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LUNARIS REVIEW

A JOURNAL OF ART AND THE LITERARY



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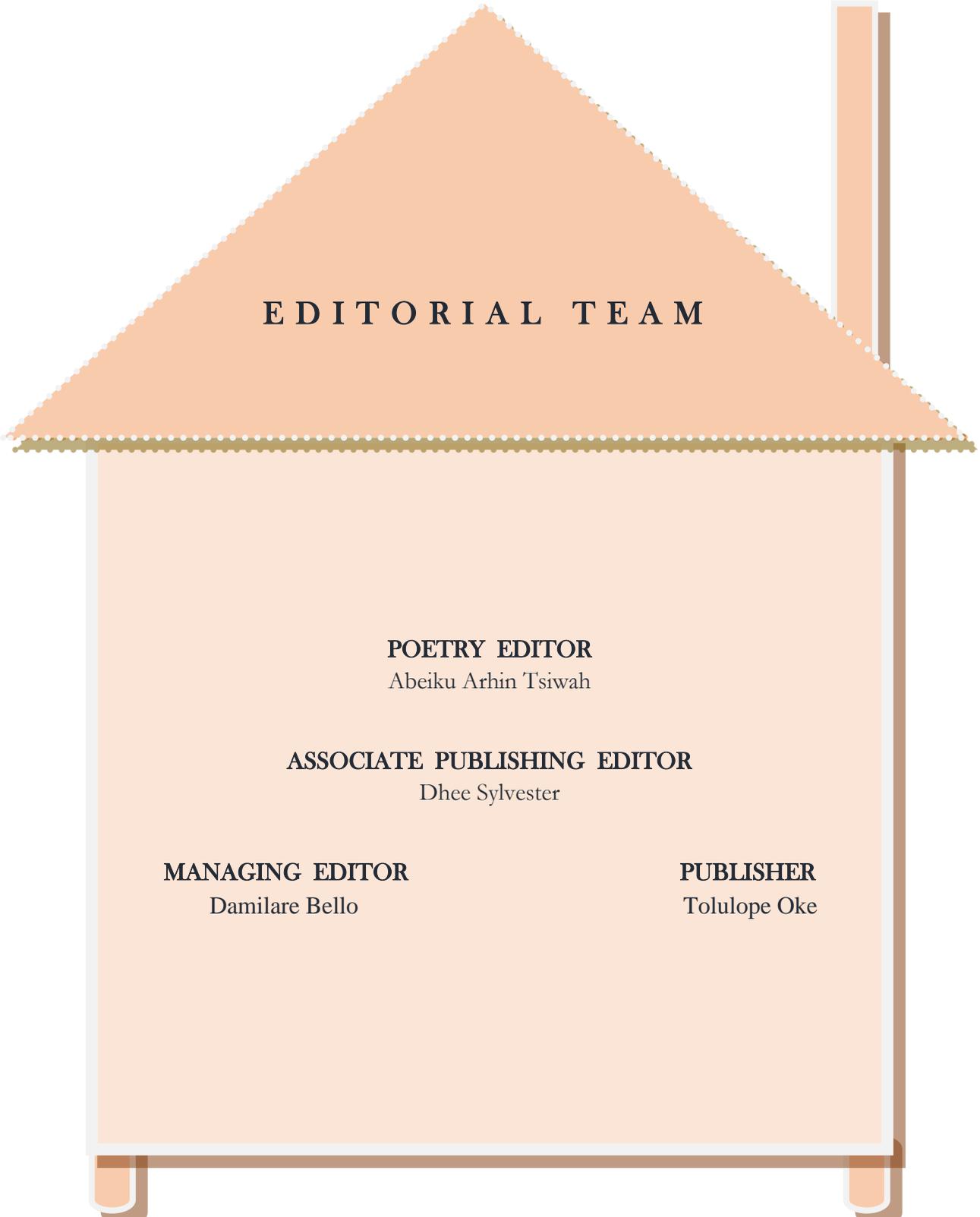
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CONTENTS

Foreword – <i>Henneh Kyereh Kwaku</i>	1
“Upward Mobility” – <i>Tshepiso Mabula</i>	3
“Green Meadows on the Crest” – <i>Olayioye Paul Bamidele</i>	7
“Anatomy of Fire and Finding Solace” – <i>Hassan Usman</i>	8
“Body Orchard (Youth)” – <i>Sandeep Kumar Mishra</i>	9
“Body Orchard (Older Days)”	10
“Recuperation” – <i>Abdulkareem Abdulkareem</i>	11
“My O.G” – <i>Dami Lare</i>	12
“Salvation” – <i>Mohammed U. Yusuf</i>	23
“Kibla” – <i>Zaynab Bobi</i>	24
<i>About the Contributors</i>	25

Foreword

In this 15th Issue of *Lunaris Review*, the writers take readers on a journey – to share in the appendages of grief; the subtleties of love, of longing for *what was* & the possibilities of dreams in the realist world.

In “Anatomy of Fire and Finding Solace,” Hassan Usman offers us a craft-talk on warmth & peopling:

If you want to know
how to surround your home
with plenty people
without sending them
an invitation — *set up a fire*

As if by divinity, Sandeep Kumar Mishra in his poem, “Body Orchard (Older Days)”, introduces us to an extended list of “people” whose company we may enjoy: “Fruit is for sharing, with friends, family and / neighbors even if your neighbors are bears or cows,” he writes. He extends an invitation to other creatures to join in the joy (& misery) of living, a reminder that the human is only human in the expansive presence of other creations. Sandeep’s poem is filled with snips of memories that transport me to my grandpa’s cottage at Nsuansa where I have also shared fruits with sheep, ducks, wild birds, and cousins.

Tshepiso Mabula in “Upward Mobility” offers as an intimate interrogation of grief & joy: “Side by side, two cow skins hung next to one another over the high wall, one for the sad family marking the loss of a matriarch and the other marking the joyful elation of a daughter who had found a husband man enough to marry her with cows.” Here, cows are not just “neighbors” as in Sandeep’s poem but an offering to “mark the occasion” of a matriarch's loss.

Although this issue is un-themed, by some stroke of divine intervention, the stories run into each other in a seamless beaut. In this volume, Lunaris Review continues the work of offering a platform for new voices & yet maintaining their rich taste in literature. Like some of the writers in this issue, Lunaris Review offered me a platform when I set out on my journey to publishing – it is a story that moves from Drobo to Sunyani to Hohoe through virtual worlds to Cape Coast, where I also write from today.

To not bore you, reader, you're welcome to Lunaris Review #15!

Henneh Kyereh Kwaku,
Cape Coast, Ghana.

Upward Mobility

THE PULSATING THUMP of the Postola drum reverberated from the bedroom, into the passage and out of the living room door with striking authority. A roaring voice belted with sheer confidence “Oa halalela heeh oya haaalaleellaa” – as if to summon the spirits of those who are buried beneath the concrete floors of Mokete’s suburban home. The congregation of the St. John’s Apostolic Church had gathered to offer matshidiso after hearing of the passing of Mokete’s mother, Mmatidimalo. The noise from the drums, bells and sorrowful and melodic singing was an unwelcomed disturbance in the neighbourhood that is normally tranquil. Mokete was the embodiment of upward mobility. He worked his way out of the dusty streets of Mofolo and into the well-kept corridors of Van Staaden-ville in the west rand of Johannesburg. Van Staaden was the picturesque landscape of the former South Africa: where white madams and their elite husbands served as custodians of the former regime. This was the Vaderland version of Simi Valley, where security police and prison warders relinquished their stresses after long days of torturing the terrorists who would become their neighbours in the democratic dispensation. Here, the racket and clamour of matshidiso are a foreign concept that prompts neighbours to call the cops and shut down the commotion of the damn darkies. The week had culminated with the dreadful news that Mmatidimalo had taken her last breath while she was admitted at the Visgat hospital in Van Staaden. Then the commotion of funeral arrangements, mourners gathering to pay their respects and make sense of the sadness that engulfed their hearts. It ended with a glamorous service for the otherwise humble Mmatidimalo who was laid to rest at the Westpark cemetery in the North of Johannesburg. Her son spared no expense in giving his mother the final send-off befitting a woman who birthed a personified version of the

new age clever blacks. When the sun began to dip into its daily rest place the noise from Mokete's yard rose with every sip of the libations he had purchased to comfort his ailing heart.

Lefu woke up on that Saturday morning with an unusually gleeful exhilaration. Today was the day his cows were to be returned to the unseen kraal in his suburban home. This was to be the day when the wisdom of a father was to be celebrated with colourful plates of food: cold drinks with adequate percentage and loud ululations from the women who had supported the man who birthed the bride to raise her. While his next-door neighbours sang sorrowful hymns while clad in black cloths of mourning, Lefu and his family danced joyfully in the streets and sang with fervent delight – “mmatswale tlogela di pitsa tseo, mongwa tsona keo oa tla.” A cow had been slaughtered to mark the occasion and just like his mourning neighbours had done, the men in the family had hung the cow's skin against the fence of their suburban homes. Side by side, two cow skins hung next to one another over the high wall, one for the sad family marking the loss of a matriarch and the other marking the joyful elation of a daughter who had found a husband man enough to marry her with cows. The blacks had arrived, and the blood-stained concrete and animated noise cemented their presence. Lefu's daughter Dineo sat in her bedroom while the elders deliberated the perfect bride price for a woman of her stature. She lay on her pink Hanna Montana duvet, staring at the Boys To Men poster on her wall while her uncles pushed for a higher price because she is a Wit alumnus who speaks higher grade English. Lefu sat upright on his armchair while a raging anger brewed in his chest as his in-laws protested the bride price because his daughter birthed an illegitimate child who warranted a discount because his father was an unknown nomad who roamed the earth with his wayward, childbearing loins. The man sipped their brandy slowly and as their eyes drew narrow they finally agreed on a price. The money was laid out, informal contracts were signed and finally the food that had been boiling for hours was served

and the elders celebrated the marriage of Musa and Dineo with beverages and rising noise.

Piet Van Staaden, no relation to Pieter Willem Van Staaden: who was the first custodian of the farm upon which the swanky neighbourhood was, raged with boiling anger while the noise pulsed from both his neighbours. A dark rage rumbled inside Piet's chest as the noise from his neighbours' rose and bellowed with every fleeting fall of the sun's rays. How insensitive they were to think they could shout, sing, and roar like drunken delinquents in a hooligan house. The single malt whiskey the blacks had been drinking churned and stirred inside their big belly with every growing scream that came from the houses on the opposite side on the road. Pieter stood on the wall and shouted "hou julle voken beks maan!" Mokete stood up from his chair and wanted so much to walk out of his gate and punch the uncultured mlungu who didn't understand that he was only trying to calm his weary heart with the noise. How dare he? With every angry sip Mokete remembered that he did not leave the dirty, rat-infested townships with their rowdy siren wailing, uncouth streets for this shit. "Ba ntlwayela masepa ba" - he kept saying as the Afrikaans slurs and boisterous swearing continued. On the other side of Grobblers street Lefu's spirit rose with joyous triumph with every sip of the bitter Mellowood brandy that filled his cup. These were the battles of new age clever blacks that occupied the houses of former madams and baasses who had fled the west to the north of Johannesburg with the hopes of being as far away as possible from those damn darkies. Two sides of a coin, each being reminded of the naturally subservient position of their brown skin and each reacting differently because of the difference in the circumstances that led to the commotion. He said confidently while he slumped back on his chair - "bond ea ntlu e patalwa ke nna net aleen, lekgooa le lea nyela. While Mokete's anger grew at the fact that Lefu was not as eager as he was to fight for his right to exist in this atmosphere of privilege.

Nnwa tagi ene etsene mo menaganong ea banna, they were bamboozled and adequately well-oiled. Piet's face was a raging ruby, and his anger began to boil out of

him with sweat bullets and verbal bullets pelting out of his mouth. The elation was ardent and thus the noise from both houses was at its peak. This was not the Van Staaden he grew up in, this ghetto nonsense belongs in Soweto. In his anger, he grabbed his pistol and rushed out of the door with fuming anger, never thinking about the prospect of *Dolus Eventualis*. He cocked his pistol and shot randomly into the chaotic atmosphere. His hand grew weary with every pinch of the trigger and at some point, it changed directions and was turned from the empty sky to the streets. He squeezed with all his might and between the words *lasting and kaffir* a bullet flew from his magazine to the slide, then the air and it flung straight into the heart of a young Thabo who had run out into the streets to pick up the soccer ball that flew out of Lefu's gate. The gun's barrel was dark and dingy and thus the 2.34mm rimfire bullet flew swiftly into the suburban light and landed just as quickly into the scarlet red 10-year-old heart that didn't expect the force of its impact. The infantile heart stopped just as quickly, and the child breathed his last as he lay flimsily on the tar. *Umphefum'lo wahlukana nenyama ye ngane, inyanga ya khanyis' amazulu, ubusuku behlisa ubum'nyama.* The bang of the gun's barrel striking blameless flesh sent a louder noise that silenced the euphoria in the air. The stench of new death engulfed the air, and a new crisis found the neighbours frozen in their tracks. Serendipity was non-existent in that moment; an anguishing tension filled the air and as if to echo the words of M. Madibana and Samuel Lepako when they sang "mabhuru ba bolaile Tshepo Matloga", the joyous mood was darkened by the reality of the lifeless victim of this vicious circumstance. Welcome to the new South Africa. A new kind of *matshidiso* was eminent and the noise was far from finished. The singing came to a grinding halt, it was replaced by the distressing bellows of screeching sirens and alarming blue lights that cracked the prospects of future neighbourly love. As he was led into the police car by the black soil-stained hands of a new age detective, Piet whispered, "they should've stayed in the fucken townships."

Green Meadows on the Crest

1.

It was a day in May/ red, yellow, gay/ flailing leaves filtered across the mount/
barren creaking trees servile/ to the yawning Autumn/ eroding their leaves from
their shade. / gay clarion call/ too gay to be heard/ stringed on the crest/ my father
tempted me for a walk to hunt.

2.

Single eye of the sky and the cloud/ had begun to red/ cold evening blew crisp to
our skin/ frailed hairs sprouted up/ evening birds gurgled their whistling note:/
'it's time to sleep with cosmos.'

3.

We were lazy to retract home/ though hissing snakes on barb wired walls/ and
the darting bats in caves spit fears/ to us, to our face. / we advanced deep to the
crest/ and to dark. we saw a pasture/ a well flourish trimmed meadow/ decorated
with rows of trees/ and trains of crimson roses, swaying to the wind/ a jewel-blue
stream trickled beneath the meadow/ oozing a swirling perfume.

4.

The moon thrust its luminous plate-head/ behind the cloud, / the grass tempted us
to stay and lay/ if only we had drove the cattle for a bite/ we would have built a
tent for the night. / east wind increases, gliding/ dogs began to growled/ we knew
our presence is missed in the hut.

5.

So we harkened to nature/ and plod our way homeward/ till another day/ a fiery
tale day/ that we will wonder to such paradise/ not in my dreams as I have seen/
but in this harmattan world/ that had plunged our herds to force fasting.

Anatomy of Fire and Finding Solace

“burning yourself is interesting.”
- Shitta Faruq Adémólá

& then watch how your body
will mellow out in joy
singing your name into
the darkness
for your shadow to dance

burning yourself is not a sin
there's also heaven for those
that like to burn – say “I”
& then watch how your tongue
will pronounce out a smoky paradise

the thing with flames
is that they make blurs
around your face
& do not allow the world
steal your smile

if you want to know
how to surround your home
with plenty people
without sending them
an invitation – *set up a fire*

Body Orchard (Youth)

I taste these pears and peaches with my whole body,
As graceful as the first floret of springtime in a garden,
We watched for the first time a tropic moon
descend pine- orange into our yard,
I kissed your raspberry cheek and tasted
inviting mango juice on unbound rosy lips

“Sangam” of red roses and white lilies flow in
East- Asian almond cool aquamarine eyes,
A sharp nose pyramid a moon ring shine,
Long Thailandish slender neck and
Brazilian bloom-down-cheek’d peaches,
in your diamond apple body orchard
shaded under Indian long silky spirited locks

The plum tree in your garden is now
bursting into flower with the promise that
snowy flower buds give birth to ripe lilac plums
this autumn when you turn sweet sixteen

Garden fig is a glittering moist four-petalled flower,
After I strip off the blossom with my lips,
heavy with dotted green and red fruit,
marking each interlude with musical drops

The blackberries would ripen-a purple-green,
Like a bottle of old wine, its pulp was sugary,
sun's blood in it leaving good stains upon the
tongue and desire for more pickings

Body Orchard (Older Days)

I have wild free-born cranberries, but
My garden doesn't have the forbidden fruit
For the true are cherry red and golden mango,

I have memories of yellow daffodils and oranges
blended with the burn of colourless lemon tears,
basked in honey rays, dreamed in pomegranate
sunsets of lime hills and dulce roses
Years of sweet citrus lived in golden hours

My yellow heart pining for red fusion,
to shake the fruit that never falls,
I am alone without the temptation of apple,
Limbs entwined in a sweet embrace
I kissed season's hot tangerine lips

The colors of my country are spread here
with clear blue sky, sun, breeze, dew and peace,
I can see big juicy melon being sliced up
and divided between a bunch of shiny kids,
Fruit is for sharing, with friends, family and
neighbors even if your neighbors are bears or cows

I would not live to see the leaves fall yet
moment of delight in the shared fruit would live on
I am not inclined to romanticize my toils in the orchard,
as the aches and pains of this grove are mines only

Recuperation

This is how I withdraw my frowns, *seeking greener pastures in symptoms that fevers me.*

In a dark room, grief standing-by like a ghost,
I lit a tiny bulb & I scour for a roach
to grace the belly of my grief, because
my body is not a bowl of rice to gobble up.

When all is silent, I speak in sibilance,
though, I do not oscillate my tongue like a snake,
like passing venoms into a body.

I time-travelled into the past, sat my butt
on a stool & I began to winnow the chaffs of my
existence from its grains.

I wonder, would this stop death from folding my
father through the wraps of a straw mat
into its diminute hole when I'm back into this future?

Hope is a wide thing, but here I folded it into the
orifice of a wallet.

I burnt the pyre staked to burn my body— waiting
for the hands of God to touch me
on every part of my body having egress wounds,

& yesterday, I slept peacefully on a cattail thinking it
was the hand of God I waited for— for so long.

“seeking greener pastures in symptoms that fevers me” is a tittle for a poem by Nnadi Samuel

MY O.G.

(In memory of a sound)

X

FOR CONTEXT, my dad never lacked clever ways to teach me about life. Once, when I was eight and wanted to cavort with my peers in the evenings, as we lived two stories up in a compound inhabited by parents with ebullient teens, he drew a line above my head on the wall of his room and told me if and whenever I reached it I could do what I wanted. I would pump my feet and shoot as high as I could, promising to reach the mark the next day as I had only one attempt each day. I grew taller, so did the line, as he kept inching it upward. He would later confess there are things that persist afar from one's reach, but that the hunt for triumph is itself rewarding. I didn't pretend that I got it, and he made no effort to illustrate. He always said time resolved all incomprehension. So, when he woke up one April morning that took too long to affirm itself and then slumped before it could expire into noon, I took it as one of his unusual lessons.

1

AN IMAGE KEEPS PRODDING ME AWAKE; it is a sequence of two things: a rushing sword beating the winds upwards and a patient head enduring a forestalled eventuality. The sword is sparsely taped at the rear, lean as the bony hand wielding it, but the head is fat with fear and optimism, awaiting a word of pardon. The pardon fails to arrive, but not the sword. It hacks cleanly, disproving the uncertainty of outcomes as the patient head lolls temporarily before dropping with a thud. This is the dream that stirs me from sleep, but it is the thud that always stays. That keeps me conscious of the image of a patient head, a quixotic pardon, and a rushing sword. A

pardon that failed to sound or voice itself. I once told my dad this dream. He responds we all have a sword hanging over our lives, kept at bay by a spiritual pardon, one that only needs to be voiced.

The first time I consistently understood sound beyond a pragmatic fact was when I read Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing the Word*. He had a careful argument that a sound exists only in its journey toward inexistence. Knowing sound as that thing perpetually transiting, Ong's statement failed to register with me. The paradox was so flagrant it provoked, first, a headache that failed to resolve but furiously and then an intense level of chin-stroking. The second time was that April morning when my dad slumped.

But before then I had learnt that Ong, perhaps cognizant of this paradox, had clarified that sound "is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent, and it is sensed as evanescent." I had also discovered that sound is transitory, slipping from itself into impermanence; that you can't suspend sound, and this much is true, for any arrest of sound terminates into a holding action, given that sound naturally resists stabilization and any attempt to impede or possess it in its pristine form shepherds it on to its death; and that nothing precedes and succeeds sound. Nothing. But silence.

That April morning began in concert with routine, that is, with me being prodded into wakefulness. My dad, the man I fondly but privately call my O.G., and I shared a ritual: he, being the first to wake, usually before cockcrow, would heat up water so we could share a few glasses of warm water before powering through routine exercise. Later, after the exercise, we would have oatmeal for breakfast and exchange details of the Nigerian experience.

That morning, the only contradiction was the oatmeal I had alone. Midway through snatches of conversation and perusing the morning news for updates, he declared what was to be his breakfast, rice and beans, which he cooked and bought respectively. He then retired to his room to eat, stepping out only to restate the details

of a scheduled visit to his school. After that habitual unfolding of the morning, I sat down to work.

I multitasked my way through the hours, working, chatting, reading, anticipating light, and keeping my ear down for odd activity. Despite these immersive activities, I mentally registered a class of quiet pivoting about me as if everywhere was policed by a stillness that took offence whenever I punched the keyboard too hard. Then I heard the sound. Something crashed. It was subtle and temporary that I almost missed it. But it was sudden enough to disconcert the quiet. I paused and listened.

In *Technologizing the Word*, Ong cautions that you can evoke sounds, however, fail to hunt them because they have no focus and leave no trace. Like occurrences tripping to life and into continuation, they simply are, and then are gone the same, having and leaving no trajectory. Returning to silence.

I listened hard, contemplating the possibility that I possessed an impetuous imagination willing things into being, for the only contrary evidence, the sound, had vanished as if nothing occurred. I tried to recall, but there was that obtrusive absence: there was nothing against which I could compare what I thought I heard as there was nothing to compare. No trace of what I had heard tarried for me to query. Nothing abided but a silence that mocked me. Like air, the sound had vanished. So, I returned to my work. To silence. A few seconds later, I heard the sound again, this time textured like a grunt emitting in staccato, as if something in motion was being harassed by space, struggling to exert its full self.

There is a knee-jerk reaction to 'crashing' in my home I suspect is spontaneous enough to be universal: when a thing crashes, we by design call out. If the person responds, a measure of relief is acquired, and we proceed to query or reprimand. The antipode of this galvanizes worry as it sacks all reasoning, appropriating our peace so much that physical inspection is requisite. I called out to my dad, partly because since I have been home, he had had two unpleasant occasions of falling and that worried me (coupled with his gait and other earlier histories of mishaps and accidents), principally

because we were the only two in the house. He didn't respond. Actually, he did, or should I say the grunts did. Repeatedly. But they weren't answering to me; they were beating against the silence.

Of all those who have taken up Ong and his seminal insights on the connection between sound and written words, I find Jonathan Sterne to be more precise, possibly because he provides useful material that aims at a needed balance between hearing and seeing. The Audiovisual Litany is a concept by Sterne that seeks to assess the limits and excesses of the oral-literate dyad, the 'great divide' that pits literacy against orality as mode of thought expression. Iconoclastic maybe, since Sterne's work sought to establish converging points between hearing and seeing, i.e., between orality and visuality, rather than pursue the standard contestation on their differences or superiority. Yet, despite the iconoclasm, Sterne does fall back on Ong, especially his conceptual model, the "Hypertrophy of the Visual", which stresses the absurd premium humans have placed on writing (chirography, typography, and electronic visuality) and by extension seeing because of the access it affords us to (engage) the past and (preserve) the future, thereby delegitimizing the immediacy/eminence of the present made possible by sound. Sterne's agenda was that the differences are never absolute, not in relation to human experiences at the very least, and sometimes both modes overlap. In Sterne's submissions on the subject are three things I find useful to explain what ensued when I heard the sound again: 1.) sound is spherical; 2.) it immerses its subject; 3.) it travels to us the subjects.

I heard the grunts and could identify and recall them because they enveloped me and were consistent in their journey, being successive. But I couldn't trap them to accurately discern what they were— in hindsight I would conceive of them as laboured grunts. I was immersed in sounds I couldn't understand because they didn't tarry for me to analyse. They travelled to their demise, fulfilling Ong's paradox. I leapt up from my seat to ascertain what I was hearing. Sterne is right: even though the contrariety between hearing and seeing might be substantial as couched in the Litany, the Litany,

which accommodates decades of theoretical bias, is neither absolute nor exhaustive. I had to see what I was hearing to understand it.

If hearing is spherical, vision is directional. Vision offers perspective and travels to its object. I bounded into his room to see him collapsed against the edge of the bed, his upper body, especially the left side, twisted atop it, twitching, while his lower body crumpled to the floor. He was crooked into a trembling and awkward right angle. The chair he sat on (always by his bedside) had given way as he slept—the suddenness must have sent him into shock. The grunts issued as heavy, coarse, laboured breaths, pushing against his lips. He was partly conscious or unconscious. Seeing him in that state organized the reality I had struggled to understand. As I emerged into a new cognitive space, everything else blurred from view.

"Fear is largely context dictated," argue psychiatrists Arash Jvanbakht and Linda Saab in the [Smithsonian](#). I find this an oft-sidestepped cultural truth. But in science circles, when rationality and emotion are involved, exercising fear externally is negotiable in the circuitry of the brain. The how is biological: the hippocampus, intricately connected with the amygdala, and the prefrontal cortex are continually in concert in context-processing to catalogue perceived and real threat. Both cerebral parts interpret sensory (visual) data and either inhibit or advance the amygdala's fear response. In the case of the latter, the amygdala sets off areas commandeering body motor functions, triggering the release of stress hormones, and activating the Sympathetic Nervous System. In the case where the thinking brain feeds the emotional brain the perception of safety, fear is renegotiated for more pleasurable emotions. The interaction of the thinking and emotional parts of the brain is indispensable to proper situational analysis and response.

While this process seems simple, in the aftermath of reading Jvanbakht and Saab, I fail to not ask myself what happens when an event feared too long that it holds a touch to one's existence styles itself to life? What does the hippocampus do? Or the prefrontal cortex? Do they downstream reality?

Perhaps because I had anticipated a dreadful occurrence like this and in a manner that remodelled it into milestone in my life waiting to happen minimized the impact of what I saw. I would think my anticipation, however negative, energized me to quickly re-label the actual experience. This clarifies my lack of fear in that moment between gaining perspective (as the external world dissolved into my dad and I) and realization (of what was at stake). Fired up by visual data, I move to resolve the situation.

I tried to pull him up, but he is three times my size. No matter how hard I tried, he buckled, and I failed. I pushed my hands under his armpits and tried to sit him up but couldn't achieve a three-inch-distance between the bed and his frame. Everything I did defeat antagonized. I recall each attempt felt like a test, as if he were daring me by doubling down on his weight and crashing back to the bed. I wanted to tell him to quit frustrating my efforts; to tell him to quit interfering. Every call of his name ferried the pressure to outperform my incapacity and raise him up. In this universe of attempt-and-fail we were immured, engulfed by silence punctured occasionally by his laboured breath and my occasional call of his name. Two men defeated by each other.

To see my O.G. in that state was disturbing but not unexpected. I had imaged myself in situations like this several times, with the thought that doing this would eliminate fear and prepare or fortify me. Girlfriend calls me pessimist for this attitude: my penchant for ideating unpleasant scenarios. She had said my retort that being disappointed by the continued suspension of the undesirable than its expression is utter nonsense, dealing in inconvenient thoughts, and prospecting evil. But, indeed, rather than fear, what had arrested my mind was the thought of what to do. My dad would always tell me “nkan ti o le soro ko le gbon ju eni lo.” The last time he said this, we were trying to fix a glass table, and he let it slip in that jocular way he says anything that can't speak can't outsmart a living person. My dad was in a state he couldn't speak; surely, he couldn't be smarter than I was at that point.

But there was nothing I could do that hadn't failed. Nothing! Except shattering the silence. This time continuously, rapidly, fiercely. So, I shouted.

2

Fact 1: You cannot pause sound to have sound.

Fact 2: If seeing demands distance from the outside world, sound involves establishing contact.

Fact 3: Sound is about affect.

I KNEW WHO MY TARGET WAS: the world, specifically any alien to the homeostasis which my dad and I now inhabited, grounded by/in the present. We needed someone to disconcert the tide of try-and-fail ushering in the unthinkable. So, I didn't pause sound; I continued to yell, and then raced out of the house, reluctant to leave my O.G., but knowing I couldn't stay. The house sits in the middle of a large expanse of land, meaning the distance to the gates would chew up my screams and spit the debris into the morning air. Beyond this space, however, is a set of shops. One of which is occupied by an affable tailor, Pastor Idowu, and his apprentices. Pastor was what I repeatedly yelled because sound is a pathetic courier, petering out before reaching its mark and requiring consistency in production. He had heard my voice, the urgency it ferried, and vaulted out of his shop. I needn't tell him what was up. The sound he heard told the tale.

I fumbled with the keys—damn keys! —opened the gate, and we raced to O.G.'s room. Pastor managed to sit O.G. up and requested for water. I sprang into the bathroom and scooped water with a bowl, which Pastor applied on his face, praying. A few seconds later, he declared we needed to drive him to the hospital. But we couldn't lift him. We tried. It was impossible. I ran out to call the boys. Three boys, pastor, and I, and we still couldn't lift him enough to put in the car. After several attempts, we got him out of the room and laid him by the passageway, while Pastor grabbed the key to the car and I reached for a shirt, directing one of the boys to pass me my phone. All the while, I kept listening for his breath—somehow, however labored it was now, and

even though he had quit juddering, it calmed me. Any sound was a sound, and I needed to know he could and was still making one.

To efficiently test for the interior constitution of an object is to insist on the primacy of sound as an affective entry point, Ong argues. Sight, taste, and smell fail as rivals, and I am inclined to agree. Loud wails, for instance, can externalize internally composed/felt grief, pain, and fear or any other undesirable feeling. A baby's cry conveys hunger or related inconveniences. A defective machine oft-time sonically expresses its faultiness. Voicing or sounding, thus, is an incontestable index of interiority, crowning orality and aurality as prime sensory modes. Perhaps touch does ascend the ranks to register interiority and exteriority, but as Ong aptly contends, it destroys interiority in the process of perceiving it. There is a good example that clarifies this: To test for the interior of a carton box—without raising it to your ears to perceive its internal composition—through touch requires slashing it open at an angle and reaching inward, destroying its exterior in the process and rendering its interiority void because it loses its enclosed form forthwith. On the other hand, perceiving through sound registers interiority without destroying it. Sounds transmit the interiority of objects that birth them because they wield referentiality. Interiority is a characteristic of human consciousness given that when conveyed by altering degrees of human sound, the body's internal composition is presented in an instructive manner.

This reminds me of Heidegger's reference to sound as a sensual landmark temporally meaningful in performance, which makes [Angela Impey's](#) position on sound as an activating modality an appropriate material to lean on in deciphering why I had paused several times to listen to my father's breath. Sounds activate our conception of phenomena, providing, in performance, situated ways of knowing and (data) gathering.

All through the riotous drive, I listened for his breath that had noise-dived from an uneven coarse rap of sound into a levelled heavy breathing. I had initially placed my hand on critical points on his body to feel for pulse and heartbeat, but the

manner the car bounced across the ruts displaced all certainty, so that I couldn't be sure of what I was feeling. Persisting with sprinkling water and fanning him, I propped him up into a sitting position as he fought his way to consciousness, his attempt at speech and his grunts betraying the labour of it all. I saw the progress through the sound first. Half-way through the journey, O.G. began to wipe at his face, muttering. This prompted me to appreciate the wave of relief that accompanied it.

I sat him upright when he finally came to as we neared the hospital, but his eyes betrayed exhaustion that made keeping awake equivalent to sloughing up a hill with one's limbs tied together. Pastor eased the car to the tip of an intersection, and I stared out of the window. As the midday breeze grounded to a halt with the car and I settled my mind on the obvious war he was waging to triumph his circumstance, a memory bobbed up in my mind. It is of another image.

In the picture are two black men, each nude from the torso up. The man in a white short with a black tape stares down at a sprawling figure equally clothed but in different color. The man in white has his right leg crooked into a pseudo-right angle, with the right arm, taped and covered with red glove, forming a perfect 90 degrees. It is a victory pose. Although now in still-motion, you can imagine him thumping his chest in triumph. With his face contoured in mockery, he derisively mouths at the defeated figure. It is 1965 in Lewiston, Maine, and the world is still traumatized by the Phantom Punch, the right hand that laid out the big Sonny Liston and, arguably, his career.

The blow and the controversy surrounding its delivery would outlive the awe of the match that saw Muhammad Ali—then Cassius Clay—fix Sonny Liston for the second and last time. Boxing history is never barren of devastating knockouts—Julian Jackson vs Herol Graham; Derrick Jefferson vs Maurice Harris; Vincent Pettway vs Simon Brown; and (for being a favourite) Buster Douglas vs Mike Tyson—but the mystery and making of the Ali punch suspend it over any other. Framed by its transience, near invisibility, and raw power, the punch labelled a legacy, setting

precedence for what would be an enigmatic and legendary stature in the history of sports. Only a few, even those at ringside, saw Ali rock Liston with that punch. I have watched that clip several times and found myself levelled with Richard Williams, who, writing for the [Guardian](#), admits that “Endless replays of the minimal available footage have failed to solve the mystery of what became known as ‘the phantom punch’...” One moment, a hulky Liston is pouncing onward, priming, and throwing jabs at a quick-footed Ali, who dances about on the canvass. Liston is ducking, parrying, and aiming, and then the next he is flopping to the ground, his back to the canvass, his trauma manifest as he attempts to rise and fails before succeeding, stumbling to his feet, and failing to make the 10-second count. The punch is lightning quick, brutal, and almost non-existent. Liston stood no chance. If indeed Ali floated as a butterfly and stung like a bee that would be the truest testament.

One moment, my dad is eating, seated, and sleeping, and the next he is crumpled beside a bed, quivering, grunting, trying, and failing to rise into a seating position. In that car, staring out through the window, I couldn't but think we both had been rocked by a phantom punch. One minute I am at home, working; the next I am in a car, riding toward the hospital, fanning my O.G. to health.

Life delivers carefully timed and almost invisible Phantom Punches you don't see till they rock your world and knock you out.

One moment you are alive; the next you are dead. One minute you are sure of everything, the next you are fixed to a spot, waiting for something, a miracle, a pardon, before the hovering sword falls. Sometimes, the pardon arrives, if you are lucky.

3

I LIKE TO THINK THE AFFECT OF SOUND is an inexact science, and I am not alone in this, for I have the weight of memory behind and ahead of me, illuminating the way. Both Ong and Impey (and to some extent Sterne) agree that more than others

of the set, sound has an affective quality that evokes in humans a consciousness of proximity, connectedness, and context.

Days after the incidence, my ma' would remind me that prior to the incident we had been 'together' on WhatsApp, and I would recall her last message was an inquiry about electricity I hadn't seen at the time. How she would have received the urgency of the situation had I messaged her filled my mind. How would she have registered the shift in context? Typing/seeing is never the same as hearing.

I had called her as we raced to the hospital. I didn't want to, had refrained from the act, but at some point, I had to: I needed contacts at the State Hospital she would have, having worked there. The distress couldn't be hidden. My voice triggered her worry, and so I let it out, construing as best as I could.

Perhaps, indeed, sound supersedes others of the set in the sensory hierarchy, as one of the few requests my dad would make upon reaching the hospital is to speak with Ma': He had fully come to by the time we drove in. In his logic—quite valid too—his voice would assure her. The affective range of sound in projecting context and establishing proximity and bond is compelling. It is no wonder Ali would thrash talk his opponents in and out of the ring. I prefer to surmise that he was feeling for proximity and attempting, in an ironic way, to bond with his opponents—to fence them off with verbal jabs, while keeping them within reach. Ali had no delusions as to who his enemies were, and he stung them both with his fists and tongue. Which is why the first battle he truly lost was with his body: when he began to slur his words, he began to lose his charm.

My dad would repeatedly talk to his wife, maybe because he understood sounds are birthed in their journey toward death. Perhaps, he realized that was the only way he could truly assure her—everyone—of his wellbeing. By continuing to break the silence. At least until the sword finally falls.

Salvation

*I ask You by every name belonging to You
which You have named Yourself with.*

— *Ar-Rasool (s.a.w)*

Once epiphany hits me in solitude
like an archer's arrow does his target

my mood brightens up from a rush
of light thoughts that spur hope.

I get adorned in my cousin's white cloak
& assume his lofty chamber in the hills

my forehead keeps kissing the earth
in a transcendental submission.

I seek His heavenly mercies,
whispering all the noble names

with which He alone had named Himself.
I seek to be submerged in His grace

to tarry & turn my old pages
I need to etch a gracious exit.

Kibla

One night your mother will be making your favorite meal & the next seconds//minutes// hours, her soul will jump out of her body to unite with her ancestors'. & her body will go back to where it begins with the word "be"—dust. you, this poem is pointing at your chest; those holes dangling in puddles of grief, you dare not fill them with cries because she won't be there to wipe them off. you dare not drain the pain with bottles. pills. guns. you dare not patch them into frost arteries of guilt—depression. you dare not revive her spirit to show her how you kill her son & replace his body with a stranger. so, you will empty your mother's death into a poem & bury it between pages of this massive memoir you wrote about grief. This is to say, you will become an author of pain. people will call you *māye* because you name every single thing you could remember about her as a title of a poem. like when you turn her smile//laugh//frown//tribal mark into words that you are yet to find the meaning to & stuff them into *poems*. & the poems into *stitches*. & the stitches hold *your body*. which is to say, you will break the rope around your neck & drench the hole in your chest by evolving into a poet that hails God's names—Ar-rahman. Ar-rahim. Al-malik—towards the *kibla*. & you will tell your mother how you travel through the folds of night
praying for more & more & more light into her grave.

Māye: sorcerer

Kibla: Where the Muslims face while praying

ABOUT CONTRIBUTORS

Abdulkareem Abdulkareem is a Nigerian writer, linguist, who wants his voice to go beyond the thatched roof of his mother's house. He studies Linguistics and Nigerian Languages at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. Besides writing poetry, he cherishes the historical fiction and crime fiction genres. His friends call him Pānini. He writes from the ancient city of Ilorin. When he isn't writing, he's either listening to JuiceWRLD or Drake. His works have appeared on Poetrykit online anthology, *ARTmosterrific*, *Naija Buffett Readers*, *The Kalabari Review*, *The Shallow Tales Review*, *Nnoko Stories*, and *Nanty Greens*. He tweets [@Panini500bc](#) Instagram: panini_500bc.

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Henneh Kyereh Kwaku is from Gonasua in the Bono Region of Ghana. He is the author of *Revolution of the Scavengers*, selected by Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani for the APBF New Generation African Poets Chapbook Series. He's an editor for [@WildPine_Poetry](#): an Instagram-based zine, the Contemporary Ghanaian Writers Series (CGWS), *Olongo Africa*, & the Rev/host of *Church of Poetry* on Twitter Spaces. His poems and hybrids have appeared/forthcoming in *World Literature Today*, *Poetry Society of America*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Lohve*, *Agbowó*, *Tampered Press*, *Praxis Magazine*, *IceFloe Press*, *Random Photo Journal*, *Lunaris Review*, *CGWS*, *New South Journal*, *All Ghana: A Stage*, *Resilience*, *Olongo Africa*, *Eremitic Poetry* & elsewhere. Kwaku is currently pursuing an MPhil in Health Education at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Say hi to him on Twitter/IG: [@kwaku_kyereh](#).

Poet, writer and lover of real human stories, **Mohammed U. Yusuf**, a fellow whose poetry is inspired by everyday life happenings and experiences, attempts to speak to and for anyone whose shade of story is captured in his thoughts and writings. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Olongo Africa Journal*, *Rosey Ravelston Books*, *Literary Garland*, *The Shallow Tales Review* and elsewhere. He loves to indulge in healthy conversations, listen to Radio dramas or enjoy the gift of his silence.

Olayioye Paul Bamidele is a Plateau based writer and a student of Mass Communication. He has passion for writing and, also writes poems, plays, and essays. His passion for the right of the citizens and hatred for child abuse inspired him more to write. His work has appeared or forthcoming in *Pawner*, *Atmosphere*, *Breakbread*, *Sugarcane*, *SpillWord*, and *Lunaris Review*.

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Temidayo Oyeniran is a Nigerian artist and curator, currently based in Hanover, Germany. In his artworks he incorporates multi-faceted experiences and images, based on spirituality, culture, and the reality of living in different worlds. He has worked on several exhibitions, including *A Spiritual Journey – Stories in Black and White* (2020) and *Whispers in the Shelves* (2022).

Zaynab Bobi, from Bobi, Niger State, is a Nigerian writer, digital artist, and a photographer. She is a finalist of the voice of peace anthology, the treasurer Hilltop creative art, Abuja branch and member of poetry club Udus. Zainab is a student of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto studying medical laboratory science. Her works are published and forthcoming in *Kalahari Review*, *Blue Marble Review*, *Slegdehammer Lit*, *Praxis Mag*, *WRR*, *Anti-Heroin Chi*, *Barren Magazine*, *Type House Literary Magazine*, *Ice Floe Press*, *B'K*, *Rigorous Magazine*, *Salamander Ink*, *Acropolis Journals*, *Olit Magazine*, *The Shallow Tales Review* among others.

CALL FOR SUBMISSION

Art is sudden, almost forceful in creation; its offerings are subtle, but never transient. –

Dami Lare

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Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing. – Benjamin

Franklin