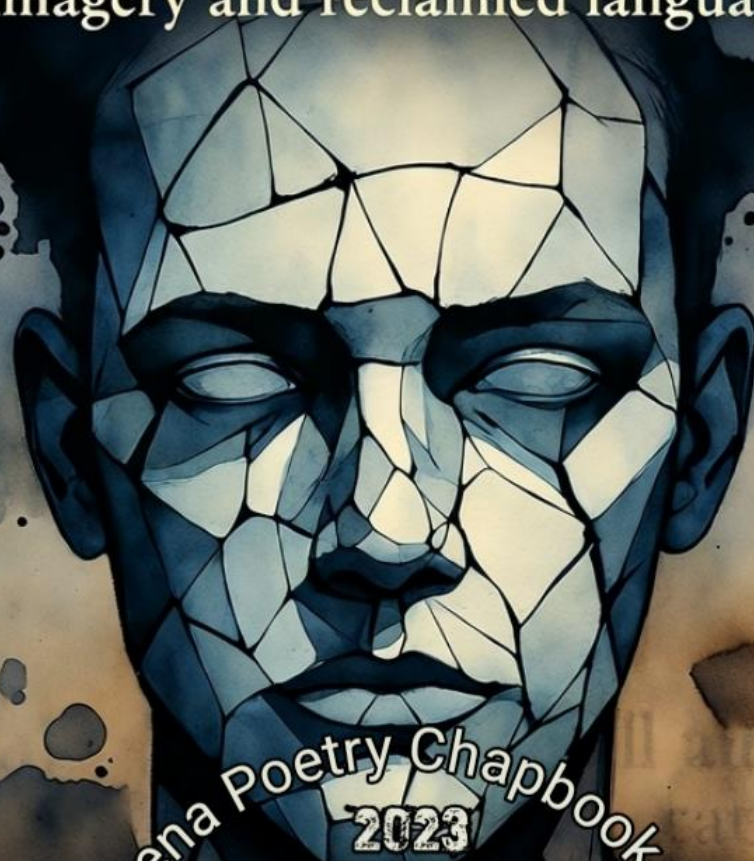


Abubakar Auwal

# portraits of broken metaphors

a poetic exploration of fractured  
imagery and reclaimed language



ArtngArena Poetry Chapbook Contest  
2023  
**WINNER**

# **Portrait of Broken Metaphors**

Winner; 2023 ArtingArena Poetry Chapbook Contest

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*Dedicated to:*

Every Sudanese/Nigerian who learned the language of death and ‘walks the surface of the Mediterranean Sea.’

All the Genocidal souls who moonwalk past the horizon of Surah al-Adiyat.

Boys who swallowed bullets with the square root of their country’s tale, chasing them back to their graves.

May we moonwalk into the palms of God with the debris of our broken metaphors.

## *Author's note*

Every story began with a poem; the world began with a poem; humans are born as poems—because even God is a poet. We love God, and God loves us because love is a poem, and we are poems on the palms of God—so Alhamdulillah, for the poems we write and the poems we recite with the voice of God.

A thousand butterflies to every breathing soul at the Federal Capital Territory of Hill-Top Creative Arts Foundation and the chapters that housed this firefly, specifically HCAF Abuja, and HCAF Niger. To the bearded guy, Uncle Makama, Uncle Olumide, Lonely Poet, King Zakiyya, the Rose Boy [I salute you, my mentor], the Poet of Haven, the Bard, the Rhapsodist, Auntie Haneefah, Zaynab Iliyasu Bobi, Ilemobayo, Nazeer Suleiman, Pacella, Ubandoma, Testimony, Saheed, Elizabeth, Bella, Sa'ada and all the beautiful souls. HCAF has always remained a home.

Immense love and gratitude to my family and friends; Dad, Momma—Fatima, Mubarak, Salamatu, Aliyu, Khadija, Jibril Yusuf, Frahnkoh, Lucy, BZ, Smart Ibson, Da'awa, Amina Iliyasu, Kulu Ango... I love you and love all the memories we shared.

A special bow to the entire team and the judging panel of the ArtingArena Poetry Chapbook Contest for choosing my title as the winner for the maiden edition as well as featuring it for publication. Thank you; it is such a privilege. Thank you, Mr. Oyin Bimbo, for the regular check-ups and for making sure that everything is intact. To my core winners, shortlisted and long-listed entrants; you are great guys. I salute the camaraderie.

To the entire team of Nigerlites Spoken Word Artists [NISWA]; may our labor never go in vain. To Miss Crown; thank you for being the cutest sister ever. To Daddy Ya'u and Rilwan Musa Gawu [RMG] for your impactful mentorship. To Joel Oyeleke; for standing as a brother. To the entire editorial league of New Voices Magazine, Words-Empire Magazine, Poetry.com, and Metaphorical Magazine, thank you for being the most-ever great team.

I wish to thank the entire family of the Poetic Collective; to Pelumi, Aperse, Yahuza, Tesleem, Rukayya, Vero, Younglan, Mubarak, and all the beautiful guys. I love your poetry.

Finally, to the editors of the following magazines, journals, presses, and anthologies where some of these poems were previously published under different or the same titles:

- Art & Science—An Epilogue of My Country's People [&] A Metaphorical /-/s/o/n/g- [for a blind poem]: Poetry Club—Usman Danfodiyo University' Anthology.
- Remnant of a Broken Theory [previously published under a different title by] D'Lit Review.
- How We Partied with the Corpses in Their Forever Home: Micro-Mance Magazine.
- 1.6 Equations of Breathless Fire and Terminated Thunder: The Beatnik Cowboy.
- Untitled Gen-Z Poem for a Country with the Song of Hell: The Crossroads Review.

Thank you for reading my metaphorical verses; I hope they deeply resonate with the song that finds its way into your nerves.

## Blurbs:

❖ A riveting and stunning debut voice!

Abubakar Auwal conjures the uncanny in his chapbook, painting through impressions a lush language of nature, love, and war. There is an ache in every word, but also a beauty that pours out as a “bouquet of crimson flowers/ from the firmament.”

Through an intricately and soulfully hewn collection of trauma, loss, and tragedies, Auwal offers us a portrait mirror to gaze upon and reflect the human experience.

Sharp-witted, dexterous and delicate with the swiftness of his language, Auwal illumines the semiotics by which we name, define, refine and heal from our pain.

Emblazoned with luminous effluences of a shadow struck by the gentle touch of light, awakening the chords of our responsive beings, Auwal stands pulsing with poetry in his veins, consciously respiring and aspiring towards the light at the end of the tunnel.

—Adesiyun Oluwapelumi

TPC XI: Author of Tomorrow Is A Dove

❖ Abubakar Auwal’s debut chapbook, *Portrait of Broken Metaphors*, evokes grief in a poignant and alluring voice. As Abubakar writes, “& I’ve forgotten everything that eats the other side of our laughter,” the poems, elegantly beautiful, remind us of the sadness in the world.

—Zaynab Iliyasu Bobi

Author of Cadaver of Red Roses (Winner, Derricotte/Eady Chapbook Prize, 2024).

❖ Speculative. Broken. Intoxicated. Digestible. Metaphors. Abubakar's chapbook is a haunting yet refreshing read, a masterpiece that attest his mastery in straightening grief into pews of words that will leave you breathless and yearning for more. With each delicate, yet powerful, word, Abubakar invites us into a world of vivid imagery and poignant reflection. This is a poetry that cuts to the bone, that lays bare the complexities of his persona’s experience, and that somehow, miraculously, finds a way to stitch, to heal. A triumph of language in experimentation and emotion, Abubakar's work is not to be missed.

— Emmanuel Umeji

TPC III: Runner-up, Nigeria Prize for Teen Authors.

## Foreword

These poems are collections of raw emotion and fragmented narratives, and are a testament to the enduring power of human experience, particularly in times of profound upheaval.

Abubakar Auwal, with unflinching honesty, plunges us into the heart of a world marked by conflict, loss, and the relentless search for meaning.

The collection doesn't shy away from the visceral; the anguish of war, the grief of loss, and the desperate need for solace. But interwoven with these stark realities are flashes of hope, glimmers of resilience, and the unwavering belief in the human spirit's capacity to endure.

The poet's metaphors are not mere decorative flourishes; they are essential tools, mapping the complexities of a world that often seems chaotic and incomprehensible.

From the "square root of a boy" escaping his mother's body to the "tummy of a Mediterranean Sea," each image resonates deeply, inviting the reader to engage with the poem's core—the struggle of finding a home, a place of belonging, amidst the ruins.

The collection also offers a glimpse into the power of poetry itself. Auwal acknowledges the role of words, of art, as a form of both expression and survival. Poems become a vessel for carrying the weight of a nation, a vehicle for confronting the ghosts of the past, and a blueprint for forging a path toward the future.

This collection is a challenge to the reader, demanding empathy, introspection, and a willingness to confront the often-uncomfortable truths of our shared human experience. It is a testament to the power of poetry as a language of hope, resilience, and the enduring search for home, even amidst the most profound adversity.

It is a book that will stay with you long after the final page is turned. So, don't stop turning.

...

CEO

Publisher

Editor-in-Chief

Oyin Bimbo

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*thanatology of genocide from the sanctuary of god*

last night, i travelled my breath into the palms  
of god and strikes the smoke of my cigarette

around the tip of his nose: this isn't about prayer;  
my brothers are hijacked trains, railing to knock

the gate of heaven— my sisters are synonyms, too.  
behold the night we walked fast a breathing bullet;

mother cooked stones & breastfeeds our silence.  
somewhere in the fire that resonates with

my little brother's giggle, a bullet taught him  
the language of silence; we sang him to grave

and so does mother visit her lord with mantras,  
scraping her lips— her soul might've thought this

poem, songs of pain & the language of genocide.  
*assalamualaikum*— for i never knew my affliction;

i'm a human. forgive this poem; is not for you, it's for god.  
he knows my voice and can measure the weights

of the august saliva i could spit on his thirst.  
he knows the weights of all the broken images i

carry on my heart, to sing his name, to please his  
throne and tongue him of how the strands of hairs on

devil's head

morphed  
into ecdysis of snakes

& murdered my breath; as early as the blue moon.  
thus, i electro-magnified the smoke of my

cigarette into the telephone of my father's father,  
his brother's brother and all the genocidal souls in

gaza: may this poem flower in your heart, may this  
poem not erase my eyes from the cctv camera on

the eyes of god: i'm a witness beyond the seven  
roofs of heaven. & may my brothers be birds beyond

*portraits of broken metaphors*

the horizons of *surah'al\_aldiyat*.

*all the cyborgs I built, speak on their own sadness*

*after Abdulrazaq Salihu*

silence open up with grief slewing  
our bodies on a yellow cup.  
my grandma burst into a prayer with  
a cyborg dragging her to the masjid.  
like this, on a leaflet wind, we placed  
our bodies on a yellowstone. we are  
nothing bigger than programming  
language of already dead bugs dying  
to script our bodies on an empty sheet.  
we walked the river down to its bottom,  
to name unnamed cyborgs who  
mourned the night to solar their bodies  
at the bar. sadness as a stereotyping  
bandit walked to the dead-pool  
& water our bottles. we drank heaven  
and earth to wash the burning city  
of grief. what do you call this in a  
python language? html— call it a  
mamba, walking to screen the innermost  
wails of cyborgs, clutching the last half  
of their breaths to pay God a visit.  
to telescope the last half of what  
drained our bodies we become cyborgs  
petitioning their masters to death.  
to telescope the last half of what engulf  
MHz battery capacity of all the cyborgs  
I built, I popped out of a 3D-clip; this  
time, I'm dragging grandma to the masjid.

triple ways of metamorphosing a butterfly

*“we can believe that the seas sneaking  
up on us would take us over the edge”  
— Tishani Doshi*

To begin the song, allow a passage  
into your body & set free the butterflies  
you clipped in your chest.

There are whispers walking on the lips  
of a nightingale. Like a paranoid,  
everything takes turn. We morphed

into what define the antonym  
of our bodies and filmed our faces  
on falsified photographs. What become

of us held too many tales  
and we're a fictitious body  
of faceless stars. In an alternate song,

I asked grandma the true color of storm  
but she duplicates my body  
in two different songs. in one

my grandpa rewrites an unending song  
and he was sang into an empty song.  
Like grandpa, the storm was once

a lightning but was facebooked into  
a nightmare— the night it tattooed  
rainbow on its face. To culminate the song,

I reclaimed the last metaphor of what sang  
my name. Tonight, I'm riding a firefly  
to repaint the butterfly in my father's

chest on the tooth of the night.

## 1.6 equations of breathless fire and terminated thunder

a cyborg human of mass 5 kg lies  
on the horizontal cheeks of a dark god.  
if a horizontal fire of  $8n$  is applied to  
the nose of the wind through the tip  
of the flames and coefficient of the whirlwind,  
transforming a boy to a man, a man to a god  
the total measure of bones broken by  
stone-age goddesses and their broken lips are:

- a. the cyborg + human =  $2.5 \text{ kg} \times 2$   
= 5kg of fire neighing on the tooth of the apocalypse.
- b. the horizontal fire incubating the laughter  
of bones in this poem =  $\frac{\text{termination}}{8n \text{ in geographical force}}$
- c. & because a poem died with no masking tape  
of death in a whisper:

bones = horizontal fire

cyborg human  
——>  $h + f = 8n$

$c + h = 5\text{kg}$

——>  $h + f$

$c + h$

——>  $8n$  of breathless fire

5 kg of terminated thunder

——> = 1.6 men singing the anthem of heaven

= 1.6 mothers with no song to sing their melodies

= 1.6 gods, overgrown into monsters

= 1.6 universes with no oxygen to name a soul

= 1.6 whispers of fire on the chest of time.

*origin of bodies in the chests of butterflies*

& this is the origin of bodies in the chests  
of butterflies: mother puffs the wind into  
a trinket of girls burying their bodies  
in light, in wind, in water and fire  
to name a boy; my name. it's a body in haze.  
the night i wore the attires of rainbow,  
walked the surface of the wind to sing  
my name in the chest of water; fire arose  
& i was a body drowned to the constellation  
of butterflies, of rainbow, of the goddesses  
with no name to share a bed. believe me,  
i cage no god in my ribs. my heart pounces  
to the cctv of clouds to know one  
as a neighbor beside my mother's heart.  
waking up with a body in the chest  
of a butterfly is a sermon to scrape  
water and name every little thing; a film.  
i tweet one and mother is pictured a bird  
intertwined with the wings of gods & men.  
it's called love: the origin of bodies in the chest  
of butterflies, carrying the casket of fire.

*square-root of a boy, escaping his mother's body for survival*

a country + fire + songs= an escapade of survival.

i gather the remains my country on a palette of flowers

and my mother is a toothbrush of a dark portrait.

each poem i sketch on my father's body becomes a tale

and memes of ridiculous dragon, chasing my broken body

into the tummy of lost hope. every day, our ears quake

to the whispers of retired gods & men with the fur

of chameleon as each day draws the spears of the sun to our faces.

today, i sit on the opposite side of my grandpa's headlamp to melt

into a body, that's never mine. today, i'll migrate into the tummy

of another mother with lungs & pancreases of love and safety.

today, i'll sing my song into the ears of men who resist my tongue

from spelling their mother's name, incomplete. today, i'll gather

the debris of my broken laughter and pour my body into the chest

of mediterranean sea. until, i inhale the oxygen of survival;

my lips will sing the anthem of my home, no more

a metaphorical /-s/o/n/g- [for a blind poem]

*¬i cut her body out of the scene when she was about to sleep*

*in her blood and hid her in the echoes of her mother's du'a*— Zaynab Ilyasu Bobi.

a girl in Khartoum                  ran to me  
with a whisper

like a bullet, escaping it  
melting body from burning.

i offered her                  a thousand salam:  
into from the geography

of martyrs      & hid the fire      that  
arose from      my tongue to

quench a city,                      not too far from  
the nightmares.                      behind

the wheels:    we chiseled    our tongues  
                    from blabbing,

our eyes from striking the  
anatomy of missiles

& our ears from burning to the  
rhythms of wails,

of laughter & claps from bizarre  
of bombs & guns.

deep into the scrotum, our lips  
are a photograph

and a movie                  we filmed to tear  
our bodies; our souls

to the wind.                      to hold our breaths  
from departing our chest;

we name      our faith to      the  
colors      of prayers.

every prayer      is an ice-cream,  
men lick to      submit

themselves                      to an unknown  
journal                          in peace.

every prayer                  is an ice-block,  
we insert in the chest

of little babies,                      tired of  
singing                      their thirst in                      a blind  
poem.

*the night we walked the cottage of god*

*—after adedayo agarau*

we stumbled before god  
like birds taking a jazz.  
each swing frenzied our bodies  
with too many tales. I held my  
mother with god's stroboscopic eye  
wallowing to name each strand  
of hair I bear. mother burnt hers  
& the night tumbles into an  
empty  
dawn like birds fading to the mistiness  
of clouds. that night, my body  
carried  
too many nerves. I walked to the  
shoreline  
of dark stars and washed the sky  
without  
plucking the stars. thus, we tell of  
history  
and erase our names on the lips  
of the sun.  
i watched mother wrapped her body  
with  
downtrodden tales and lilies  
frenzying the sky  
into an entity of laughter. how do you  
tell god  
of yourself and the demon  
you've become when  
you are a twofold of nightmares? god,  
when next  
you see me taking a bloodbath,  
excuse the shower  
—my cadaver is a meter away tiled to  
the ancestry  
of this stroboscopic body I  
owed to no god.  
this time, pluck the stars and spank  
their limbs  
to the birds. do not forget to tell  
them my name.

upon the sight of moonlight; i pictured the smoke of my father's cigar

when the night shivers, the moonlight is a city of dust & men.  
i sang a story in-between the twinkles of stars, for the night  
wallowing on the tooth of gods, for the night a story began  
with a boy, learning the masquerade of fire and whispers of  
forgotten travelers, & boys, & girls with the map of scars.  
a boy is a portrait of doom [&... ellipses]: we name our tongues  
with the syllables of what bury our fathers in the song  
of night with no existence to home a nightingale, or the stars,  
or anything one may palm, so soft like *amala & ewedu*. i melt  
into satin rayon, and silk of crickets traveling their homes into  
a void. each name i bear on my head, galvanized to the toothed  
smoke of my fathers' cigar. [& like every surviving hero] elipsis...  
are what translate our songs into a language the gods escape  
the gravity of things known by the unknowns, & things left  
of the fire we exhale and the fire we chew. i'm not different:  
the night my mother cooked the earth in her belly, the gods came,  
the gods transverse into my father's cigar & i'm a night shivering  
to the sight of moonlight and the cadaver of stars it houses.

*an eclipse of a country beholds its men & corpses.*

therefore— in my country; corpses return home  
to tell us of the mystery we await  
and the flowers they consume in their graves.  
i poured my eyes into the breeze that birth  
december in january; my father emerged not a dust .  
before this poem, i sketched the portrait of his  
corpse on my mother's cheeks. she gave me a peck  
and mouthed me to halter. in her definition;  
father is never dead to tell of a mystery.  
in her definition; men live by the mystery they inhale  
& the fire they breathe.

*every country is a body of flesh & bones & guns*

on a night like this, i swallowed a flower to name a country.  
my mother: an album of hope & wails & love & hatred may  
count the chaplets of it as snow flowing in my veins.  
every country is a body of flesh & bones & guns. i stripped  
my body into slices of an onion; my country sizes my lungs  
as my name burnt to the cigarette smoke that eats her and men.  
this poem travelled with my chest into her tummy & i've  
forgotten everything that eats the other side of our laughter.  
our country is a valley of speaking wa[te]r & birds renaming a home.  
yesterday, a man ate off his fingers as i listened to the music  
in his tummy. another bite the gun on his daughter's chest  
& he's a bullet entering my country's belly.  
there are no other mysterious letters, differentiating wa[te]r  
& war than the ship, sailing my country's blood  
in the ocean of fire and the hell darkness dug in our chest.  
if you call this voice a poem, i'm scared you may be eaten  
by the ghosts steering my countrymen to the maneuverings  
of bombs. & guns. & flesh. & bones of my country's fate.

*untitled gen-z poem for a country with the song of hell*

*“there's a country opening into a graveyard: in it,  
there are boys, like me, surviving on metaphors.”*

*—adamu yahuza abdullahi*

& it's morning. like a psalmodic portrait of a body  
in a graveyard, i pressed myself into the anthem of  
a country, learning the calligraphy of the wind  
and the echoes of what buried a boy in it whispers  
& tinseling lyrics of reincarnated bodies—bloody like  
mud. you wonder how every line  
moonwalks a country into a song; it's  
the only way we're reminded of how mother  
wakes up every day to die, or how we die  
every day to count the breaths, left of us.  
there are tantалums in every breath we noose;  
in each; we are burnt fireflies,  
reviving to suck from her breast, a routine  
tale of survival. last night, my brother walked  
passed her ears to know more of how bodies  
are said to be manipulated into the lyrics of  
the wind and he was strangled to the thirsty  
oesophagus of a tornado. i ride with my tongue,  
a whisper and i'm afraid there are ghosts [chitchatting]  
in the territory of my words. there're voices  
so clear; mine has faded into a broken tune of a country's  
rhythm. of a country's saxophone throat of scar.

tonight, my body is a prayer for survival

*—today, i brought out a palette and painted qur’anic verses on every part of my body  
that hasn’t burned to the heated flame of this hell, i call a country. — saheed sunday.*

I.

they said: every black man is born to the rhythm of a battlefield—  
so, mother taught me to paint qur’anic verses on my breath  
& inhale the syllables of iyya-ka-na’abudu-wa-iyya-ka-nasta’in  
{--} a faithful song we sang on the chest of boys who took with them  
a battlefield and become machetes.

II.

when fire laughs; boys don’t wait a smile from the moon.  
we hijacked the stars to a halt & clouds to an edge  
mother said: it’s the only way to inhale the fire that may never  
swallow a home.

III.

last night, my mother carried her chest; heavy with rocks.  
her xanthine is the only photograph of what homed  
the gun that taught father the language of silence and a dungeon  
of immortals where boys & girls ride with them a blasphemy  
as a gift to their gods.

IV.

as i write this poem, a boy is somewhere in the ribcage  
of puzzles: an examination to enumerate the world in his chest  
and the death on his palms:

- a. life is a flower to those who plant guns and bullets.
- b. life is hell to those who swallow bullets and become fire.
- c. none of the above wears the face of his god.

V.

tonight, my body is a home filled with my mother's words.

tonight, my body is a prayer for survival.

*naming every part of my body with the silhouette of a home*

the last time, i warbled the mantras of home;  
home chants my breath on the trunk of a desert:  
father knows of the thirst in my esophagus  
for so does mother scribbled on his chest:  
i took thus as an oath to the walls of where  
wind sweeps the [k]night, to name a pebble  
on the palms of a stranger. i know no home;  
father didn't let it taste my tongue: the last time  
i palette it, i was sour. the last time i taste it;  
my body sang home into a castle of fire.  
the last time, a whisper would ride through my nose  
grandpa would be born, a stranger like a cadaver  
resurrecting from the charbroiled nose of memories.  
i carved my breath & painted my tooth to tell mother  
of the faded rose she is & the forgotten tales in her. i'm  
not a cavalier of memories. mine burned to the tinted  
flames on the trapezium-walls in my head. the last time  
i forgot a loved one; mother smudged herself into a  
broken smile. i hold unto it and i am a whisper of thousand  
centuries, lying in my tummy. i swear, i know nothing  
of the goddesses, hanging out with the forefathers.  
i swear i know nothing of the fire that quench the sweetness  
or the favor, or the mercy, or the generosity of mediterranean's  
spittle in the fire-most of black gods with the origin of scars.  
my home is beyond a territory of masked gods: we're thunders  
that neighed fire-horses on earth's tongue & whirl  
the wind into a trinket of white doves, flying across the  
monumental heavens we sculpt on the face of the world.  
today, i sang the lyrics of home and my face bore the paints of its interior  
& home exhale its breath into my nostrils & home

*portraits of broken metaphors*

scribble its name on my chest: call me a black flower, i'm  
a white rose with the shade of memories i never will forget again.

*art & science - an epilogue of my country's people*

*—my mouth is a passage to a country*

*where light drags behind tales of the night— ojo olumide emmanuel.*

today, i swallowed my father's tale  
& i am a country, dancing with the fate  
of my intestine on a thousand ridges.  
i dug my heart, my lungs and tongue  
to taste the saxophone rhythm in my throat.  
what's left of me are theories of both fire  
& wa[te]r as the people in my buzzing  
tummy learnt the art and science hygiene  
of a sanctuary:

- i. tell my mother: her weight is the gravity  
of my endless transfiguration.
- ii. tell my mother: her tears metamorphose  
a river in the anatomical laboratory in my head.
- iii. tell my mother: i've loosened the warm handshake  
intertwining my limbs with the shoulders of the gods.

tell my mother the gravity of my country's fate  
tell my mother the physics & the chemistry of my country's weight.

*i bend time so that you and i can lie down together*

*after reading— tucker lieberman*

it's a thousand years of travel on the unicorn  
into the future: my mother foretaste the sight  
of time and her body melt between the mistiness  
of clouds. there're two cosmoses, housing her body;  
her soul faded into an embryotic color of grandpa's  
aristocrat of shoes. the last time i wore my mother's  
monocles, i was a bird. my wings whirl to the rhythm  
of the wind. & [at the same time] i was a body; an annexes  
of snow. there is no rain here. we don't eat. we only  
thirst-quench patented spittle of gods who are just  
being born in the same hospital my grandpa is birthing  
his shoes; that is to say men give birth here and i would  
duck down to each neoprene and metals that grease  
my body while at birth: they are inordinate uncles, a pater's  
brothers. like a car engine, i vibrate my body-pane to  
upload the unsaved centuries i hid beside a tunnel.  
there is mono virus; a malware has hijacked my breath  
& [at the same time] my telephone's screen came to life  
[there stood silence in agbada] and there were dusts  
of breathes, singing to install a microphone on my ears.  
i speak, and a voice popped out of the sound panel to size my  
eyeballs: my mother is filmed beside the picturesque. i wonder  
how much more she knows my hatred emotion of time for it  
caused much traffic in the wind, for i can't escape giving  
birth to something so scary [& that i have no dyke to slide into  
the second universe, my body belongs while still resurrecting  
my father's body here.] so, i bend the shoulders of time  
and clutch unto it curb. time is no moving; time breathe when  
i ask it to. thus, i dungeon the time and at the same time my body

*portraits of broken metaphors*

multi-exist in seven universes with each dead and still alive.

*remnant of a broken theory*

i begin this poem with the theory  
of how men sing the songs of grief  
& hold our broken images together.  
when this poem gave birth to storm;  
mother was the first to chew  
the dust, strangling on the whirlwind  
of typhoon nights. it says the nightmares  
sing the lullabies of flowering stars  
that appear in many films. in one; a  
brother homed my words between  
the colors of his tongue and mama's  
encamping grief. in another; a boy  
crawl to understand the language  
of what it takes to sip fire from the cup  
of gods or those that invade the wind  
and nosed all that sketched breath  
in the chests of a corpse. in another; a  
scientific storm tongued the language of  
15-july as the first date of rescue and your father  
was carved between the roars of thunder.  
so this time— call me after you found the title  
on your dead forgotten grandpa's forehead.  
back again is me— versing to paint  
the colors of naked metaphors to how men will  
no longer endangered their breath.

*partying with the corpses*

that night/i pictured the images// of you, god and i sitting in purple dresses;// there were songs  
& echoes as the wind freezes the universe./ angels danced/for the unsung songs.// how that  
night/ god mouthed our names in whispers; & gazes// assembled like a bouquets phylum//  
how that night/ we reversed the time & erase memories of when grief knocked our door.//  
that night, i sighted god mouthing a blissful laughter// as the sky opened into a territory/ with  
clouds appearing in green garments. /the stars smiled— like evergreen birds. how that night,  
we drummed the earth, & sang the corpses—to dance in the parlor of their— forever home//  
as i kneeled to kiss your feet; when you/ eyed my face/ & gave birth to the goddess / i forever  
paint her face on my chest// how that night i satellite my phone/ dissect the sun / & charged  
my smiles // to the moment i sip electrocuted glances from your lios// & phoned my lord with  
gratitude// while i kneeled to title your name.

*we've never begin a new phase with god awake  
—for Yazeed and Sani; who were shot by a police officer  
just like my cousin brother Yusuf who died the previous year  
of the same incidents in Minna.— 16th March, 2025*

At the end of the tunnel: we watched  
boys crawled with their breaths

back to the chest of God. My brother  
held a prayer to the field and was given

a bed at the graveyard. When a bullet  
struck his lungs, fire gathered in my

mother's eyes. Is this the first time  
she is losing a son to a stray bullet

meant for another son? We gathered  
ourselves every time and poured our

tongues in the ears of God. But  
each time mother raises her limbs

to clutch the oesophagus of God,  
He shut the door; darkness greet us

each time as our prayers hunts our  
wishes until all that's remain of us

is faith and hope that come back to us  
as fairytales. Maybe, this is how we

were meant to taste the glowing sun  
of the apocalypse. Our endings has

multiple beginnings but we never  
begin a new phase with God awake.

Like always— today wears the face  
of yesterday and so do Yusuf wears

the face of grandma. Forgive my  
manners oh, God. I forget to scribble

a note on Yusuf's grave. I forget to

remind you that *Yazeed & Sani* has

the same date of death with Yusuf.  
It's evening like the other day. & today

again, a police officer painted Yusuf's  
face on their faces. They appear

beautiful in the blood that decorate  
their innocence. Loneliness is

the language of transfiguration here.  
The evening didn't spare Yusuf

or the boys from the stray bullets  
that cooked their breaths in my poems

and their names in another song.  
This time— you go again.

*dear editor— i'm too scared to name this poem*

*—after Michael Immossan*

Dear editor! I'm taking a step into  
this poem with a black face because  
my tongue is an enclosed memoir  
of dark theories. It's myth. And this  
poem is another body of it own. And  
this poem is another body of hell.  
And this poem is as wide as the space  
between our souls and heaven. By this  
I mean— this poem is a thanatology  
of death. I mean— this poem has carried  
many faces of souls bullied by the child(s)  
of God. I mean— this poem is a journal  
of broken dreams & dead songs slipping  
down to the gutter of unfinished storylines.  
Dear editor! I've never page a poem like this.  
And this poem is a portrait of a thousand  
other poems, wishing to scribble me on their  
faces like drizzles of years growing on the  
check bones of old men. Yesterday, my  
brothers were sent back to their lord with  
an empty stomach in Gaza. Another brother  
was given a packaged bullet as a gift to his  
lord. A fourteen years old mother in zamfara  
watched her body crumpled to ashes as her  
tummy stomach the wails of unborn queen.  
There're a thousand faces onomatopoeiang  
the lyrics that compose their songs like history  
remembering the lifespans of mutinous warriors.  
Dear editor! Save me from this poem. I'm hunted  
by the metaphors that paraphrase it lines. I mean  
my body is another metaphor of all the faces it bores.  
I mean this poem has hyperboled my breath  
into a thousand other poems with the dark  
faces of brothers who have gone to knock  
the gate of heaven with the red face of a black poem.

*dialect of love for boys with chronic love of other boys*

—no song calling on the sky for fire, no fire speaking the language of burning skin,  
—no empty rooms in the stomach of boys filled with love—romeo orio gun

&

we coupled our bodies in fire,  
in songs that translate the phonetics

of our bodies with the dialect of pain,  
in songs that sculpts our bodies

with the history of scars and thirst,  
in a thirst for love, in a thirst

for breath, & freedom that made us  
birds in the body of birds with broken

wings, flying above the ridges on the fur  
of butterflies and cockroaches that forget

the other name of mess, & mess,  
invading the lyrics of this broken poem.

&

for once, we hold our bodies in our bodies;  
it's the only territory of survival, the territory

of peace and quiet, the territory that boils  
within and still refreshes like a dry-leave, like

a green bird with an empty stomach, like a whisper  
escaping the lips of the dead, like a sin crushing

the eyes of the-man-of-god, like a sky, invading the  
emptiness of the night and emptiness of dead sun.

&

this is how it all begun; this poem bears a face,  
this poem bear a name, this poem forget the

supremacy of young boys with the photograph  
of sword, this poem died on my lips to know

what a kiss felt on the tongue of another boy,  
this poem becomes me, this poem; this poem;

this poem is as old as the beginning itself.

&... this poem is for boys wearing the hat of death  
for singing the lyrics of love into burning boys.

**&**

i trace my breath on the cheekbone  
of a butterfly, carrying the asteroid

of this last hour. i forget the eminent  
songs that sang with me a theory,

whose syllables rhymed with the  
anthem of a body with the map of scars.

in this poem memories are the only  
disconnected things that lead to the past

and transverse into a blind screen. call  
every tale; a theory. a fire neighing to

film my body in multiple songs.

*somewhere between the colors of water*

listen to the lyrics that gave birth to a poem  
and sketched the colors of laughter on the smiles  
of nightmares and anything that flowers— it  
happened twice and i'm a boy learning how  
to envelope the nightmares into anything that  
transform into creative figures. the other night;  
a boy my age planted a bullet in father's head  
we sing unto his name, a fire that never rest  
even before the dance-steps-of-death. there are  
eagles wearing the face of gods in my mother's  
ceiling whom father battled to dashed out our  
grains for. i can't tell remember or recall the  
sweet songs they sang, that erase father out of  
himself & mother buried her heart between  
the lyrics that organized for her a burial. i'm sorry;  
this poem doesn't wish to verse your heart into  
the colors of dirt or the death. i'm learning how  
to chase nightmares out of the small heaven in my head.

*my name*

i spiked through the space,  
carving the flows of a river,  
twinkle of stars  
& bouquet of crimson flowers  
from the firmament.  
a boy my age oust a name  
from the folka of a dying storm;  
behold its shadow, mother  
tongued thus; when a boy  
sing the fire-dance;  
the lyrics gives life to my name,  
a star. watch out the wind  
from napalm; another man is here to  
slice the wind as i glide through the air  
split a cloud, a storm, a gas  
& misty. just in, i'm stoned  
like the lullabies of speaking wind,  
plucking my name; a gold, a pearl  
from the firmament of stars.

*telepathy of guns and prayer*

through the body of water  
our names are like starfishes in the bowl  
of red wine. prayers clothe the bones of men  
like breeze of silent wind,  
singing on the ears of what wrapped our names  
on the cheeks of memories.  
i swear the lyrics of death from their guitar  
quench away my blood & the spins of flower  
we see on our mothers' faces. this night;  
a boy knocked my heart with the portrait  
of how he captured my prayers  
in many films. in each, there are gods tantalized  
behind the whispering guns...

*first time in the universe of love*

this may not be a poem or a tale.  
maybe a verse of the first love poem i wrote—  
you are not a god— so when i say  
do not judge my words; i am not on contest.  
i only dying in the consistency of  
memories that forever haunt my soul.  
tonight;  
a goddess would scrape  
my heart & break my soul  
into pieces  
of what i'll meet my lord  
picking the broken ones  
on his palms.  
if you breathe love  
in this verse— remember  
a brother died beneath;  
the smiles of the goddess  
his heart worshipped— all day long.

The End.

## *About the author*

Abubakar Auwal, TPC VIII, is a Nigerian teen author of *Portrait Of gods As Metaphors*; 1st runner up Nigeria Prize for Teen Authors (forthcoming—Poetry, 2024) and *Portrait of Broken Metaphors*; Winner ArtingArena Poetry Chapbook Contest. He was the winner of Splendors of Dawn Poetry and Short Story Competition (February-April, 2023). Also a finalist for BPKW Poetry Contest, AIPFEST24 Poetry Slam, NYTH Poetry Contest & long-listed for Brigitte Poirson Poetry Prize, Akachi Chuku-emeka Literature Prize, Blessing Kolajo Poetry Prize and others. He has his works Published/Forthcoming with Eunoia Review, The MAAR Review, The Beatnik Cowboy, After Happy Hour Review, Naked Cat Lit, Iceflow Press, SUBNIVEAN, Cajun Mutt Press, Lilac Journal and elsewhere. Abubakar is the Editor-In-Chief at New Voices Magazine, Managing editor at Words-empire Magazine, founding editor at Metaphorical Magazine and member Hill-Top Creative Arts Foundation, Minna as well as Founder/President of Nigerlites Spoken Word Artists. You can access some of his works through this link; <https://linktr.ee/AbubakarAuwal>

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