that sits across me and stares.

Farewell my fear, I do not know you

Say me well to my long lost love

Our kisses our buried in the waves of the sea

On this shore, we paid love thirty pieces of silver.

Farewell my heart, I'll forsake you today.

Say me well to my long lost love

Your dirge was played when night died in distress

On these pages, inks witness the weight of betrayal.

Farewell. Farewell.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Self

do not go into the business
of asking, 'how do i look? '
your dress, though gorgeous in
the sight of a foe feigning friendship,
may be shabby in the
sight of those folks drunk with
that wine that is poetry.
their eyes have seen worse images
and spirits as words on pages.

do not look in the
mirror to check what you wear,
how nice it fits, how stretched they appear,
how the colors blend or how necks would
break as you walk the busy streets;
look in the mirror to see your eyes
looking back at you,
your nose smelling your true self
and your ears hearing your mind's whispers.
take heed to the whispers of your heart.

too many false selves hide in the noise
in the streets, the loud lounge music and that tot of liquor.
bind them if you please, and cast them to the devil's dungeon-crawl
there's a better place to be than hell.

do not look in the mirror
to check what you wear,
look in the mirror to find your true self
hidden in that whisper that is you
and no one else.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Spring

as I watch these leaves and branches wave
and bend in romantic frenzy,
I remember now
how dead and mortified these tress had been in winter.

perhaps,
this night that delays her coming,
this morning that comes too soon,
this sun that loses her hotness to a little
cold and warmth—are the best antidotes
to all who are warned to quit smoking or die young.

□

death.
two more springs after this season,
you will die again.

come again, sweet spring,
smokers will not die young.
where again was this inscribed?
“smoke and spring are partners in God’s blueprint”.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

The Awakening

I

□

I paid attention to yesterday's promises
To my own peril; a furious flood carried
My hope to its tomb; it was buried.

II

□

Words in the mouth of an orator tickle
The ear; but in its sweetness hides a bitter pill.
Since empty words began to torment tender hearts
Like mine, every honey hosts and hides its bitterness.

When words sound like the chewing of kolanuts,
Think not that its taste is sublime. It holds no life.
It comes like the whistling of pinewoods as whirlwinds
Display their macabre dance; disaster accompanies the ticklish whistle.

III

When evil is laced with sweet tunes,
And every ear is forced to listen; I pay no attention.
Its bitter lesson leaves a scar on all my senses.
Now, I still hold vengeance in my palms.

Here I am, waiting for the passage of this
Sorrowful night; for I drowned thrice in
Its pool of torments filled with vain promises.
This trouble shall not see a new dawn.

IV

The night has made her passage,
Now, a blissful morning summons.
I've thrown away yesterday's trouble
With its used waters; freshness rests ashore.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

The Blind Pianist

there's a blind pianist
who plays all night in my street's only bar.
his coat smells of tobacco and history.

black is the colour of the tunes
that announce his blindness.
he attracts pity and little coins too.
some nights are cruel to him,
while some share a bottle of beer or two.

this night, his hoarse voice brings
a lady's lost love alive...
there's love in every lost melody,
every lost dream, every lost smile,
every lost handshake, and lost winks too.

kindness hides in his voice—and in the movement of his fingers on the keys,
there's a touch that can strum any lady's guitars.
this night, blindness lost its grip over romance, over music,
over beauty, over attraction that hides behind the walls
of soulful songs.
this night, love, music, and booze are telepathic languages.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

The Initiation

i

ENTRY:

with your hands in your pockets,
you walked into the room and the lights went off.
"you've come on your own accord! "
a voice roared and the doors locked behind you.

"on your knees! "
another voice ordered.
you knelt and closed your eyes as Mozart's
requiem in D minor embraced the room.

ii

ACT:

those rules read to your hearing
knocked off the air you once breathed,
the tales that taught you magic,
the wands you dreamt to usurp,
the taste of wines that built your bonds;
that night, you drank a new wine served
in a skull with sauce.
a new bond was born.
each vow was sealed with a thumbprint
in a basket of torn papers and spilt inks.

iii

EXIT:

lights on.
you opened your eyes and the requiem
resumed; nothing remained the same.
in the midst of those who formed that arc,
your new self came on a tray of books and pens.
you became a slave to every written word.
when you left the room, tales hung over your head
and followed you everywhere; you must be a writer.

The Last Bottle Of White Wine (For Onyeka Nwelue)

Sip gently to bury the fears that fight your will.
Your feet are heavy to take a walk to the place you
once called home.
Let the last drop lighten your feet
and make them swift.
Tomorrow's tale shall bear witness
to the white wine's prophesy.

When the wine is finished, spare not the bottle.
This last bottle of white wine in Paris is the first
bottle of palm wine in your fatherland;
The taste is the home you seek.
Do not forget, the taste awaits you patiently.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

There's No Love Here

I

rise with your troubles from where you lay,
the love you seek here left last night.
she left with all her mementoes too.
follow your map to where it leads,
but let not my room appear on your sketch.
i sold the welcome mat at my doorstep
to weavers who wished me well at dawn.
borrow no laughter from the streets,
my ears are filled with lame talks already.
those are signposts that lead to nowhere,
they love in the morning and hate at noon.

II

cast aside these wilted flowers
which cling defiantly to yesteryear's
affections.
what do we do with borrowed moments
which disguise themselves as eternity?
to heal the lust that hangs on your thigh,
there's a man left in limbo.
search for his portrait and make
for it an altar.
i'll send my absence to witness your healing.

III

your gait at nightfall speaks of a lovelorn lady.
what manner of love accepts no gift
on valentine's day?
yours is the love not sought with sanity;
the love you seek is a faded paint.
rise with your troubles from where you lay,
the love seek here left last night.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

This Light, Our Journey (For Dami Ajayi)

Flames are fortunes when they burn stacks
Of thorns lodged in our terrain.
Brother, let me sing of the light from your candle,
For therein lie the answers we seek.
Although the wax melts with speed, the hidden paths
Of these byways are made open like earth's space.

Darkness is no serenade as we wade through these
Path of thorns; pray, guide and guard this flame.
These paths are battles we must fight and win.

Life's battles come as storms at sea. Darkness is its aide.
It whispers no comfort amidst storm and shoots fear like stone from slings.
Brother, cast your fears upon the rising waves of Bar Beach.
Its fall shall be the death of fear. Let me play the symphony at fear's funeral.
My presence sharpens my ready sword and cuts through hedges.
My word is my sword and my sword is my word. Its cuts shall last.

This light is destiny.
Destiny is the seed we plant as we make our journey through these paths.
These seeds shall sprout and grow old when our light waxes stronger.
Let it burn. Let it shine.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

This Night That Knows No Sleep

When Mary lost her virginity,
Jesus' cry woke the night
And sleep fled the night's eyes.

The Magi followed stars that
Suffered silence as
Gifts rocked the manger of the babe—Jesus.

From then till now, nights in Kingston
Are like days that defy meditations—
To feel the void and calmness that keep the night.
Yet, night is awake as the day.

But, who would blame the night?
Does it own itself?
Its owner is God who came as man
And killed its sleep before mortals—
God is both night and day—and I, a peripatetic poet whose
Solitude is lost to night's mystery of wakefulness.

This night that knows no sleep,
Is yours the sleep that makes death an eternal journey?
This night that knows no sleep,
Is yours the sleep that soothes a fetus?
This night that knows no sleep,
Is your spit in the bite of tsetse flies?
This night that knows no sleep,
Is your sleep the song that scents the throne of God?
There's no night in London and The City of Light—
As both night and its sleep are in God's briefcase.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Threnody For Kofi Awoonor

When journeys begin and end at the beginning,
We question the place where life vanished.

When a flowery pen's ink was snatched and spilt;
Westgate's mall melodies turned sour.
For this passage, cries and tears bear testimony.
Inks of bards wail and chant dirges.

Kofi,
Yours was not a war of words, but thoughts
so rich and rare. Flowing from your fount of poesy,
They touched thirsty tongues and filled
minds with wit and foresight.

Kofi,
Your eyes are closed, but open.
Your ears are stopped, but alive.
No bard bows to death wholly.
You have left earth's crust.
But your works are born again.
Sleep; may you find rest in these songs.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Two Doves And A Lighter

We met at a bar in Birmingham on a night
When booze baptized you
And the world lost its shape:

New names

 New existence

 New world

□

There's a world in every bottle of beer
And you had twelve bottles before my arrival.
Twelve worlds in one head is death in disguise.
Satan's kingdom has no throne for drunken martyrs.

You extended your hand
And said your name, Burner, or
Something that sounded like the name of a cigarette:

High deaths

 Low deaths

 High births

 Low births

Those words escaped your lips like your cigarette smokes
As what your name meant at that moment;
You were birth and death.
You were everywhere, but nowhere.

I smiled, nodded, but didn't say my name
Nor shake hands with you.
My eyes were two doves, you said.
I nodded again and adjusted my bra.
You said my breasts were doves too.

The fourteenth stick exhausted your lighter's gas
And I thought your cigarettes, lungs and liver
Would find some rest;
I blinked twice and smokes from the fifteenth
stick left your lips in leaps and circles.
You were a lighter.

You are still a lighter.
No lighter can light two doves in flight.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

We Wear Purple Robes

purple robes adorn our bodies
as stench from decaying
limbs signal turbulence.

we wine and dine in this room
where cadavers are laid like logs,
pulling the strings of our heart.

we do not see cadavers but paintings
on the wrong canvas.
the land is green, but its dreams are deferred
till her civil war victims are canonized on the
altar of many truths.

make no haste to play dirges
for these fallen brothers.
it is not yet night in that land
where roses are rags.
here, we wear purple robes and make merry,
awaiting ghosts to send battle flames.

tell me, o merry king,
what now do we do to this
land that thirsts for nothing
but bloods of her offspring?

wait, you said to me;
how am i supposed to hear the
land asking for blood?
do lands suck bloods like vampires?
what manner of earth eats anything
more than roots of plants and carcasses?
you should know better, you said.

those words became stones,
hitting my eyes till i saw a flag,
flying at half-mast.

truth be told, my lord

these robes in their resplendence
are no true pictures.
the mirrors in this household
wear masks and show shadows
where bloods are shed.
the troubadours in this household
sing sweet lullaby when the land
is on its toes, racing away from its
comfort zone.

wait, you said to me;
there is light in every darkness,
and darkness in every light.

haven't sleep denied us?
haven't our ears heard enough
to make these lights dim?
how then do we dance to the rhythm
of bullet symphonies in these purple robes?
these robes are heavy. yet, we wear them.

we wear purple robes
sleeping with an eye,
and sending the other to
guard at the gates.
whose life is costlier than
these spilt bloods?
these robes are costly, but a drop
of blood is costlier.
even so, we wear purple robes and
measure our heartbeat after each blast.
here, everyday is our death day.
yet, we wear purple robes.

like brides, our faces are veiled
in these carpeted corridors.
when night shall come at midday,
our veils shall be opened to behold
the true celebrants toasting with the
bloods of compatriots again and again.
then, we shall pass judgments on these purple robes.

Where Music Lives...

In a certain office free of sound,
A professor thinks of crotchets and minims as music.

At the corner, a dusty piano stands in regret
Its keys and pedals as memorabilia for display.

These walls are new graves for Haydn and Beethoven,
Symphonies don't sound in scores scattered in shelves.

But where is the sound where music shows its face?
These papers don't sing; humans do. Instruments do too.

Take a walk along the streets where songs don't hide
Take a walk, my old man, don't sit and stare at sheets of papers.

The streets are full of strange sobriquets and songs
There's a tune in every laughter and hot cup of coffee.

The firmness of Audre Lorde's poetry is music in disguise
Music wields a painter's brush; spilling colours on verses and pages.

From a mansion in Ikoyi, stereos wail for Wizkid's Ojuelegba
A broken-hearted lady in London sheds tears for Adele's Someone Like You.

Drive to the suburbs and witness a wine-tapper at work;
Whistling on palm-trees, the calabash is filled with wine.

Who argues against palm-wine's penchant for music as whistles?
Wine is music and music is wine; there's no coda section there.

Somewhere in Ajegunle, blackout is haven for all mosquitoes
Their music is a call for compulsory blood donation.

While the first melody interrupts a kiss in your dream;
The next is a wake activated by a self-slap after a pint is gone.

In London, Asda's muzak sings to you about ten more goods;
You walk around in search of products that don't need you.

Come away from your Google search for Bizet's Carmen opera;
The music is happening live on stage in the city of London.

In Ife, a talking drum mentions names of men and ancestors;
The Igbo man's flute fetches money from pockets of potentates.

In Kampala's suburbs, ululations greet Museveni's convoy
And djembe drums roll out rhythms for Macky Sall's Senegal.

In my visions of here-and-now, a huge dog barks in baritone
And I remember a bass singer in my choir of long long years.

What happened to those riff's from Fela's years as Kalakuta King?
The prophecy of shuffling and smiling is Nigeria's existential reality.

Come away from the turmoil of long Lagos queues and traffic;
Come away from the scarcity of genuine love and laughter.

Spread your arms and hearts to welcome a new form of healing;
Music is in the streets of your city; embrace it now and always.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

Zakk's Lager

*

Friday night's gig soured his taste
for apple juices and filled his
glass with cold Carlsberg.
The twenty-fourth glass crowned him
king of all kubulors.

**

The beat drops again and he
stands to dance.
Three steps forward and five
steps backwards; Isn't alcohol
a veteran dance tutor?
He leads the way and off
they go. Pryzm must have more kubulors!

Zakk's gait is the evidence of drunken
eyes. But who calls the kubulor king drunk?
Isn't that apocalyptic madness?
In the Kubuloric law of governance
and code of conduct; section one
sub-section c: drunkenness is clarity.

Echezonachukwu Nduka

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Echezonachukwu Nduka