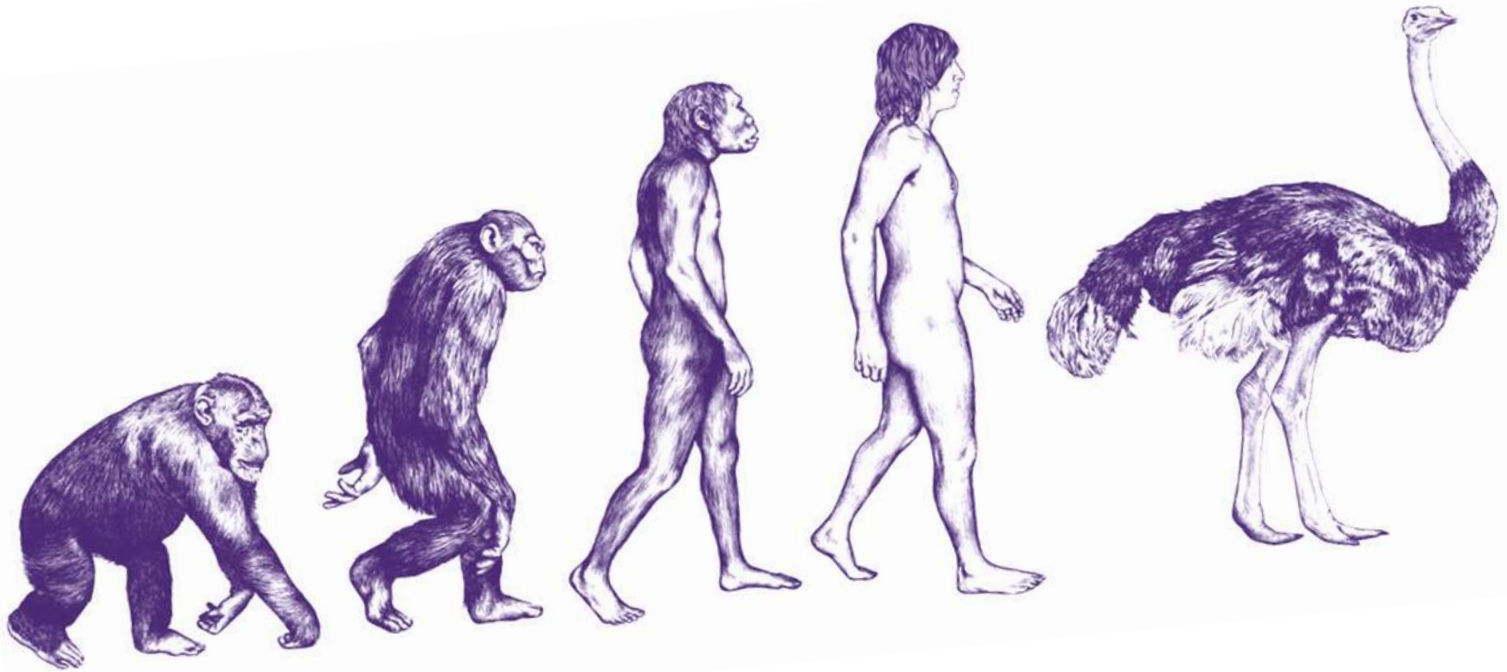


# saraba



## TECH.NO.LOGY

TE.Ki.Na.LOGi  
TECHNOLOGIA

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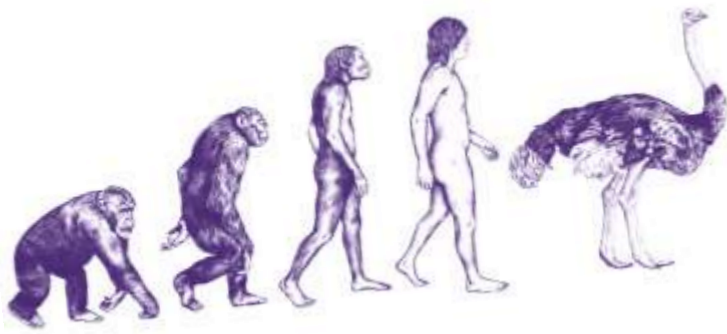
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*Creating unending voices*

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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

We think of technology as a basket of broken eggs, which must hatch into chicks. Our contemplation is that we must accept disadvantage as advantage, that we must lead ourselves into a den of a lion, and sleep close to its mane.

The starting point was an identification of eternity. It's difficult to agree with James Blunt: "Forever is just a minute to me." For, in the initial analysis, technology is to us what a mustard seed is to a sea. There is, we beg, no specificity to an outlook on technology.

But what does an unwholesome consideration entail? How can we write about change that is constantly changing? How can we find a definition for new renewed newly? We find that, in writing about technology, we are writing about the world; not as it is, or as it was, but as it was, is, and would be.

There is, in a connected wondering, the speculation that technology is the art of witchcraft, wizardry. This tells us, in very clear and precise terms, that what we indulged in is as big as magic and probably bigger.

So, magic is experienced for instance, in Olofinlua's tribute to her computers, in the tons of morality in Ekine's rendering of Nigerian social media, in Iduma's award-winning story of a Facebookish expression of humanness. And we see this hexing realism in Ifedigbo's story where he seems to question the point of intersection between on-screen and real life. If this is unsatisfactory, Olusolape stops at 2020 to simulate what marital disagreement might look like.

But there is more - Ajayi's *Calling Credit*, as much technology as poetry; Toye's short story of technological memory. And more.

What must ask you - how big are your eyes? Technology, being an ocean, can fill your bucket and drown you while you fetch. But you should, we plead, find that you are in technology as it is in you - that you are this issue of Saraba, that what we have tried to do is chart your life, its evolution, and how its evolution is possibly its devolution.

And in our usual practice, we did not go far to sound these depths. There is, as you know, talent within reach: young, emerging writers, with limitless ambition.

This is technology, we hope, within reach.

### E.I. & D.A.

*Ile-Ife/Enugu, Nigeria*  
November 2010



## WRITING AND PUBLISHING IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

*Myne Whitman*

---

*Myne Whitman tells the pros and cons of self-publishing, social networking, and all their in-betweens*

It was August 2009. I had decided to start writing full time a few months earlier. I had joined a writing group and somebody suggested blogging. Since then, my blog has proved indispensable. I had started by sharing my work-in-progress and as feedback poured in, I was encouraged and inspired to continue. I love being read and that is the opportunity I appreciate most of all from blogging. Since I want to get better, blogging is the perfect way to sample a variety of opinion. Not all criticism is constructive, of course, and it is helpful that I can discuss these comments with my writing group. I have also taken part in several writers' blogfests, which are useful not only because of the writing involved but the critique from fellow writer-bloggers. This way I've received professional feedback on my writing exercises, scenes from my WIP, and short story drafts.

In addition to my writing group and blogging, I polished my writing craft and style through freely available online writing courses. The critique from my writing group showed that they were taking effect on my work. Soon, I wrote 'The End' to my WIP, which had grown from a novella to a complete manuscript, and I began to shop for publishers. I queried traditional publishers in the United States but their replies showed that they preferred a story set in the US, which was their major market or if it had to be African, then literary fiction. I really wanted to tell a contemporary Nigerian story which Nigerians would love, something simple and easy to read. So I looked to Nigeria. But there were not that many publishers and the few I discovered appeared resource constrained.

So I began to study alternative means of publishing. I researched Lulu – whom I actually used for an initial eBook – Authorhouse, and other so-called Vanity Presses. I kept an open mind as I read the testimonials of those who had used them in the recent past. I found that most of the successful ones were full-time writers and they'd had a prior audience before self-publishing. As both of these factors described me too, I saw that this avenue was worth a try. Others factors I considered included the fact that the publishing world has begun to come to terms with the internet age and self publishing was becoming a valid choice of getting books to an audience. The print-on-demand technology and the advent of eBooks and e-readers like kindles and Nooks meant that the cost of producing books were no longer too exorbitant for an individual.

My decision was made when I considered my blog followers. Most of them had been reading *A Heart to Mend* as excerpts on my blog and I wanted to give them a chance to read the whole story. I also found out that most publishers would not accept a manuscript that had been published online. I knew that this was just a first outing and there were several more stories to come. So I said, traditional publishers could come later if necessary, self-publishing it is! My research had shown that I needed a way to take some of the burden off and I chose AuthorHouse because they assign an author a production team. I also liked that they had access to the major retailers in America, Europe and the UK and a lot of author resources to guide one through the stages of marketing and publicity.

The main advantage of self-publishing for me is that as the author, I have full control over the content, design, and marketing of my book. I also decide when it goes to press and I retain all the publication and subsidiary rights. Thus, I was free to penetrate a niche market like Nigeria, which a commercial publisher would have ignored. (I know of several books by Nigerians, set and written in Nigeria but published in the UK or USA, which are yet to be distributed in Nigeria). I also believe that my book had a greater chance of success because I was very committed to promoting



it, more than say, a publisher who has hundreds of other titles. In terms of sales, *A Heart to Mend* has been doing relatively well and I get most of the net revenue. I want to point out that apart from the commercial success, there's also that deep satisfaction of knowing your creative work is out there making and contributing to conversation. *A Heart to Mend* was published in December 2009 and I am always amazed by the number of people who have read the book from all around the world.

On the flip side, self-publishing is expensive and requires a capital outlay to begin with rather than an advance you may receive from a traditional publisher. Even when my book came out, I had to invest further time and money in the publicity and marketing. If I had been published traditionally, I could've left all that to the agents and publishers and gone back to my next project. Not so with self-publishing. I had to put in a lot of effort and energy to get *A Heart to Mend* buzzing. A hurdle to be aware of is that a lot of media organizations still do not review, distribute or feature self-published books.

You can understand why I will always be grateful for the vehicle the internet provides to a writer and published author like me to get my book out there. Setting up an active blog and publishing my book has served a double purpose for me; finding out the target audience for my kind of writing and building a platform too. If not for the social networking channels, *A Heart to Mend* would never have gone viral the way it did. It was through the support of bloggers that I did my first blog tour for *A Heart to Mend* with the attendant publicity. By the end of that blog tour, I was getting requests for interviews and features almost daily. I put up chapter one of the book on a free reading website and it became a massive hit. It remained in the top 10 for three consecutive months!

The beauty of the internet was that I could remain in my work room with just my laptop and a connection, and meet up with these dozens of interviews. As time went on, I continued networking with other writers and self-published authors and as I shared what I had learnt, I picked up some good nuggets from them too. I set up a Twitter page and opened up my Facebook profile for use with my pen name. As I became more adept at using the word-of-mouth tools on those two sites, the visibility of *A Heart to Mend* quadrupled. I learnt how to interconnect these media, how to set up scheduled tweets or how to update Facebook via RSS feeds, etc.

The challenge of using social networking is that of distraction. For me, Facebook has proved the most addictive. I find that sometimes while updating my pages, I may stray into something else entirely and so on, thereby wasting precious time that could have been put to better use. One day I took a break from writing and as usual, the first point of call was Facebook. The site was down, and I kept refreshing it for almost five minutes before it dawned what I was doing. I laughed at myself, left a message on Twitter about my addiction and went to check some other things. I had to really think that day but it is what it is. Apart from work, Facebook is also the only place I can keep in contact with all my family and most of my friends.

Finally, I think the reason social networking worked so well for me as a writer and publisher is because I am a social person. During the times I am not writing, I enjoy the company of other like-minded people and being able to use the internet and social networking to connect to more and more people in my writing life is a thing of learning and also of pleasure. At the end of the day, I have to find a way to strike a balance by ensuring that my internet use is mostly purposeful and in a way that is linked to my writing and also setting out a specific time for my writing itself without any distractions. That way, I still get a lot of writing done while remaining in the social circles.



## THE BLANK SHEET: ON BLOGGING, AND OTHER BOTHERATIONS

Kola Tubosun

---

*Kola Tubosun on blogging*

Let me tell you about how and why I blog, in these few words.

Up one night trying desperately to write something, I think it was an article for a newspaper's travel section, I stared for a long time at my pen and the vain scrawling on my many sheets of paper littered around the room, and sighed. There were experimental paragraphs but the beginning didn't fulfill the right opening I had desired so I stopped. This article wasn't going to be written that night. To divert my attention to something else less complicated than brainstorming an opening for an article, I logged onto my blog hoping to get it updated. Ten minutes later, I had written a few paragraphs. I looked at what I had written, and decided that it was what I was looking for as an opening for the article, and so promptly copied it onto a Word page, and continued it there. For a long time now, it had been my best way of breaking writer's block: get on the computer and pretend to be starting a blog post. Most times, the blog posts would be published as blog posts. At other times, they would be transferred to another portal to be continued as a longer piece. This is my experience as a writer and blogger, but it all started back ...

*... when I was a young boy of seven in a big house with nothing at the time to show as talent beyond restlessness, and a pressing desire to write a story, a book, anything that could be produced by typing well formatted words on a typewriter. The catalysts were many: a really large house half completed with too much unused space on its first floor with nothing but wood, dust, corridor mazes and plenty of hornet's nests to stare at endlessly; then books in every bedroom of different stages of ageing, different sizes, and different contents – from physics, biology and chemistry to poultry, health, politics, literature, and just some really insane collection of old Readers' Digests, Denis Robin's novels, and very many "holy" books of different faiths; and a rusty typewriter that lay in my father's living room, visible through the window pane. Eventually, I would sneak back into the room at night while I thought he was sleeping in order to make the typewriter mine by typing my own words out onto the sheets of paper that he'd left there. The noise would wake him, of course, and he would come to kick me out back to bed.*

I grew up, and one day decided to continue from where the young boy stopped. I had learned to use the computer, and blogging conveniently stepped in to complete the circle. The first blog I started was in 2006 on the way out of the mental quandary of a post-NYSC year. I *desperately* needed a way to connect with the larger world before being boxed into the routine of day jobs so I started a blog as a means of expressing my frustrations, fascinations, facts and fictions of everyday life, and a way to keep myself busy, or distracted, as the case may be. I had kept a writing journal in some way or the other for a long time before then, but as soon as I began the relationship with the electronic medium, it became a one way street into its long enticing corridors. I would write and wait for responses from a mostly invisible audience. Yet I never knew while starting the blog that I would one day get to a point of writing something almost every day of the year for loyal readers across geographical boundaries. All I wanted to do was just to explore a way to connect to a wider world from the corner of my room.

I started the *KTravula* blog when I was heading out to the United States in 2009 at the beginning of an exchange programme. I was going out of a home environment, and I needed something solid to hold on to. It was either going to be keeping a private journal or keeping a public blog. I chose the latter after a few conversations with friends, but at the time, I didn't think of myself as doing something spectacular. That feeling came later when I heard nice things about words that I had





written in relative ease and playfulness. Conversely, it was also becoming a way for me to find a much needed discipline of writing every day of the year, even when I didn't have much to say. It became a means to direct the creative energy of every morning into something productive before heading out to make something else out of the day. And yet I've been told that the words published on the blog have influenced, stimulated and pleased even when all I had intended was, simply, to *express*. I think that this is true for many bloggers as well. One can only delight in the chance to be the medium for such connection. In my first blog post, I expressed my optimism for a journey into an unknown land, and a warm anticipation of whatever comes next. It was a moment of mixed emotions as I was about to take a new positive step into the future, a step that came at a cost of leaving behind family and friends. Of course the first post got no readers, as expected. I only told a friend of the existence of the blog the next day on my way to the airport.

One of the things that amazed me along the way about the power of the blog was the way it made me write. Every time I sat in front of a blank page and thought of a hundred people in different parts of the world waiting to read what I would write next, a writing force always seem to take over. It never ever takes long after I've opened a new page to begin a blog post before the post is done, whether or not I had an idea in mind previously. In that, I think it has made me a better, more diligent and definitely more confident writer. I wasn't a writer until I started blogging (though I'd written a few poems published here and there). Blogging gave me the discipline to call myself one. There is much in it that holds keys to the direction of literature in the future. I still write for newspapers as a freelance journalist, and send my poems to journals for consideration. I would never turn my back on traditional routes of publishing, but having a blog has put me on a path of steady progress in the development of the writing craft.

Some people sing while some dance. Some act on the stage, and some play musical instruments. I write. I blog. Blogging is journalism, opinion, news, literature and public relation combined. I remember the feeling of exhilaration when Western Union halved their transfer fees in response to some scathing thing I had written accusing them of insensitivity to the dead in Jos. Another was a blog post about the Red Cross's arbitrary discrimination against blood donation from Nigerians. Even though it never got overturned, something I wrote about the account of my visit to the blood donation booth on campus became one of the most read articles of that period. Till date, I still get comments about it. I also remember getting many laughs from real-life friends from one old post about culture shock in the aisle of an American supermarket while looking for toothpaste. Even to me, that was one hilarious encounter beautifully captured, and it was one of my shortest. Through the blog, I was also able to raise a few hundred dollars early in the year to send to the Red Cross in Jos who were working to rehabilitate the victims of the senseless killings.

Writing a few paragraphs every day of the year is rarely a genius act, but if each word from it tugs at the heartstrings of humanity and is capable of making a change, it is a victory for literature, and arts in general. I look forward to blogging being recognized as an authentic art form. The downside of sharing oneself with an audience of mostly unknown readers is the possibility of sharing too much than needs to be shared within a sensible conversation and thus losing the innocence of one's private personality. I have weighed the risk along with the direction of the future in an electronic age, and decided that it might be worth the effort. But if it were possible to create a link in – no, more than just the desire – the compulsion to write and share oneself with the world every day in a way that might perhaps enlighten or entertain, I would go as far back as look closely at that little boy of seven peeping through a window pane. The only difference is that now, I live beyond the constraints of a loud rusty typewriter in the dead of night.





## TECHNOLOGY SERVED WITH TEARS

*Unoma Azuah*

---

*Unoma Azuah on learning how to type*

It was the late 90s, and I was settling in as a graduate student in Cleveland, Ohio. All the excitement about being in America had dissipated; reality was what starred me in the face. Homesickness, I didn't like the food, I hated the cold weather, I couldn't figure out the bus routes and worse of all, I couldn't type to save my life.

A few days in graduate seminars made it plain to me that I had to type up papers and give presentations, in most cases twice a week. For some reason, I started feeling uncomfortable in my classes, especially with questions like, "How did you learn how to speak English?" "Do you have Colleges in Africa?" "If you have problems with your writing, let me know." Already I seemed to be struggling with everything. Even the simple task of walking to the students' center for a snack became a problem. Often times I fell. I didn't know how to walk in the snow.

There was a skill to it. However, the greatest task I faced was getting my first 20 paged paper ready for a mini exam. I was shocked to realize that there were no professional typists—very much unlike Nigeria. Some of my class mates suggested I ask undergraduate students who may need the extra cash. None was willing. So I had no option but to do the typing myself. I started at about 12noon, and got up after every 2-3 hours to get a snack or something to drink. At 2.a.m I was still picking my way through the paper.

When I finally concluded, I wasn't sure about how to save the document. I was alone in the Poetry Center where I worked part time as a graduate assistant, and hated myself for not making enquiries about what to do after typing. The anxiety of typing had made me flustered and illogical.

I picked up the phone and called my Indian co-worker. First, she yelled at me for calling her so late at night. Then drowsily she instructed me to hit the "save" button. "Where is it?" I asked. "Look up, to your left, you'll see the sign of a disk drive, click on it." She hung up. The word "Disk drive," bounced around my head for hours. I picked up the courage and called again. This time, her phone must have been switched off. It rang endlessly and nobody answered. I sighed intermittently, paced around the office, sat down, got up. I sat down again and decided to click on all the signs to the left of the computer. Within seconds, the document disappeared. I panicked and started making frantic calls; all the numbers in my address book were called. No luck. It was already too late to take the shuttle to my dorm. Besides, I had made up my mind to sleep on the hard cold floor of my office.

Before I knew it, tears welled up in my eyes. Trickle drops fell on my note book and blurred the words on the first page. I wailed till the tears gathered into a pool. But I suddenly sprang up, opened the door of the office and ran to the security phone on the wall a few steps away from my office door. I called the security on duty, hoping he was not a rapist. I had watched enough movies to know that there was the possibility that he could rape me, strangle and disposed of my body. As soon I finished the call, I ran back to the office and hurriedly locked the door. I couldn't afford to be met alone in an isolated building. A few minutes later, he knocked on the door. My eyes were red. I recounted



what happened, hoping that he was techno savvy. He sat down and clicked on several icons on the computer.

Nothing came up. He asked if I had saved anything. I said no, and he spent the next thirty minutes trying to trace my document. At the end, he shook his head and said, "I'm sorry ma'am, can't find it." He suggested I wait till 8am when the computer technicians would be around. My paper was due at 8am before my mini exam presentation for 8:05am.

The look of remorse hung on his face, as if he was responsible for the disappearance of my 20 paged document. I told him it was alright, biting my lower lip. He walked me to my dorm, then gave me his private number and asked me to call him as soon as I was up, so that he could get the computer technicians to the office and attempt retrieving the material. I stayed up till it was close to 7:00 am, brushed my teeth, take a quick shower dressed and headed to campus. My supervisor was already in the office. I asked her to help me. We tried, nothing happened. I eventually called the security man. He appeared almost immediately with a slim Indian student. Five minutes to 8:00a.m.

Nothing. I ran out without saying a word to any of them and raced to my class. As soon as I stepped into class, the room was already full. I walked up to my Professor to narrate my story, and was almost whispering to him. He glared at me and frowned, then spoke up, as if to say "speak up!" I felt he was deliberately too loud because our dialogue attracted the attention of my classmates. Some of them clustered around us either waiting to ask their own questions or curious to hear my story. But I could hear them in my head. They were laughing. Their questions invaded my head. "How did you learn English?" "Do you have colleges in Africa?" "Let me know if you help need with your writing." I could swear I saw a blanket of incompetence descend on me. Added to the blanket was an echo of "You can't speak English, you can't write English and you can't TYPE!" I held back the tears, and clenched my fist. I had to prove them wrong.



# TYPOGRAPHIC



Vladstue

VLAD GERASIMOV



## TECHNOLOGY AND PUBLISHING

*Chiedu Ifeozo*

---

*Chiedu writes of the coming future and the changing now.*

Is reading without the experience of physically printed pages, still reading?

The iPad was released recently and although it is certainly not the first device to offer an eBook reader, it did allow an important question to be raised once more, “What is the relationship between technology and publishing?”

Technology has always moved at break neck speed, nothing really stays the same, and the boundary of limitations is consistently being pushed. EBook readers began as a niche device, only purchased by serious enthusiasts. Book lovers still loved the idea of collecting physical books, in an actual library. However this year has seen an explosion of devices that can technically be placed in this category. The Nook by Barnes and noble, and the Kindle 2 by Amazon, have been joined by the iPad, hp slate, joo joo and the Beobook neo reader offered by Booksng here in Nigeria. The iPad, hp slate and the joo joo, introduce the idea of doing other things with the device other than just reading eBooks, like playing games and browsing the web. The design of e-ink displays, which mimic the look of paper and is less strenuous on the eyes, has also increased the adopters of reading through this medium

EBooks have been around for a while, although there were many problems with the format, firstly it had an expensive entry level cost for an eBook reader device; also most devices only did the one thing, display eBooks. This didn't seem to interest too many consumers strongly though the eBook market continued to grow little by little, people still stuck to reading physical books or eBooks on their laptops. EBooks are generally cheaper than their physical alternatives, some even used it as an opportunity to sample a book, say, from a first time author, before deciding whether to buy a paperback version or not.

The music sector faced the same technological challenges, and has managed to see it through. But music isn't the same as books, and it would be interesting to see what happens with eBooks. The music sector battled with creating a stable platform for monetizing the advantages of technology, as well as finding a way to deal with the multitude of problems that same platform brings. Technology helped many independent musicians to find a platform to present their work, good or bad; everyone had access to that same opportunity. I think that's a good thing, it puts the power in the hands of the listener to decide whom they would listen to, against the traditional method of listening only to whom the record labels had selected as a great investment of their time and money. The iBooks store hopes to mimic the success of the iTunes store; however I don't know what to make of restricting books bought from the iBooks store to only being read on the iPad. Other online retailers like Amazon have been doing well and the eBook portion of the market is set to rise with the introduction of these new devices according to stats by JP Morgan.

The publishing sector has largely remained a traditional process, taking advantage only of technological advancements in printing and graphics design. In an age of information at the speed of thought, we now have a world of writers, thinkers, and opinionated individuals, scattered all over the internet. Technology has now made it a lot easier to share our thoughts through social networking and blogging. Publishers have become





inundated with manuscripts by so many writers with the belief that their work is indeed worthy to be published. Obviously publishers are very careful about which project they embark on, so it is impossible to see to all these manuscripts and all these writers, leaving many to fall back on technology through self-publishing. Many first time writers like me have taken advantage of this route to getting our books out there, and rely heavily on technology to assist us.

It's obvious that one advantage that publishing can utilize is in the aspect of raising awareness of the books they have printed. This needs to be done in a consistent manner using as many multimedia mediums as possible. It's free, and its available to traditional publishers as well as self-publishers, everyone has equal opportunities to be creative with their marketing schemes. It's a bit more than just having a website; it's about creating a connection with potential readers. It's about trying to convert as many people as possible into readers. This is important, because as stated on many sites, the reading culture in many societies has steadily declined. This is true, but it makes understanding the potential market of readers even more important. The publishers may publish what they feel the public would be interested in reading, what they feel is the best work, but it is obvious that in today's world the reader is faced with a lot of options and the publishers need to put more effort into trying to attract their attention. Book sales are down, and many independent bookshops are closing up, publishing may be facing a crisis, and I think the use of technology should be considered as an option, rather than scorned as a medium for the propagation of mediocrity.

Online publishing of eBooks allows more people to become involved in the publishing sector, and in my opinion gets more people reading. The question is does it matter on what platform they are accessing the books, in both cases what you are actually doing is reading. Physical books would always have their appeal to some, there are many things you can do with a physical book that you can do with an eBook, one of the most important to me, is that you cannot donate an eBook to a library after you are done with it. eBooks however allow for easier and cheaper distribution of your book, creating opportunities for publishes to make better profits. This becomes important in the current business situation the sector finds itself in.

For me publishers need to utilize both physical books and eBooks. There are some books I would always want a physical copy of, but I'll still buy eBooks. eBooks may cater to a different audience, and it's a group that publishers really shouldn't be ignoring. Sites like booksng.com and najjareads.com are already doing a great job selling both physical books and eBooks, and I think that publishers need to either cooperate with them or start doing the same on their own sites.

The future beckons.



## MY HUNDREDTH FRIEND

*Sylvia Nze Ifedigbo*

Barely two weeks after I finally succumbed to Chima's pressure to create an account on the site, I got my hundredth friend request. Before creating the account, it had been a running battle with my internet savvy younger brother whose sight the doctors said is deteriorating because he was always staring at a computer screen without his medicated glasses.

"Look, facebook is the in thing now o." He would say without lifting his face from his laptop which is usually balanced on his laps. "Every one is on facebook. You better sign up and join the rest of the world"

When I peep into the screen from behind his neck, I see a bluish page with many faces. Tiny pictures of people that look like passports cut into two. I imagined that it was the many faces that gave the site the name facebook. That it was a collection of faces, a place where you showed the rest of the world what your face looked like. It was thus not for me I imagined. The scar above my left eye wasn't something I thought the rest of the world should see. So I thought It was wiser to stay away. But I did not let Chima know about this. Instead I told him I was too old for such frivolities. That facebook was for jobless youngsters like him. That I would rather be reading a novel or watching a movie than wasting my time looking at peoples faces.

"Its not so" he disagreed on one such days in a voice laden with concern like a priest admonishing you in the confessional. "Do you know Obama is on facebook?"

"Is that so?" I asked surprised that the new American president whose speeches inspire me a lot was also on the site. "So what really do you guys do there?" I was silently glad Chima was facing his laptop. The look of embarrassment on my face would have made him laugh out loud.

"You meet new friends, connect with old friends. Read interesting stuffs and chat"

"So you chat on facebook?"

"Yes of course. In fact I prefer facebook chat to any other chat room online" he said his eyes coming alive with excitement. "See for example, I have been chatting with this lady." He raised his hands off the keyboard and pointed to the picture of a woman on the screen. She was blonde and the wrinkles on her face reminded me of Nene, our grandmother who Daddy said should be near eighty. No one was sure of her age because Daddy said there were no birth registers when she was born.

"What are you doing with such an old woman?" I had asked.

"Ah no," he dismissed my concern with a wave of the hand. "She is not old. She is just eighteen."

"Eighteen? My voice had risen slightly.

"Yes of course, it's on her profile. You want me to show you?"

I shook my head but he must have sensed that I was not convinced so he added. "Don't mind the picture o. That's the picture of her mentor Gladys Forester the movie star. You know her right? She died last week of lung cancer. She put it up as a sign of respect."

"So what are you guys chatting about?" I asked trying to conceal my embarrassment. I didn't know you could use another person's picture as yours on the site.





“O, she just told me about the trip she and her family will be making to India and Africa in the summer. Can you believe she didn’t know Africa was a continent? I was just telling her that there are fifty two countries In Africa. That I am from Nigeria. That Nigeria is a beautiful country blessed with so many resources. That much of the gas they use in American cars is purchased from Nigeria. I have told her a little of our history. You know its fun to share knowledge online. See why I have been telling you to join?”

I did join. It was however not just that discussion with Chima that convinced me to. I took the decision a week later when during the reunion of FGS Owerri I found that the reunion might have as well not held. That most of the girls were already in constant touch with each other. That they had created a group on facebook and had been interacting. I seemed like the only one left out. As I sat back listening to their chatter about some interesting guy they met online and about many blind dates they had been involved in through facebook, I instantly made up my mind to create an account.

“But I don’t have any nice picture” I said to Chima as we sat before his laptop on the only table in the off campus room we shared that Sunday afternoon creating my Facebook account. He knew I was making reference to the scar. He had been part of the accident. The accident that took Mothers life. We had gone to the village with the Mercedes Benz for Christmas and on our way back to Kaduna on the second day of the New Year, we ran into a stationary truck that was abandoned at a dangerous bend. Father had been driving with Mother sitting with him in the front. The impact had been greatest on her side. They said she died instantly. When I regained consciousness, I had three lines of stitches on my face which left an ugly scar. The scar which now made me feel so inferior. It was the scar I blamed for not being able to secure a date even in my second year in the university.

“Hey, don’t worry about that. You mustn’t even use your own picture” He reassured me. “At worst, we can photo shop your picture.”

“What’s that”? I asked

“It’s a way we can edit your picture on a computer and it appears *muah*” he squeezed his lips as if blowing a kiss in the air. “You know all those pictures of models you see? That’s what they do to them. You think all those girls are as pretty as they appear?”

Chima could create many things with the computer. While I had slime rubber dolls with detachable body parts and eye balls that dangled from side to side as toy when I was little, Chima had all kinds of computer games. It wasn’t long before father bought a desktop family computer mainly for him. First, all Chima did was play his games on the computer. I remember the Street Fighters and the FIFA Soccer. Most times when his friends were not available, he would conscript me for games that needed two players. I was always awkward with the keyboards but he always let me win him.

A little later he got tired of games. He said the computer games were for kids and he was no more one. That was when he began to explore the computer and its many other applications. His friends now called him a design wizard and he had designed a website in Mothers memory. I could imagine what he could come up with when he boasted of turning around the picture I had.

But we settled for neither. I didn’t upload another person’s picture nor did I doctor mine. I uploaded the picture of a red rose flower. It had been a last minute decision. Rose is my baptismal name, the name the Priest pronounced while sprinkling water on my head on the morning of my baptism. Very few people knew me as Rose though. It turned out a



wise decision. The picture looked so cool with the name. It was a rather weird name, one that gave me the anonymity I wanted online. Rose A.A.

My first twenty friends were suggestions from Chima. They were people we knew mutually; family friends, school friends and few celebrities. It was great adding and getting confirmed by D'banj as a friend. My other early set of friends were my own friends who I told on phone that I was now on facebook and requested before hand that they accept the friendship request from a Rose.A.A. I think the excitement that I had finally joined them saved me from the questions on why I was using a strange name. By the end of the first week, I had added all those I knew and it was all starting to get boring.

By the start of the second week, I began to get the friend requests from people I did not know. They were mainly guys. Few dropped a message along with their friendship request. Some expressed their love for my profile picture. Some thought my name was strange but sexy. Some requested that I upload more pictures so that they would see what I looked like.

I liked reading their short messages just before clicking on the 'Accept' button. They were all flirting. They made me laugh. Most of all, I liked the fact that I was having the attention from guys. It was even better when I was chatting with them. Because I was faceless, I was free to say anything and not mean anything. I felt unplugged. Let loose from life itself. It was fun.

But things were different with my hundredth friend. When I noticed that I now had ninety nine friends, I had made a mental picture of what my hundredth friend would look like. He was however nothing like all the images I had built in my imagination. His profile picture was also that of a flower. A pink flower. Not a rose. Something similar to that which was on the cover of the Integrated Science text book we used in JSS 2. He didn't leave a message. He seemed like an uninterested person who just stumbled on my name and sent a friends request. With nothing to be fascinated about except perhaps his name which was also an abbreviation like mine, I also uninterestedly clicked on the accept button and went on to other things.

The next time I was online I had a message from him. It was short, just a line to thank me for adding him. I replied saying it was my pleasure. It was an off hand reply, one done simply as a courtesy. But then the next day there was another message from him and so began our exchange.

My hundredth friend's name, the one he bore on facebook was Ben C. S. So I called him Ben and he called me Rose. It was clear to both of us that these were not our real names but both of us loved the anonymity. He sounded like a lonely man. Someone in dire need of someone to talk with. He admitted that much himself in one of our early chats. He said he just wanted someone he could talk to. Initially I kept up the exchange with him just because I was thrilled at the idea of being the shoulder on which a man, an obviously older and wiser man was leaning. But my thrill soon turned into genuine concern as he gradually brought me into his world and I began to see my self as perhaps his guardian Angel. Like I had a special duty from God to care for this faceless friend.

Ben was a busy business man. I could decipher from our exchange that he had lost his wife though he would not talk about it. But it was obvious he still missed her. He was always travelling on business trips. From Japan to Germany, to the United States. He lived in the air. In many ways, he reminded me of Daddy who I had not seen in months. Though I was



in school in Nsukka while home was Kaduna, I knew he was hardly around. He called us, me and Chima often though. Today he would be in Singapore, the next day he told you he was in Canada. The last time I had a good talk with him about his health, he had promised to retire as soon as I graduated in two years. That the company was at a critical stage and he needed to work hard enough to bequeath a flourishing trade to us. I doubted his assurance for I knew he was not driven by the zeal to build a business empire. He was only trying to get away from the memories of Mother and he thought getting real busy was a way out.

Ben soon became a part of me to such extents I felt mad at him whenever he failed to keep his promise of writing to let me know how he was doing. I soon began to feel it was my right to know. Normally he wrote daily to tell me how his day went, the people he met, the achievements and the disappointments. He also let me in on his plans for the next day. When he was elated, I shared the joy with him and when he was depressed I spent time typing words of consolation. It would have been easier on phone but we had agreed to keep this only within facebook. So we kept at it for close to three months before one day he asked that we meet.

“I will be in Nigeria in two weeks time” he typed. “I was wondering if we could meet.”

The increased activity in the left side of my chest was spontaneous. . I didn’t think I was ready to see him. I didn’t think I wanted to. I suddenly felt it was risky to.

Just the week before I had watched on Sky News the burial of a teenage English girl who had been killed by a guy she met on facebook. The man was much older but had posted the picture of a handsome young man on his profile. The girl had fallen for him and after a couple of exchanges online, they fixed a date. The man drugged her and raped her before killing her. The news had scared me so much and as Ben requested that we meet, my mind went flashing back to it.

“Where?” I typed after several minutes of hesitating.

“I have something to do in Enugu. Your school is in Nsukka right?”

“Yes, but...”

“You could come into Enugu or better still, I can come down to Nsukka to see you. There are other people I would love to pay a surprised visit there in Nsukka too.”

I hesitated again, my fingers as if on pause above the keyboard.

“You don’t sound as thrilled as I am about this.” he typed when he must have noticed I was not going to say anything new. “It’s ok. If you are not ok with it, no problem. We agreed to keep this online right? Let it not spoil the day. I am ok with keeping the rules.”

Two weeks later I found my self walking through the glass doors of the CEC to meet with Ben. I had insisted that the meeting would be on campus for reasons of my security and I had Chima in tow. He was going to loiter around and come for me in case I got into any kind of trouble. The obvious disappointment in Ben’s voice that first day he mentioned a meeting had made me feel bad. I had worked so hard in three months to make this man happy and it felt like a betrayal not to grant him this one request. So a week after he first mentioned it, I told him I would love to meet with him. That was after I had told Chima all about it. Not all the details though, just the parts I thought he should know about. He had reassured me it was ok and together we had hatched a safe plan, one that would guarantee that I did not come to any harm.



I walked into CEC taking deep breaths. I felt nervous like I did as a child when I am about to take an injection. I was taking measured steps and taking care that my heel did not make so much noise when it landed against the tiled floor. The high heeled shoe were my favourite, Daddy had bought them for me on my last birthday. My hair was freshly braided and I had taken close to an hour to select the dress to wear. Chima had teased me all day that I was obviously in love with the man, that he has not seem me so anxious about anything as I was at meeting him. I spent long period in front of the mirror and never before had I been more irritated by the scar on my face. I felt like tearing it off, like its presence disqualified me from being a human being. But Chima kept reassuring me like he has always done since the accident that it was ok. That the scar was not my fault. That I looked beautiful still. As I walked towards the bar area of CEC where we had agreed to meet, I wasn't sure any more.

Suddenly, I heard Chima's phone ring. He stopped to answer and I took two more steps before stopping and turning around to allow him catch up before proceeding. I didn't feel safe without him close. He had the phone to his ears and his face to me. I watched his face go from surprise to joy and finally to disbelief as he listened to the caller.

"Ok, we would meet you there shortly" was his last words on the phone, his eyes almost leaping in excitement.

"What's that Chima?" I asked, a thousand foot soles matching across my chest.

"Daddy is here." he exclaimed gleefully. "He said he is in Nsukka right now. That he has come to pay us a surprise visit"

"What?"

"In fact, he is around here. He said he has even just checked into a room in CEC."

Chima was still speaking when something clicked in my head and I let out a scream which jolted him. I felt my knees give way and had I not held onto the wall, I would have reached the floor in a thud.



## MAIL FROM BEHIND THE FIREWALL

*Deji Toyé*

Dear Bemigho,

Isn't it amazing what boosting effect your letter of the 15th came to have on me, I who am condemned to die by wastage? When the mail runner brought in the brown envelope (it wasn't blue, just to let you know that I noticed), the look of your handwriting, its cursive turn taking an extra slant, literally reclaimed me from the depth of despondency into which I had been consigned since that day, six months ago, when the verdict was first handed down, with the cold curtness of a magistrate's gavel. The mail runner who held out the letter to me said that he noticed a glint in my eyes, and a beam etched so deeply not even the vituperation in your letter could wipe it off.

'Coward,' wasn't that what you called me? I guess, though, that it was with a struggle that you wrote that word. I noticed that words were becoming more staggered in the approach to it. And the word itself, you printed it so thick it raised contours on the reverse side of the page. Say, Bemigho, were you trying to convince yourself? Tell me, did you feel some guilt revising yourself, you who had described me with all sorts of epithets – "My stud." "The real man."

Remember I had been madder at the beginning. You recall our last exchange, the chat we had over the net in the evening of the news? We had agreed to chat that evening, to talk about the pregnancy. You were online before me and as soon as I signed in, you buzzed. Then you sent the smiley with the broadest beam in the lot, against the backdrop of our favourite IMvironment – the cream cloud ambling in a blue sky. But I wasn't in for all that. I simply broke the news to you right away and, God, I don't ever want to recall a single one of those terrible things I said to you. But then, you had gone blank, never saying a word. Not again.

That was how we both lost contact, literally erecting a firewall in between us – you disappearing altogether, I pining to be left alone to tend my wounds. Didn't that remind you of the incident of the scam joke, when you forwarded to me a 419 joke you had stumbled upon on the net, and I had not been able to open it? Of course I complained to the Café Manager.

"419 Joke! Oh, I see," the guy came smugly, on sighting the subject of the troublesome mail. "We have barred all mails containing scam words from our systems," he confirmed rather pertly, like a genie that had just discovered his own wizardry. That guy could be smarter; scammers do leave telltale signs of their schemes in their correspondences, but rarely do they go ahead to cite the code that outlaws their trade as well. Even we could be smarter, wouldn't you now admit?

Six months on, your letter tells me just how fast we have both matured in that period, perhaps faster than the consuming pace of this debilitating disease. I'm happy to learn that you have not seriously hurt yourself, or the baby, as I had once feared. Which is how your mail came to have such redeeming effect – taking me, I believe, through these last couple of days, against the verdict of the doctors, in the eve of your letter's arrival, that I had only one more day to live. Wish the doctors have always been this wrong.

Bemigho, you could even do better. Please save our baby. I'm told we could get a healthy baby, if only you seek medical help. Wouldn't that be wonderful, I mean, don't you feel like a phoenix just getting another lease of a thousand years?

Now I feel lighter, though weaker. I may not escape the ultimate verdict for much longer. Who needs that anyway, in this body that has become so ravaged? Not when you now carry a new seed for us. Bemigho, will you let that seed sprout, unsmutted?

It's your Love,  
Bamidele.





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# IT IS DEVELOPMENT

*Yemi Soneye*

## I

Nothing is recently born.  
All things are not new,  
from primeval times they have been.  
Only oscillations in form, we see and feel.

Or what are communal tales  
told under gleaming trees  
in the village square to  
Facebook, Twitter and others?

Would ancient folders of roads  
have had reason to race, fly or sail if  
with a tap, they were at terminal?

Calls, SMS, MMS and Emails,  
just as a talking drum, stroked  
by the chosen, vibrated with Arokos,\*  
these are the classic couriers.

## II

I sift, but all has been  
birthed by the same principles,  
just that each age gets what suits.

Several changes!  
Climbing up, unknots  
tangled cruxes.

And goodness!  
Explosions have dissolved the perplexing  
powers of local aberrations in  
the universality of chaos.

And now, at homemade bombs  
and field arsenals,  
I shudder not. It is development.



## IRONKYO'S BLOG

*Ironkyo*

*The life and times of a geek: one week's collage*

### SATURDAY

Arrgh! I hate friends!

Woody didn't show up for his part of the gig, so I had to fill his shoes. I hate friends! There I was, looking like an idiot, trying to demonstrate the use of *Wings3D* and *Blender*. I just hope that someone got some idea of what was what, and Dade just had to put the pictures on *Photobucket*! Is he high or something? I've promised his sister that his just reward will be death and dismemberment, unless, of course, he can pay me off, and I don't come cheap.

Woody didn't tell me he was hopping off to Ghana, and he had the gall to call me from there (fuming—do I look convincing?) Anyhow, I guess he and the girls and guys are doing great over there.

Unfortunately for me, my blog seems to be getting quite a bit of popularity, at least as far as I can see. I attended a session of *60 Minutes with the Geeks* (the gig I've been talking about), and people were pointed to my blog. Why? I don't know, since my blog is less techie and more personal. Ah, well. I guess that's the downside to being 'famous' —you lose your personal life, somewhat anyway.

So, what's been happening in my life? Lots, but since quite a bit of it involves other people, I can't say much here, but:

\*The anime *History's Strongest Disciple—Kenichi* is over. I think the end was okay, but some people think it's crappy. Opinions differ.

\*Nigeria celebrated her independence. Duh.

\*I got like, really, really, broke

...among other things, anyway. Well, gotta go now. Later!

### SUNDAY

Oh, crap!

My normal internet connection is down. Also, I have to deal with some issues that I'm not exactly happy to write about. I mean, too many people I know and see, at least every week or so, actually read my blog. That's not exactly a great motivation to write about myself as freely as I would have otherwise. Anyways, I'm not too bad. I hope my internet connection gets restored very soon. It's annoying being unable to download anything via browser.

I had one of those "Why did I ever get out of bed this morning?" days today. It started pretty good, so I thought it was going to be another ordinary day. Boy, I was young and foolish and had no idea what was coming my way. I first updated my antivirus program, *AVG Free*, for the first time in about 12 days (I did mention my regular internet connection is down, didn't I?), and then the updated *AVG Free* began detecting *OpenSong*, a program I'd been using on my machine for well over four months, as a Trojan. Then, I show up at church and not one person in my team makes it early. Worse still, our equipment made it in almost a full hour after service had started—not exactly very comforting setting up while service is going on. The day rapidly went downhill from there on, including the fact that I need to use *OpenSong* for my work in church. It was not funny ignoring all those virus warnings while working...ah well. The day ended, and I'm still alive, or so I think, though I may be wrong, even if I would like to be proved right....



## MONDAY

I have internet again and, for a wonder, electricity. Even though I had to go to a friend's place to have power. Meh.

I was crawlin' round the web, doing nothing of absolutely any value, and found this blog that I seemed to have the password to. So, I'm writing in it. I hope the owner doesn't find me authoring content in his blog. Heh (rubbing hands together gleefully), I wonder what kind of evil I should leave here that's untraceable to me....

If I crawl the web this much, *Google* should employ and pay me. Of course, they'd pay me what I'm worth—nothing!

Dear *Nokia*, I officially think your software sucks, now. I also think *Microsoft's* sucks too, but that's a somewhat different matter. Apparently, theirs has to suck, for some unknown reason(s). Or, can someone please explain why I cannot download *Nokia Ovi Suite Update*, required to update my phone's firmware to the latest? It gets to 17MB then goes crazy and keeps downloading. I've googled for answers, but I don't have *Eset NOD32* antivirus, and disabling my antivirus doesn't work. I tried getting a workaround the shared internet connection (through the wireless card to my phone) but apparently couldn't share it. Sorry, *Nokia*, I guess my dreams of kinetic scrolling (whatever that is) will remain just those — dreams, until I find a way to either update *Ovi Suite* or get an unsecured wireless network to run the *OTA* firmware update. As far as I'm concerned, the problem isn't solved. Please get a fix, or make it easier for people to get the update. Thanks.

Dear MTN, if I lose my sleep to browse overnight on your network, or use valuable airtime to access the internet on my phone, it gets annoying to read “No suitable nodes are available to serve your request,” very. Please work on it. I'm a paying customer, okay?

Thanks.

## TUESDAY

I'm actually blogging from my computer again. Yes, I went and re-subscribed for one month more of *Glo's* high-speed internet package, except, of course, it's not even speedy, not to talk of high-speed. I'm still averaging 1kB/s with it. And *Glo* apparently forgot they had an open ticket with my complaint of ultra low-speed internet, even though I complained over a month ago.

I wasted a great deal of the day attending to nonessentials, and finally have to stop working with *Symfony*, unless someone can tell me what's wrong with my setup. I'm using *XAMPP 1.7.3*, and I got *Symfony 1.4.1* and have been working through the *Jobeet* tutorial. However, when I try to generate the *SQL* using *symfony doctrine:build --sql* command, I realized that the previous command (*symfony doctrine:build --model*) had generated invalid *PHP* code on my machine, so the subsequent command failed. I can't seem to find anyone with a similar problem, and since my link is too slow to fix the image I tried to upload to show the invalid generated code, I'll be signing off here so I can get my butt kicked in either *Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow* or *Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia*.



## WEDNESDAY

Jos is cold, mind-numbingly, excruciatingly COLD. And unlike Tsafe, it's a moist cold, not a dry one. Every night the bedding felt like someone just poured ice-cold water all over. Turning the mattress over didn't really help after about 3 minutes. I usually slept with just a tee in Tsafe (and maybe something to cover myself with). In Jos, I don't dare the same. At least, I wear a shirt, my 'khaki' top, and my windbreaker on top to boot. Only parted with my head warmer when I realized my brother wasn't using any.

I burned a great deal of my phone credit looking for and trying out file managers for my S40 phone. Eventually settled on *BlueFTP*, but should try out a couple more soon.

By the way, I'm doing this from a friend's phone using a 'custom' build of *Opera Mini*. I want to appeal to the mobile service providers in Nigeria to make *GPRS* browsing cheaper, and allow people to legally use *Opera Mini*. All this free browsing is lost revenue for them, and they're seriously underestimating the Nigerian (& human) appetite for freebies. Later.

## THURSDAY

Found a rat in my room this morning. I called D over after trapping it. When it ran into a folded mattress, I took great pleasure in pounding said mattress, and then stepping on the crippled rat (ending its existence) after it fled its hiding place. I always suspected I had bloodlust. Now I have proof. Since I don't take alcohol, I guess I'll have to blame it on *Bleach*. And *Hellsing*. And all the anime.

I realized with a new clarity today that it's a wee bit uncomfortable taking a leak when you understand you probably can be seen about 200 meters out doing so, from the wrong side, in broad daylight. Grow, grass, grow!

Apparently, while I'm still here, it's ok not to answer calls I don't want to pick up, and later claim that I was charging my phone. On the phone issue, I should blog later about my recent experiences with *Java* mobile browsers, when I get 'real' internet. For now, staying awake to complete this post is an issue. So, I'll go to sleep. Night.



## FRIDAY

Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* is a really good series of books. I was fortunate to have begun from the first book, which is rather unusual around here. Anyhow, I started reading them again recently, and in the first book, *The Eye of the World*, at the end of Chapter 27, Egwene tells Perrin that Ila was giving her advice on being a woman. Perrin replies, "Advice! Nobody tells us how to be men. We just are." Egwene counters this with, "That is probably why you make such a bad job of it."

I never thought I'd find such a gem in that kind of book, but that precisely is the problem. Today's men, by and large, have no idea what they're supposed to do, and more importantly, be—as men. And this is made more serious by the fact that modern men are generally out of touch with other people. Men generally find it more difficult to actually relate with people than women (that's why she has more real friends than you do - and I'm not talking about buddies. I'm talking about real friends, who know your heart). Dude, maybe someone should start a school or something for men, and don't look at me—I got my own row to plough!

Weird: I'm thinking a little different since last night. Maybe I was tired last night. Women can be noisy, nosy and plain exasperating. Plus, they have this ability to make absolutely no sense at all. It really is a talent, and I'm surprised we don't have more female comedy sketches. And Hollywood has it wrong: who says the women are smarter, and usually have it all together? Anyway, before I get crucified remotely, women have their redeeming qualities. You've heard how form follows function, right? Well, hugging a woman (sometimes irrespective of her actual form) can be like hugging a pillow. Guys, no offence, but hugging any of y'all is like, well, hugging a rock. Ewwww. Who'd get warmth from that? The truth is: a woman would. Remember, I said "form follows function"? Well, look at it this way: *otoko wa senshi*. Guys are created to protect, to provide, and deal with nasties. They're meant to have strength, so they need hardness and rough edges. They're rocks. Women on the other hand, are nurturers, feeders (this isn't to say they're supporters relegated to a back role, though they do kind of play a supporting role). They're meant to care and be soft and comfy (I hear the angry mobs coming), a place where a man can shed his strength (at least temporarily) and renew it (now you know why little boys instinctively flex their non-existent muscles around a pretty girl. Big boys do it too, even if they do have muscles, and you can replace muscles with looks, charm, pumped up ride, big bucks, or whatever. It's basically a way of saying, "I'm strong, and a rock you can depend and anchor on"). So, guys are basically the hero-warriors who rescue the damsels in distress, and the ladies are the damsels for whom the hero-warriors are strong, the ones who get rescued. Or at least that's how it was supposed to be. Something happened a long time ago, and got men and women broken inside. Now, we just have males and females who don't know what they're supposed to be or do. *Mendokusai o ne!*



## EROS REPORT

*Deji Toyé*

Am I a buzz from the IM of hell  
audibles that cram your ears  
against the lull of the day's desired rest  
emoticons  
scary like scarecrows  
smiley whose grin is the horror grimace  
of a night's mare?

Am I a buzz?  
The first buzz was yours  
bearing strange omens  
yet tempting  
I fell for the tempting

wanting moonlight  
in the anonymity of cyberspace  
but it got too close  
too personal  
You reminded me of uncharted distances  
even in the double-click chat-ter  
of cyber date.

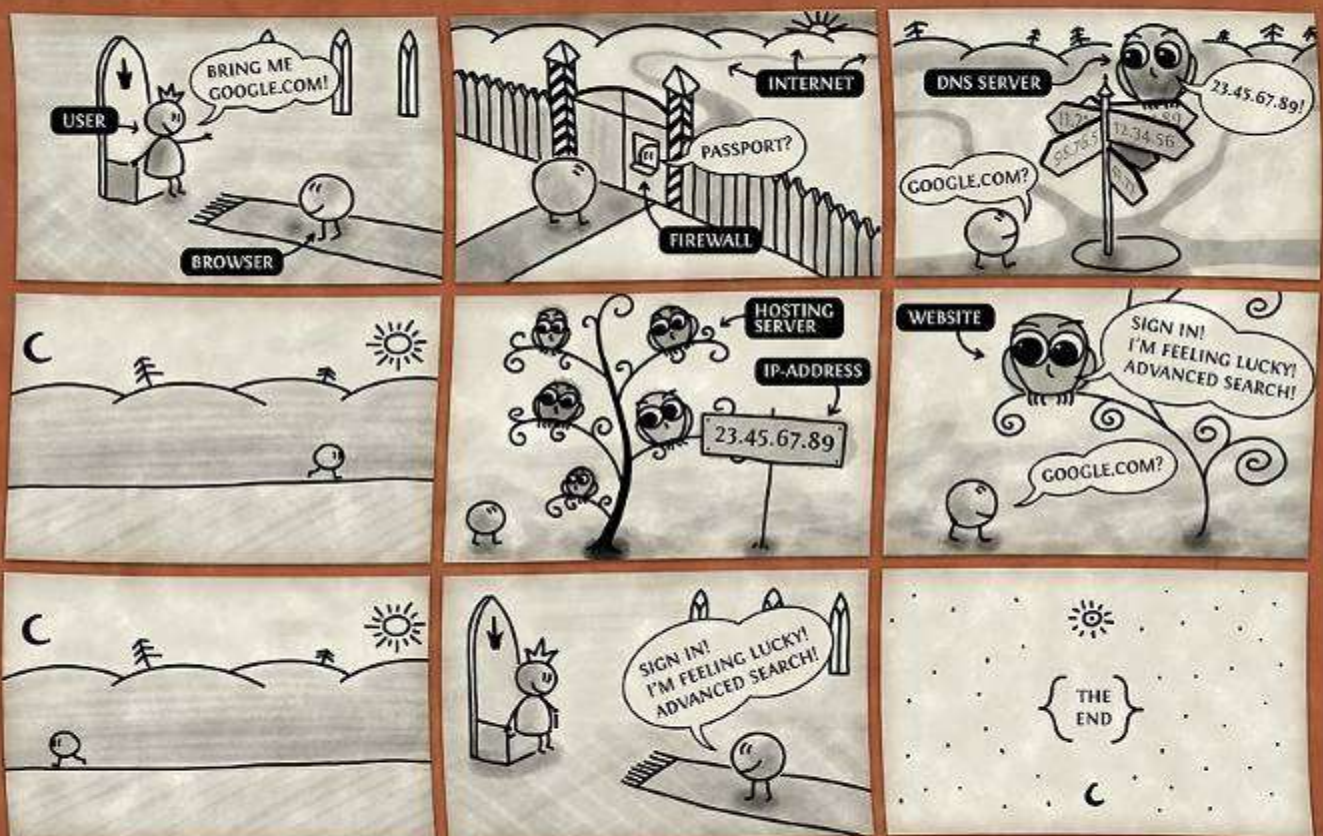
If you seek a chat-ter box  
to bring a sliver of life  
into the tedium of a weary working day  
do you blame me if I ask for more?

Think of this whole affair  
as some error report on a bad network day  
You never buzzed me  
I never badgered you.





# HOW INTERNET WORKS



## ELECTRONIC FREEDOM

*Emmanuel Iduma*

*(Winner of the Naijastories Independence Day Contest)*

She lost love at first sight, but married him nonetheless. On Facebook, she had fallen in love, with his profile picture where he held a Nigerian flag in one hand and had the other hand across his chest. And then she sent him a message, something about how his profile picture seemed like a symbol of hope, of a coming dawn. She didn't think he'd reply, given the myriad of comments that accompanied his updates, 150,000 on the average. But he replied. His reply ended with, "I'm coming to Ife for a function. Could we meet?" Half-excited, half-nervous, she replied, "Yes."

And it was the same word she used when he asked her, in his hotel room, only meeting her in person for the first time, to marry him. She didn't gasp, although she felt like gasping. She didn't say 'no,' or 'wait,' or show surprise. She said yes. And she did not want to think that his face was older than how it looked on Facebook, or that at his age, 47, he was yet unmarried.

So when he became President, surprisingly, given the odds against him – he was from Southern Nigeria, and was from a newly-formed party – she became, of course, the First Lady.

She did not change her relationship status on Facebook. She left it the way it was, "In Progress." By now, he was too involved with governance to update his status on Facebook, and so did not see how unchanged her relationship status was. Or that her status was usually a word.

Or that when he hit her for the first time, after she disagreed with his decision to appoint a man as Minister for Women Affairs, she updated her status to read "Hit." Perhaps, because he did not see this, he hit her more, anytime she sounded or acted dissident. Dissidence to him meant more than one thing, as indefinable to her as to him.

Because her dissidence was indefinable, and because she was silent to his decisions as he was vociferous about them, she obliged when he asked her to wrap her hands around a pillar so that he could flog her. She had questioned his decision again. This time it was regarding the amount allocated for renovating their house. So he lashed her a dozen times, and for the second dozen, he stripped her blouse, and lashed her bare back.

And so, on the day he lashed her bare back, her status was "Bare." It was September 30, 2010. Two hours later, her status became "Tomorrow."

When tomorrow came, while he slept, at 1.00am, she took a rope, made it into a noose, and circled it around his head. Then she pulled it until it got to the pillar which she had held hours before. She circled the pillar with the rope, and kept circling, and circling.

Later, when the President was unavailable for his Independence Day broadcast, she updated her status, "Free."



*Adebiyi Olusolape*

You: You're an ingrate bitch  
1stLady: |

You:\*&^(@!))giebfudjvcbn  
dfuierifijgferigjeijfiojweoiweijfibjdfgyyoioqiwugrrfuhijjfejigiurutyuibfgnvcbnalkO:Lihefjb)(  
\*&  
(@#@\$\$%^&\*!%%\$#\*\*&%%%^&#mkgfjpokgrjnklnfjoijakmvnjdjvopidfudjfik  
o(\*\*!(@@@! @#\$%^&\*)))))))))(&^%\$#@!@#\$k\$fnvg  
bdhbvgygfe=wo(ejwbbklsnvbhfdbvi(ifegrpconkjheopfpabheiuhejhebrfieh%^%%^  
%\$#@!@#\$%^%\$#@!@#\$%^&^%\$#@%\$...



**PHONE***Emmanuel Iduma*

His phone  
rang twice  
during  
his burial

**DEVICE***Emmanuel Iduma*

In the world  
according to Zain  
we are all  
storage devices

**A FACEBOOK STATUS***Damilola Ajayi*

Last night, my girl broke up with me.  
She said I slept with my laptop,  
but she does not know about the others:  
how I flirted with a friend's iPad,  
and gave cunnilingus to my pocket PC.



## COMPULOVE— A TRIBUTE TO MY COMPUTERS (OR I'M NO G33K!)

*Temitayo Olofinlua*

*Temitayo writes in enthusiastic detail about her love for computer love — compu-love.*

Do not call me geek. I'm not one. My computer is my best friend. I do not have this Coca-cola bottle *bottom lenses* fit to my head with a rope. I like collecting programs I may never use, movies I may never watch; I have music to the tune of 30 Gigabytes on my system. Friends complain I commune with my computer than with humans—I'm no geek. This is a rant about my relationship with my computers.

Call it *compulove*. I'm no *g33k*!

I cannot remember the first time I saw a computer. I can't. Our meeting is like that of best friends; try hard, can you remember how you met your best friends? I remember though the important days of this friendship: the day I learnt to trust; the day it connected me with the e-world with my first email address; the day I owned my *own personal* laptop; the day my first short story was published online; the day it taught me to use MS Word 'review' tools; and how much my computer is my best writing tutor. I also remember how each computer is so different.

*I'm no g33k!*

### GOOD OL' GRANDPA

*First year at the university.* Inquisitive me, I had to know how the computer worked. My uncle had one of them old ones in his office. Huge PC. Pentium *something*. Let's call it Grandpa. Old. Weary. It had many grandchildren, this writer inclusive. Everyone owned Grandpa; each of my cousins with a folder on the desktop; each seeking equal attention. I touched it, carefully at first, as though it were a child, afraid I would hurt it. First lesson—trust a computer as blind old man his stick. You can't hurt a computer. It crawled many times. Hung up on me. My best solution—switch it off. And on. I made some mistakes. Typed on the keyboard, punching hard like someone with 'partial blindness,' finding each key, forgetting it; finding it again.

Those were the early days before very personal relationships with the computers. Now, I do naming ceremonies. Well, low cost parties as I am the only guest. Drink on offer: water, juice or anything available. Program of Event: Punch in a name. *I'm no g33k!*

### HEADSTRONG BOSCO

University ended; Grandpa died with it. All my poking, shoving and pushing with it. My second well wasn't exactly mine, an office laptop. Big HP Box. Almost like a suitcase. Named Bosco by its first 'Oga,' I'm no slave master who changes it slave's name on ownership. I allowed it keep its name. I don't know but I think of Bosco as masculine. Father. Brother. Husband. Son. Bosco had a mind of its own, damning what anyone thought; it did what it wanted despite me. Stubborn. Headstrong. Box. Bosco controlled me. The height of Bosco's *power* was shutting down on me. Bosco crashed. I had no back up. I learnt a lesson: when your computer gives you signs, listen and act. Do NOT play Master when you know who the master truly is. I healed from Bosco's heartbreak. Found myself a lady friend. *I'm no g33k!*



## FINE LADY

Second hand HP DV4. Four months used. Let's call her Fine Lady. In Fela's words: *she go say everything man fit do himself fit do...she go wan take cigar before everybody. She go wan make man open door for am...Call am for dance, she go dance lady dance.* Fine Lady—sleek shiny grey, cuter than Bosco. I was in better control, Fine Lady was well-behaved. First three months, like my new wife, I paid her attention—shut down properly (*you know through the start button*); dusted keyboards; cleaned screen; scanned drives; bought her a cushioned carrier bag; shared my bed. I doted on her; I was drunk on her love. Like palm wine, it wore off. I got rough, Fine Lady got slower. She caught the virus. I didn't use protection. Thank goodness there was a cure; a tough cure—she got formatted. Fine Lady was shocked at the changes and adopted her method. She complained her battery was weak. Tired, she could not go two hours battery life after NEPA struck. A touch, she screeched. A kiss, she shrugged. She died off me many times. Fine Lady was worn and torn, from typing letters; editing books; acting nightwatch playing songs on repeat, as I slept.

*I'm no g33k!*

## GIRL WOMAN, *SISSI EKO*

A child took over from Fine Lady. *Sissi Eko*. That's what she calls herself. She knows Lagos streets like all my Documents. She can search though it as she does my files. She says she can walk the streets on six-inch heels, eyes closed. I take her everywhere, in my bag. A cross between a child and a mature woman. A confused teenager. I think of her as my child. I stripped her from the carton; she smelt new. It felt good.

I call her *Mafoya* which translates: do not fear! A cute TOSHIBA Notebook. She acts as though she can be Bosco and Fine Lady combined. I know she can't so she has a hard drive (*whose godmother nicknamed Tinnie*) to assist her with the files. Well, to save myself too; children are unreliable. She does not allow me to use iTunes. She does not let me open some files. Yes, her nappies are Windows 7. Starter Pack. She is a strong one though—stays alive for about five hours after NEPA strikes. Our relationship is good. I hope she matures soon though. Into a new laptop. An iPad probably. *I'm no g33k!*

My computers are my link to the world; I've written articles too many to remember; edited more books/stories than a mind can take. Through them, my works have reached people I may never meet. They have won me prizes. They have been go-betweens between many friends and me: ask Facebook, Skype, GTalk, Yahoo Chat, if they don't agree. Their distractions with them too. My computers, my link between the past, present and a future unknown.

I have some questions: where do deleted items—from email, hard drives, documents, Recycle Bin—go? Are they hanging in some *interspace* the way I think emails travel box to box? What happens to emails I never receive though they appear in senders' sent folder with my correct email address? Where does the soul of a computer go when it dies of old age or a coma crash—heaven, hell or the creator's mind? Do you return to the world of unborn computers? Are they recreated as an *abiku* or do they reincarnate? No one can tell me you have no souls. And something has got to happen you die.

*I'm no g33k!*

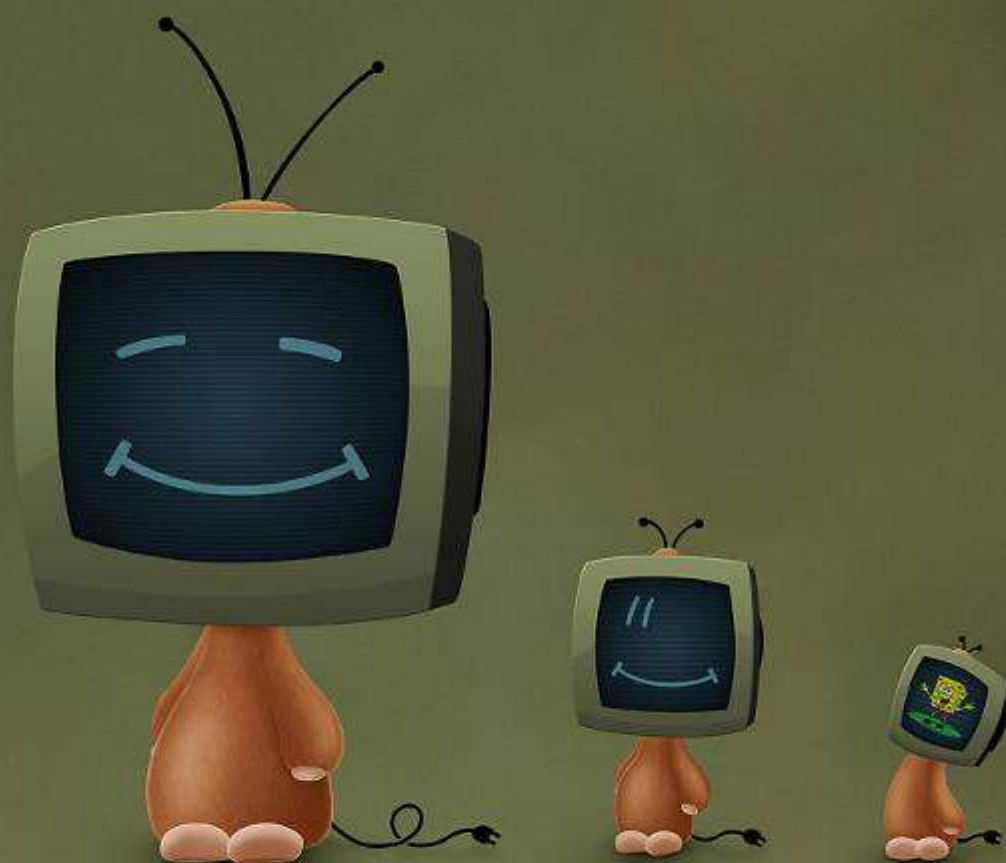
It's been topsy-turvy, each computer being an individual with its uniqueness, to be studied and understood. They have made me a better writer, editor, blogger and person. I owe them a lot. This is a tribute to them—Grandpa, Bosco, Fine Lady and Mafoya. Faithful friends.

*I'm no g33k!*





## TV HEADS



Vladstudio

VLAD GERASIMOV



## CALLING THE CREDITS

(For CB)

*Damilola Ajayi*

### I

Where was I when civilisation  
caught up with nature?  
I can't even find my voice  
in the drone of this wailing iPod.

Reality has become virtual:  
friends farther than skylines,  
Facebook fellowships and webcast evangelisms  
Yahoo! boys are the new pipeline vandals

### II

I never stepped on a toe  
or held a hoe or played with sand,  
but I watched a Gameboy enlarge into a PS I  
and shrink back into a PSP.

My ISP is Eden (hidden);  
the privilege of being  
a user of Club Freedom  
or Tor or Freegate.

What else is heaven,  
if it isn't to tap the "Enter" key on  
my touch screen and revel  
in the consequent cyber-ecstasy?

That said, I poked my mum last night,  
a good evening on Facebook;  
she returned a "buzz" on Gtalk,  
then I sent Ebay to the market  
to fetch me vegetables.

The worldwide web is an  
entanglement of bulging impossibilities,  
and the world has become  
an arachnid.



## ABUSE BEING INEVITABLE? A LOOK AT NIGERIAN SOCIAL MEDIA

*Sokari Ekine*

*Sokari on the intersection between social media, politics, rights and other relevant nooks*

### INTRODUCTION

The past two years has seen a global explosion in the double phenomenon of Twitter and Facebook which together with blogging combine to form “Social Media” (SM). Social media has developed from a minority largely “techie” pastime to a mainstream activity and has been welcomed for its ability to democratise the global conversation enabling anyone to become a “citizen journalist”. Three factors that had led to this huge spate in the growth of social media: the ease of set up; the functionality which has grown to include video and audio clips plus a wide range of social networking features, particularly the use of “tags” for sharing music, bookmarks, books and photos; the realisation that these technology tools can be used as instruments for marketing, activism and political campaigns.

Much of what is written on social media presents a scene of harmony and freedom of speech as the economic and technological barriers to publishing are removed, enabling citizens to speak out as they choose. Having blogged for over six years, and being an early user of both Facebook and Twitter, I cherish the technology that enables me to say what I like and how I like. I do not have to consider editorial constraints or advertising interests. The only standards I have to adhere to are my own. I am free as the wind to speak as I wish.

The point about social media is that it facilitates and encourages an interaction between writer/creator and reader/listener/watcher. The writer/ creator is too some extent exhibiting their ego and the reader/wather is engaging in overt voyeurism. In the case of blogging and in Facebook, the creator knows when someone has been to our blogs or “wall”, how long they spend there and what they read. But isn't this what we want? We creat our online identities so others will take a look, listen, watch and try to discover, through our words, who we are, what we think and what we have to offer.

However there is a sinister side to this explosion in social media which reflects existing existing prejudices within society along with the notion of “freedom of speech” which is being used as a cover for “freedom to abuse”.

As Rebecca Blood writes: “The weblog’s greatest strength - its uncensored, unmediated, uncontrolled voice - is also its greatest weakness...”<sup>1</sup>

She argues that the editorial and advertng constraints on the mainstream media ensure that ethical standards are maintained. However, the lack of constraints on blogs, (and other social media - Twitter, Facebook, YouTube) which at the same time make them so vibrant, compromises their integrity and therefore their value.

### FREEDOM TO ABUSE

Based on my own monitoring of social media I can safely say the Nigerian social media scene has grown expotentially in the past 6-9 months. There are estimates of over a million Nigerians on Facebook as well as most of Nigeria’s newspapers. In addition the



number of Nigerians with Twitter accounts is also growing and again most newspapers and bloggers also use Twitter. Since the announcement of the date of Nigeria's 2011 election the Nigerian news media has been full of stories of political intrigue. A plethora of candidates have since emerged. Old faces which needed to disappear have revived themselves and new ones provide plenty of opportunities for gossip and together with campaign and pro-democracy groups are all vying for constituencies and publicity using Twitter and Facebook.

Whilst on one hand it is positive to see so many candidates and pro democracy groups using social media, a number of disturbing trends have emerged which raise questions of the ethnics being applied in using this medium and how freedom to write what you like, has become freedom to abuse how and who you. To put social media into a Nigerian context, we should note that out of a population of around 150 million, between 70 and 80% people are living on \$1 a day. The numbers of Nigerians in Nigeria with access to the internet is estimated to be 43 million, in other words just under a third of the population. However this figure does not break down into those who have internet access at home or work and those who occasionally use the internet via public cafes. Nor does it correlate with the numbers living on \$1 a day or a literacy rate of 50%.

My concerns over the misuse of the social media in the Nigerian elections were confirmed recently when I received an email from a Facebook group called "Save Nigeria informing me that it had now become "Dele Momodu for Nigeria" election campaign group. What I thought was the 'pro-democracy group 'Save Nigeria' (SN) had now morphed into a political campaign site. I later discovered that many people had joined the SN Facebook page thinking they were joining THE Save Nigeria but in fact they were joining the Vote for Momodu in waiting Facebook page. My first action was to remove myself from the group and report this on my Twitter. Checking Facebook I discovered there are three Momodu campaign groups and a number of Twitter handles connected to his campaign: TeamMomodu, Dele Momodu, MrFixNigeria and Cool2Vote. MrFixNigeria, Ohimai Godwin Amaize is the campaign manager for Dele Momodu and also the creator of the non-partisan, Cool2Vote site. He relinquished his professional interest in the group when he became campaign manager yet the tweets on his personal and Cool2Vote accounts are often similar in content.

Another example of this trend is the social media strategy applied by President Goodluck Jonathan (PGJ). I recently counted 17 Facebook groups under PGJ however only two appear to be directly connected to him. There are also a number of Twitter handles but again only two appear to be directly connected to the president who also has a campaign website. What is disturbing here are two issues. The first is that the Nigerian government site has a link to the PGJ campaign site. The Twitter and Facebook links on the official Nigerian government site links to PGJ's campaign Twitter (@jgoodlucktweets) and Facebook pages which in turns links to the campaign site. Another Twitter account under PGJ is @Presjonathan which was linked to the Facebook page has now been deleted. There is also a second campaign site "Goodluck Jonathan 2011" which links to the Facebook page, "President Jonathan and another Facebook page "Goodluck Jonathan Campaign, which Jonathan used to announce his candidature for 2011 no longer links to Twitter or Youtube.

I understand that the above is confusing and that is my point. Whilst there is no evidence of intentional deception, the connections between supposedly nonpartisan campaign groups and presidential candidates and their campaigns, AND between the Federal



government and the election campaign of the president, I would at best suggest incompetence and at worst a lack of probity.

The second trend which is emerging is although candidates are using social media they are not engaging with their followers. Despite attempts by people to ask questions on both Facebook and Twitter these are ignored by the candidates or their representatives. However, the lack of engagement has not rubbed off on followers who are actively engaged in conversations with each other. One exception to this case is the Dele Momodu campaign through the campaign manager, MrFixNigeria, Ohimai Godwin Amaize. Unfortunately his engagement has not always been pleasant and in some case outright abusive which raises questions around social media and bullying. In the case of MrFixNigeria it is particularly irresponsible and worrying given his connection to a political campaign. One example took place on October 17th. MrFixNigeria sent a tweet stating that the Dele Momodu campaign was offering Naira 5 million in exchange for writing a party manifesto. Although there is nothing illegal about this, many Nigerian Twitters found this to be unethical and were concerned about attaching material gain to a campaign however well intended. The response from MrFixNigeria was dismissive and abusive to me and others to the point where he called me a “cockroach.” A section of the conversation is printed below. But for more comments see the MrFixNigeria’s timeline for Sunday 18th October between 7am and 10am EST.

**blacklooks**

: @MrFixNigeria OMG if you cannot take criticism on Twitter how do u expect to be President of #Nigeria?

8:32am, Oct 17 from Seismic Web

**MrFixNigeria**

: @blacklooks DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISMS are like Cockroaches - good only for destruction. All constructive criticisms are very welcome my dear.

8:38am, Oct 17 from TweetDeck

**blacklooks**

: @MrFixNigeria That is a complete cop out - admit it you cannot deal with criticism - stop offering ppl money to hlp u

8:40am, Oct 17 from Seismic Web

**MrFixNigeria**

: @blacklooks If you make yourself a Cockroach on my Twitter space, I will treat you as one. Trust me.

8:45am, Oct 17 from TweetDeck

@blacklooks And you are gradually metamorphosing into a Twitter roach! Hehehe! I have my broomstick waiting for you...rubbish! Lol!

Another blaring example of the unwillingness to engage with criticism of policy and the tendency to take that criticism personally rather than politically was [Chief Raymond Dokpesi's response to Sahara Reporter's interview Kayode Ogundamisi](#). (2) In the interview, Ogundamisi raises some serious questions around the government of former General Ibrahim Babangida's. Rather than address the questions before him, Dokpesi is so insecure that he resorts to a pathetic display of stupidity by focusing on the age of the person interviewing him and begins to ask Ogundamisi about his age. Here he implies because he must have been a young man at the time he should not even be questioning that period in Nigeria's history. Eventually he manages to gather himself and address the



points but this is lost as his initial response is so defensive as to make everything that follows laughable. policy on hate language, abuse or bullying.

Because people see the social media as a space where they can express themselves freely and often anonymously, they feel they do not have to adhere to the constraints in speech that they would in the non-cyber world. These issues become more apparent as the number of people using social media grows. Of course, Nigerians are not the only ones engaging in abuse. At any one time, there are thousands of conversations taking place and many of these are abusive. People who would not normally have contact with each other whether because of geographical space or just personal preference now have the possibility of sharing conversations. Social media usage reflects the non-cyber world in that the lack of shared values, ideological consensus and cultural differences amongst people can and does result in conflicts and confrontations between groups and individuals through their Twitter, Facebook and blogging presence.

## IN CONCLUSION

The Nigerian elections are forthcoming and it will be interesting to return to the issues raised in this post to see if there are any changes. Dele Momodu's followers are between a few hundred and 4,000, depending on which of the sites you go to and I don't believe he has much of a chance of being elected despite the hype around his having the "youth" vote. So far, President Goodluck Jonathan has nearly 300,000 fans on his Facebook page and each post receives an average of 3,000 likes and comments. This is pretty amazing and shows that people are seriously engaging. It's just a shame that his office is not taking this opportunity to actively engage with his followers. Facebook and Twitter also provide an opportunity to recruit a huge number of offline volunteers to support his campaign in the field but that needs to start now if there is to be any real impact on voters.

Social media has the potential for a massive exchange of ideas, empathy and tolerance across the numerous dichotomies that exist in an increasingly complex and changing world. For Nigeria, the rapid take up of the various social media provides the possibility of bringing about a much-needed alternative and progressive voice cross continent collaboration through a citizen's media. It is important that these possibilities are not side tracked or diminished by a few destructive non-progressive elements. Users of social media need to be able to engage in critical debate without degenerating into abuse. Nigeria also has to develop a new mindset whereby democracy is understood as participatory and that each one of us has the right to criticize and disagree with political position or policy and that this can be done without insults.

**NOTE:** This essay draws on two previously published essays by Sokari Ekine - "Freedom to Abuse" published in *Pambazuka News* 2006-03-15 and "Use and Abuse of Social Media in Nigerian Elections" published in *New Internationalist* 2010-10-21

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1-Rebecca's Pocket "Weblog Ethics"

[http://www.rebeccablood.net/handbook/excerpts/weblog\\_ethics.html](http://www.rebeccablood.net/handbook/excerpts/weblog_ethics.html)

2 - YouTube [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nE\\_gUe1oPWw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nE_gUe1oPWw)





## A T.E.D TALK (TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED DESIGN)

*Emmanuel Iduma & Vladimir Gerasimov*

*E. Iduma: I converse briefly with Russian digital artist Vlad Gerasimov, whose illustrations have captured the attention and imagination of more than can be numbered. There is grand surrealism, I think, to his work, and this attracted me, and has not let me go, yet.*

**IDUMA** *This interview, Vlad, was conducted via email. You've never met me; I've never met you. Is this appropriate?*

**VLAD** Absolutely. I have participated in many design projects (often with huge budgets) without actually meeting anyone I worked with, without even knowing what they look like. This is how Internet works. And I like it! (Not because I'm ugly, I'm not :-)

**IDUMA** *I assume it's customary to ask you when you completed your first illustration. But I want to ask: why did you complete your first illustration? And why do you complete illustrations?*

**VLAD** I'll probably dissappoint you, but I do not remember which was my first digital illustration, and why I did it. For some time, while I was a kid, I expressed myself through guitar and gel pen drawings in notebook. And digital illustrations were mostly to exercise my Photoshop skills (I was doing UI design in Photoshop before I started drawing art using it). Then, these 2 activities emerged. The result is what I am doing now - my wallpapers.

**IDUMA** *Do you see yourself as a creative artist who has an obligation? Is there some form of duty attached to your work? Oh yes, you have to post wallpapers weekly on your site. But I refer to the art of making the wallpapers. Do you feel pushed, as though not posting the wallpapers would mean you're failed or incomplete?*

**VLAD** Hmm, both yes and no. By the way, I do NOT have to post weekly. I never ever made any statements about how often I post new wallpapers, because who knows. So, on one hand, I am completely free to do (or not do) what I want (regarding my artworks). But on the other hand, I always have couple of ideas sitting inside my head and wanting to go outside, just need free time for that, which I absolutely lack lately.

**IDUMA** *Now, I understand you have a tutorial on how you create your wallpapers. But I'm interested in knowing what comes to your mind when you want to start illustrating. What is your most common pre-illustration thought?*

**VLAD** Well it all starts with an idea (as all other creative things!). As you might notice from my works, I tend to do art for children (lately), but this also includes inner children inside all adults! I also enjoy taking a common character and giving him most unexpected behavior (maybe even make his dream come true?). Speaking of that, one of my own favorites is "Learning to fly." (<http://www.vladstudio.com/wallpaper/?learningtofly>)

**IDUMA** *And do you believe that your illustrations can change the world, in some way?*

**VLAD** I do believe in it! This belief makes me go on. I'd stop long time ago without it. I really really hope that my art makes world a tiny bit better, through the eyes of children, who are the future.



**IDUMA** *You say you grew up surrounded by computers. Was this some form of ideal for you? Have you ever contemplated ever having a life without computers?*

**VLAD** As any child, I did not compare my childhood, I accepted it. But I'd say I was lucky. And I am definitely lucky to live in Internet age. Where would I be without Internet?

**IDUMA** *I find it interesting that you work with a number of formats: wallpapers for desktops, iPhones, wallpaper clocks, and so forth. Is there some beauty in the multifariousness of your work? Do you enjoy the divergent forms that you 'translate' your wallpapers into? If so, why?*

**VLAD** Of course I do (otherwise, I would not do it, I try not to do anything I don't enjoy doing ;). Just drawing something is one thing. Making sure it's "usable", and making it easily accessible to as many people, formats, devices, forms as possible - well it's another thing! And it's equally important.

**IDUMA** *You've lived in Russia most of or all of your life. Did you have to transcend your immediate locale to illustrate the way you do? Or is Russia a major part of your illustrations? What I am asking simply, Vlad, is what Russia is to your illustration.*

**VLAD** Not really. It might influence my vision of life in some way (everyone belongs to some place), but I never thought of my art being "local."

**IDUMA** *Finally, this issue of Saraba themes on Technology. Can you select five of your illustrations which you think conforms to this theme? Can you, also, make passing comments on why each of those illustrations qualify?*

**VLAD** Sure! Here you go:

[http://www.vladstudio.com/wallpaper/?how\\_internet\\_works](http://www.vladstudio.com/wallpaper/?how_internet_works)

[http://www.vladstudio.com/wallpaper/?typographic\\_world\\_map](http://www.vladstudio.com/wallpaper/?typographic_world_map)

<http://www.vladstudio.com/wallpaper/?airlines>

<http://www.vladstudio.com/wallpaper/?eos1>

[http://www.vladstudio.com/wallpaper/?tv\\_heads](http://www.vladstudio.com/wallpaper/?tv_heads)

These qualify simply because they are technology-related. (*Editor's Note: The illustrations are those featured in the Technology Portfolio*)

**IDUMA** *Thank you. I hope I have not bored you much.*

**VLAD** Not at all - my pleasure!



**EOS 1** Vladstudio**VLAD GERASIMOV**

## WATERCHILD

*Omale Abdul-Jabbar*

In the grottoes  
and caves of the deep earth,  
where dreams mate and multiply  
like flowers along a boulevard  
moist with passion,  
a young Nigerian Poet  
is dreaming of me.

Reaching down like an enchanted  
flower, his roots-rhythm for me,  
little by little, like the rings of life  
around a Tree;  
he is completing my DNA.

Waterchild, he calls me  
Allahberimini, after his  
mother's sorrow and his eldest  
sister, the first of eight to stay.  
Like this sister to his mother,  
I am his consolation.

When the fragrance touches  
Earth-centre, I shall drift, my soul  
to him, to his dream, his  
enchanted hope, my long hair  
wet with henna, his mole on my face.

Unlike the neon candour of  
Paris and New York,  
I am Allahberimini, simply,  
a Poet's dream, born of the  
colours of the deep.

I am the unborn female child  
of the poet Mmaasa Masai.



## SUCH A LOVELY GIRL

*Nancy A. Caldwell*

She wonders: when did this uncanny silence infiltrate her charming neighborhood of meticulously crafted stucco homes.

About seven years ago she'd pushed a pram with Gretchen in it, who was dressed in a pink pinafore, to the woody thistle fields edging town. She saw men laboring there. They laid train tracks, used cement and brick to build walls, eight feet tall. They stretched iron fences across streets, too. These barriers prevented her from walking in those fields, the ones she'd enjoyed since childhood, and prohibited her from going near that nascent complex, which was as silent as a cemetery. On a clear day, the snow-tipped Alps could be seen from those now defunct fields.

Throughout her childhood, everyone – family, friends, teachers and neighbors – told her what a lovely girl she was. After graduating from Edelweiss Upper School, one of Germany's finest institutions, she married Finn Rossman. She, Leonie Richter, wedded her childhood sweetheart, now an accountant for a prestigious firm. Her father died long ago from a fragile heart and her mother from pneumonia later, after which she and Finn moved into her parents' home.

Only children, living two doors apart, Finn and Leonie gravitated toward one another when they were just five years old. They played on see-saws and swings together, ate lunch with their fathers in a café off the town square where their father's stores, one a haberdashery, the other, millinery, stood next to one another. When their fathers retired, they sold their stores, which after being reconstructed, became Gasthof drei Rosen, a restaurant specializing in local cuisine.

Leonie remembers how their mothers used to share recipes over short hedges that lined their front yards for cherry streusel, and secrets for growing flowers in window boxes. "Tulips work well," Mrs. Rossman told Mrs. Richter, "bury their bulbs beneath petunias and pansies." And Leonie's mother did. Pink petunias mixed with purple pansies still drape her wooden boxes, replaced only once over the years, because, like everything here, nothing is taken for granted, everything is scrupulously cared for. Leonie can't fathom living anywhere else because it all feels like home.

With a casserole in hand, Finn's father, who still lives two doors down, comes for dinner every Tuesday evening for sauerbraten, red cabbage, and potato dumplings. "To your health" he always says, after tapping steins. Whenever he visits, though, Leonie misses her mother-in-law's way of turning domestic toil into glee.

Finn's father evaded his wife's consumption because he habitually read the paper, fireside, with the window open, while she labored in the kitchen or knit woollens in the rocker sitting in the opposite side of the room. Eventually, she coughed up so much blood on her handkerchiefs that Finn's father hired a nurse to care for her in the bedroom overlooking their back yard.

All the back yard patches here knit with one another, creating an earthen blanket, where neighbors grow vegetables in gardens, delineated with wire netting attached to thick sticks. At the end of the block lies a soccer field, outlined by a track where students sprint – one girl seems destined for the Olympics.



One July weekend, Leonie notices that fewer people attend the chiming of the town's Glockenspiel, a structure that towers over all the other buildings attached to one another like a protective barrier. She remembers how mutterings and anticipation, like electricity, would fill the air and charge the crowd. There would be so many people here that Leonie would set Gretchen on her shoulders in order for her to see the clock. She realizes now that fewer spectators have been gathering for the last month. Or has it been longer? She's heard about armed forces on parades, on the opposite side of town, but never attended one because she refuses to concern herself with politics. That she leaves to Finn.

She loves strolling in the plaza with her daughter, weather permitting, visiting shops, and stopping for a frosted mug of beer. When she sips it, she can almost hear Finn scold her – "Not for you, my lovely girl."

At noon The Glockenspiel's hands peak, a door opens, and the cadence of bells affords her serenity. Leonie enjoys watching Gretchen stretch her arms toward that door and bystanders' comments about her: "How blessed you are to have such a beautiful child. Look at those blond curls. That light in her eyes." And then they all look up at the life-size figures standing on a slowly spinning wheel: Brightly colored knights holding lances on horseback reenact an ancient tournament, and trumpeters celebrate the end of the plague. At this moment, Leonie feels as though she were a branch in the tree of her town's history.

She recalls, when she was a child, weeding her parents' gardens – one containing cabbage, spargel, and potatoes, the other, parsley and thyme, well-drained with southern exposure – with her mother. She still loves feeling the soil between her fingers, picking beetles off asparagus, and harvesting vegetables for dinner. She makes her mother's schupfnudel every Wednesday, and when she does, she can visualize her mother's thick hands working the dough, smell the frankincense oil that she wore, and hear her deep voice telling her what a good job she's done. She and Gretchen now work these gardens together; have just planted new spargel seeds that will become tall green stalks in seven years.

While working their gardens, the neighbors share news about pregnancies, marriages, diseases, and deaths. It was Mrs. Ackerman who mentioned to Leonie how the Epsteins vanished, middle of the night, last February. She never mentioned it again, just shrugged her shoulders and said that "these things happen."

When exactly did things begin changing around here? she wonders with a sinking feeling, as though she forgot to turn off her oven.

One night, Gretchen at home with a baby sitter, Leonie and Finn dine out for the first time this summer. She notices how women's high heels, difficult to balance on the town plaza's cobbled streets, no longer make that certain snap of sound in the evening breeze. At Gasthof drei Rosen they sit in a private corner; their table clothed with white linen in the glow of candlelight; the atmosphere somehow disquieted. As they sip RieBlingen, Leonie mentions to Finn, how, as time passes, Gretchen has fewer classmates, and that her teacher was replaced last month. He shushes her when the waitress delivers two dishes of Hendl a la Parkvilla, steaming. About to leave, the waitress mentions how lucky they are because these are the last two chicken dinners available this evening.





Dressed in a vested suit, Finn looks up at his wife with his slender face and thick mustache. His hat is racked behind his head on a wall of polished pine. He mentions how they should start attending Saint Jakob every Sunday and take Gretchen with them.

“Why?”

“Because Gretchen’s getting older.”

“But we’re not members.”

“We’ll become members, don’t argue.”

“I’m not, I’m just wondering...why now?”

“It’s time.”

“Everything good at work?”

“Yes, wonderful.”

And she knows this it true because she showed him the price tag for the silk dress that she’s wearing, its matching shoes, and burgundy purse, before the sitter arrived. In their parlor, he waved the sales slip away, nonchalantly, as he read the paper while sitting in their brown leather chair, his feet propped on a hassock.

Startling the silence, while walking home arm in arm, Finn mentions how people talked about that military camp at the edge of town the other day at work, but “I can’t remember exactly what Franz said about it,” he tells her. Leonie notices how few “guten abends” are offered when they pass others, and how everyone seems to be studying the street. She wonders about the air, how it feels like a fist pressing on her chest, preventing her from inhaling deeply. She remembers how Gretchen put her tongue out the other evening, or was it last month, and caught a flake on it, thinking it was snow, but she spit it out because it was an ash. Leonie tells Finn how Silver, their white-faced schnauzer, came home with barbed wire stuck in his paw, and whimpered, as if kicked, when she rubbed his belly last week.

“Somehow, he must have gotten into that complex. I put salve on his cut,” she says, looking at Finn. Leonie hears the sound of firecrackers popping in the distance, then stop, then pop pop, then stop. It’s not a holiday, and Finn doesn’t seem to notice the noise.

He says, “Just keep Silver away from that place. There’s nothing of interest there, anyway.”

When Leonie looks up, she sees a starless apparition of a sky. Hugging Finn’s arm, drawing herself closer to him, she nods in assent, and says, “He ran away because he broke his leash last week. I bought him a new one yesterday.”

That night Leonie dreams about giant knights brandishing swords, and a short man holding a broken sling shot. She wakes in a sweat, wants Finn to hold her, but he’s left for work already.

Early that afternoon, Gretchen in school, Leonie walks toward the edge of town with Silver, leashed. Her translucent blue irises are like beacons. She wants to know how Silver got hurt, wants to clear up any misunderstandings. She’s been thinking about Silver’s situation all morning. With his sweet temper, how could anyone hurt him, even if he did trespass? They must be out-of-town boys who don’t know how to behave in such a nice place as our Munich.

The sun acts like a parasite or something akin to touring a botanical hot house: the further Leonie walks, the more depleted she feels. She continues travelling on a dirt road next to a



canal with scant maples leaning over its edges. She hears trains clanking in the distance, then silence, no whistles.

Finally, she reaches the complex's thick walls where military trucks, their backs covered with canvas, and a jeep, greet her. Odd, she thinks, no one's here. But just then a soldier stoops through a door in a guard's hut with a slit at eye level. She walks toward him.

"Guten Tag, Frau," he says.

"Guten Tag," says Leonie, straightening her hair.

He says, "What a cute little dog, you've got there. What can I do for you?"

She tells him that Silver got barbed wire in his paw last week, picks him up and shows him the scar. Looking up at the soldier's face, she wonders at him, smells his musk, admires his high cheek bones and prominent nose. A lock of blond bangs falls over an eye, but he swiftly replaces it under his olive-drab cap.

"Because of the barbed wire, Silver must have been here," she says, "gotten in somehow."

Rifle hanging on his shoulder, the soldier says, "There's no barbed wire here. Perhaps you better be getting along. Your children must be missing you."

"I hope to prevent any mishaps in the future," Leonie says. "His leash broke that day. He didn't mean to get in anyone's way. Say, aren't you Mrs. Godfrey's son who lives near the Hofgarten?"

She watches the soldier turn away from her. He faces a cannon to the side of the entrance with cannon balls, shaped like a pyramid, stacked in front of it, and then takes out a piece of white paper, sprinkles tobacco onto it, and rolls it up.

Another guard, standing behind the hut, appears to the soldier's right. He spreads a smile, steps up to her, and briefly brushes her cheek with the back of his soft hand, and says, "What lovely skin you have. Are you married?"

"Happily."

"Well, that's nice," he says. "You really should be going home. We've got a lot of work to do." Moving alongside her, he wraps his left arm around her waist, briefly, and as he does, he scoops Silver up in his other arm, scratches his neck, a little too hard for Leonie's liking, and then tosses him in the air, then higher, declaring how his son laughs whenever he throws him up like this. Silver does a twisting turn in the air and lands at Leonie's feet.

"He's quite the little circus dog. I'll bet the men inside would like to see him."

Leonie gently picks Silver up, holds him tightly in her arms, and pets his shivering body.

"It's late. I should be going," she says.

Leonie begins walking away, but down the road a bit, she stops and turns around. She says, "By the way, what is that stench we all smell at night?"

And then he's right in front of her, leaning his face near hers, so close that she can smell beer on his breath. He says, firmly, "We're cooking things. You want to take a look?" Leonie pulls back from his pleasantly fashioned face and says, "No thank you." Her heart pounding, she turns, walks briskly away, never looks back.

At her front door, she looks over her shoulder because it feels like that soldier is breathing down her neck, but he's not. She changes into work pants, suds up water in a steel bucket, and scrubs her kitchen floor, then the living room, the bathroom, and two bedrooms. She pays special attention to the green and white bathroom tile and buffs it until it shines. She takes down the sheets, flapping in the wind, and irons them, including pillowcases. When



she collects her mail, she notices that her steps look dirty, so she hoses them off, in addition to the sidewalk in front of her home.

That evening, her daughter stays with a friend for the night. After showering, putting on her canary dress, hemmed with swallowtails, she picks thyme from her garden, dons an apron, and cooks her husband's favorite dinner. Her dog sits in his flannel bed near the fireplace, his fur fluffy after being bathed. His red leash, cleaned with olive oil, hangs on a hook near the door. She lights the candles sitting near the handles of a porcelain tureen that centers her round table covered with lace. Roast goose, apple stuffing, and potato casserole waft in the air. Wine glasses wait to be filled.

Smiling, her husband walks through the door with white lilies in his hand, takes off his hat, kisses her, and slowly says with a smile, "It smells wonderful in here." She notices one scarlet rose centering the bouquet, then walks over to the only open window in the house and shuts it. She puts the flowers in a crystal vase and then sets it on the table near the couch.

After her husband pulls a seat out for her, she sits and serves the meal, smells her clean home. He chatters about his day, his lunch, and a promotion that he received. "Now we can have a second child," he tells her.

Feeling fallow, she listens to her husband whose voice fades as she envisions a boy – her son –wearing bronze shorts, the wind shifting his curly hair. She can see him skipping alongside his father to that nice little café off the town square, The Glockenspiel's hands about to peak.



## **AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN 'ALLEGORICAL' WISDOM AS PRESENTED IN CHENEY-COKER'S "THE LAST HARMATTAN OF ALUSINE DUNBAR"**

*Rosetta Codling, PhD*

### **THE ROLE OF ALLEGORY IN BLACK LITERATURE**

Allegories are staples in the literatures of Africa. Indeed, Africa's ancient oral tradition nurtured and sustained the preservation of epics which detailed classic struggles of man against man and man against god(s). These epics served to provide encouragement and hope for mere mortals as they toiled in the journey called life. The contemporary African literary canon commenced with the allegorical works of D.O. Fagunwa which was later translated as *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (1982) and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1961). These classics stemmed from the oral, African, literary tradition of clearly defined Ethnophilosophical literary elements.<sup>1</sup> The offspring of the original Masters became Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, Chinua Achebe, and Ben Okri. And these writers continue to be chaste to the mode established by their forefathers. In another (but predictably similar) Black, literary hemisphere, contemporary African-American writers have forged their own canon too. Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison carved their own genre in style and format. This format followed the traditional allegorical style of the Black struggle against the White elements. Offspring of the original African-American Masters include Toni Morrison, August Wilson, and Claude Brown. This new generation adhered to the traditional African-American literary priori well. Alas, there was a river between the African and the African-American literary canon.<sup>2</sup> In earnest, many (current) African, literary contemporaries studied and were influenced by the courage and fortitude of the politics of the Harlem Renaissance, Negritude, and most predominantly, the Civil Rights movement in America. The African-American writers such as Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Zora Neale Hurston undeniable influenced the African literary intelligentsia. So potent was this American movement that it sparked a Black intellectual and literary tsunami felt throughout the entire Third and Western world to this day. One may detect the styles of the African-American writers incorporated into the political works of Soyinka, Wa Thiong'O, and Achebe.<sup>3</sup> Syl Cheney-Coker's *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* (1990) alters the current in the opposing streams of Black literature in Africa and the Americas. Cheney-Coker merges the literary flow in terms of the Ethnophilosophical aspects of the African novel with the African-American metaphysical<sup>4</sup>. This intersection is complete, through the craftsmanship of Syl Cheney-Coker's *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, that one finds it hard to distinguish the African from the African-American. In hermeneutical<sup>5</sup> fashion, he is able to intersect two literary genres. In fact, Syl Cheney-Coker captures the essence of the progression of African history as it unfolds in the Europe, Africa, and the Americas. In allegorical fashion, he bridges gaps, merges ideologies, beliefs, and cultures within the spectrum of the (universal) Black hemisphere.



## AFRICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN MODELS OF THE WISE AND WISDOM IN ALLEGORY

Specifically, in the text *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, Cheney-Coker creates a Black Atlantis otherwise known as Malagueta. Malagueta is a self-made African community/republic (off the coast of West Africa) developed by emancipated Blacks. Through the prophecy and lens of the Nubian Sulaiman of Khartoum, the reader is able to float through years and centuries of Black history without being confined to a particular time zone. In hermeneutical fashion, Cheney-Coker's style is reminiscent of the African elders Fagunwa and Tutuola in terms of the negation of a particular time slot<sup>6</sup>. The protagonists of these classic epics dwelled the land of the living and the dead. Yet, Cheney-Coker is a true student of the style of the African-American writers Toni Morrison (*Beloved*, 1987) and Ralph Ellison (*The Invisible Man*, 1952), as well. The journey of his main characters and supporting characters (in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, 1990) often parallel those in African-American allegories.<sup>7</sup> These allegorical characters champion the cause of Black dignity in the neo-colonial world of America.

Cheney-Coker's protagonist, the Nubian Sulaiman, drifts through various time orifices surfacing and disappearing. He reappears to mentor, shed light, and often illuminate the universal significance of a particular event in Black history. He knows of the Genesis of man. The country of Abyssinia, the legend of the King of Ethiopia (Prester John), the great African Postmodern eras such as the Empires of Songhai and Mali were all experienced by the Nubian. Also known as Alusine Dunbar, the Nubian of Sulaiman, most importantly, forewarns of transgressions. Cheney-Coker's format is to preface major events through seemingly trivial daily happenings. For example, another pivotal character in the novel, Jeanette Cromantine, is subtly presented:

"She was mentioned in a prophecy that resulted from a vision in the looking-glass of the Nubian, Sulaiman of Khartoum, a hundred years before. On that May morning as she stood on the deck of the *Belmont* almost anchored in the English harbour, Jeanette Cromantine seemed like a woman with an esoteric past....At twenty, her life was only just beginning, but Jeanette Cromantine had the aspect of a woman who had been the mistress of a man accustomed to the sybaritic pleasures of the East Indies then fashionable and greatly copied by young English planters.....(Cheney-Coker:1)"

How seemingly ordinary and trite this description appears to the unknowing reader at the commencement of the novel. Jeanette Cromantine is presented in a non-descript manner. There appears to be no distinguishing attributes in his heroine. As one reads further, more details regarding this character are provided. And these cryptic details allude to the very nature of the text as well. Cheney-Coker writes:

"Jeanette Cromantine was an octoroon but very proud of the dilution of black blood that gave her an emanation of *fleur-de-lis*, which, with her smile of sea corals, made her the most desirable woman for any redblooded man. Her mother had been a beautiful mulatto... (Cheney-Coker:1)"

Now, in this passage the reader is given more details. Jeanette Cromantine is a beauty of mixed blood. She is an octoroon, having a mulatto mother and White father. And she is indeed the esoteric character foretold in the novel's first paragraph. Jeanette Cromantine is also representative of a new race of people and a new land in development. Later in this novel, Jeanette Cromantine, marries, forges a life with her husband in a hostile land, and gives birth to a son. Under the skillful tutelage of the author, layers of this character and story are pulled back slowly. This slow revelation process sets the stage for a blending of Black cultures and destinies, as communicated in by of Cheney-Coker.

This orchestrated manner of revelation, first, peeling the preliminary layers, and secondly, divulging the multiplicity of a character, is the signature style of the African-American Toni



Morrison. The lessons that Morrison incorporates in her work are most subtle. The reader must review the historical politics of the Black times within her works. There are 'ugly' inherent truths disrobed in her texts regarding Black and White America.<sup>8</sup> When one directly contrasts Cheney-Coker's style in *The Last Harmattan Of Alusine Dunbar* with a single work of Toni Morrison's, the novel *Love* offers striking similarities in the development of a female protagonist/antagonist. Morrison commences her development with the character June:

"The day she walked the streets of Silk, a chafing wind kept the temperature low and the sun was helpless to move outdoor thermometers more than a few degrees above freezing....She should have bent her head and closed her eyes to the slits in that weather, but being a stranger, she stared wide eyed at each house, searching for the address that matched the one in the advertisement...(Morrison:1)"

Once again, under the skillful tutelage of the author (Morrison), layers of the character and text are pulled back, slowly. June or Junior emerges battling a cold and callous atmosphere and exterior environment to seek employment. Later, the reader comes into an awareness of a cold and callous atmosphere which abides in the hearts and minds of those that June will encounter in her new place of employment. This new world is symbolic of the New Negroes in America.<sup>8</sup> These are post slavery times, African-Americans now enjoy measures of the same affluence afforded their white counterparts. With new era affluence, there is enough greed and betrayal to be equally divided among both races now. June/Junior is to become a servant in a house of women who service the memory of a deceased man, Bill Cosey. Bill Cosey was a strong and complex character. Death was not final for Morrison's character, because Cosey continues to govern the lives of the women in his role as father, husband, lover, beyond the grave.

The reader may resolve that in the writings of the African Cheney-Coker and the African-American Toni Morrison; there are similar cultural, literary elements. For example, the characterization of Jeanette Cromantine and June/Junior are uniquely similar. The women are not what they appear. These are layered characters. In fact, African and African-American life is not what it appears to be (to outsiders) to the naked eye. One must be observant. One must be dutiful to look beyond the surface. Most Europeans are content with they see; not wishing to extend themselves. This is what contributed to what is known as the alternative universe of convenience within the *invention of Africa* by the European world.<sup>9</sup>

Death is a major issue in *The Last Harmattan Of Alusine Dunbar*. For Cheney-Coker's character the Nubian is immune to the terminal. He transcends death and the ages. This characterization is essential to the novel because of the non-Western scope and philosophy of time and death in African culture. Death in African culture is not a finite entity. The author reveals...."The Nubian was old but his ageing was a kind that had escaped the ravages of time and chronological oblivion (Cheney-Coker:19)." Within the aging of the Nubian, he acquires a foresight and hindsight of events as they impact upon man. "He could predict the future because he had mixed all the conflicting elements of time in some hourglass of knowledge where natural phenomena became more a matter of his invention than any logical result of cosmic movement on the earth. In that way plagues, famine, droughts and hurricanes required only a tap on the looking-glass for their dates to be known..." stated the omniscient narrator of Cheney-Coker's work. However, the Nubian often became frustrated with the mere mortals who had not his insight. An illustration of such was seen in an exchange between the Nubian and a character named N'jai:

'Men,' said Sulaiman the Nubian, 'have moved centuries from the age of the stone, but they are still centuries away from the age of "the great book of the age" where everything is written and preserved.'

N'jai did not allow him to continue. 'But man has moved a step ahead of the camel. He has learned to walk with two legs.

'So you think because man has learned to walk upright he has moved a step ahead of the chameleon, that he has mastered the lores of his age?' (Cheney-Coker:20)





Wisdom, the reader learns in Cheney-Coker's text, acquired through the ages, is a blessing and a burden. Few have the capacity to see life with the extensive lens of the Nubian. The character N'Jai cannot look back into the past, nor can he look far into the future. Therefore, the scope of N'jai's vision causes the Nubian to despair.

Cheney-Coker's characterization of the Nubian follows an old, literary tradition in Black literature. There is often a 'wise owl' character that offers insight to his counterpart's friend or foe. The simple wisdom of Langston Hughes (influenced greatly by the poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar) is recalled in the passages of Cheney-Coker. A reader of Langston Hughes' main character in *The Best Of Simple* (1961) may be reminded of the morals and of Jesse B. Simple within Cheney-Coker's work. Jesse B. Simple, in this series of Hughes, speaks in the common language of the average Negro of the times. In the passage *Morals Is Her Middle Name*, Simple speaks:

"It takes a whole lot of *not* having what you want, to get what you want most," said Simple cooling off at the bar.

"Meaning?" I asked.

"Meaning you have got to do without a lot of things you want in order to get the main thing you want." (Hughes, Langston, *The Best of Simple*, Hill and Wang, p. 130)

Simple, in this passage, is desirous of a woman that he wishes to marry. He realizes that there will be sacrifices in order to obtain this woman. Still, the lesson goes beyond this event and this time. And the versed reader of Langston Hughes knows that the wisdom of Simple is within his vernacular and meaning. Sacrifice was something that the Negroes of Hughes time knew all too well. Often, the Negro of Hughes' era had to sacrifice much. The Civil Rights Act was the result of many years of sacrifice. Langston Hughes was conscious of the role of language and meaning within his writing. In later years, many African-American writers became critical of the vernacular used by Langston Hughes in his texts. But, Hughes wrote in the authentic language of his people. He also wrote in the language permitted by his publishers.<sup>10</sup> In the African-American tradition of Langston Hughes, one may construe that Cheney-Coker was mindful of the language and wisdom of the people that his characters represented. As *The Last Harmattan Of Alusine Dunbar* progresses, the language yields to the times in which the Black characters lived. Cheney-Coker's characters speak in the dialect of the Black times.

Sebastian Cromantine of *The Last Harmattan Of Alusine Dunbar* settles, comfortably, in Malagueta. But he, like the Nubian of Sulaiman, possesses foresight and hindsight of bad times. In a passage with Emmanuel, his son, he shares his wisdom:

"He [Sebastian Cromantine] described America as a place of horror and damnation. 'There is too much evil there, son. De devil made a pact with men, white men, black men, and he eats their souls, warps and breaks their spirits. He went over torturous injustices, the horror of women who watched while their children were taken away from them. Distance and time had not lessened his bitterness but he felt more sadness than anger as he went back to the unregenerated history in his bid to teach his son. 'Dey put you in chains, hand and foot, son, worse dan their horses: entails, horse radish, onions and potatoes; but we is God's chillum and we learnt to cook chittlins, spinach and sweet potatoes real good...(Cheney-Coker:138)."

In this passage, the gentle wisdom of a once enslaved father is passed on to his son. Sebastian Cromantine. He cautions his son against America. It was deemed by Sebastian to be a place equally demonic by and for Blacks and Whites. Women suffered the loss of offspring, people were chained, and the enslaved were fed worse than livestock. As a wise elder, Sebastian combines his admonishment with encouragement. He states that we (as a people) were God's children. They learned to make something special 'out of nothing.' They learned to transform the undesirable to the desirable. This is a lesson for a son that transcends a father's single experience. And in essence, Cheney-Coker is offering a lesson regarding the fortitude of a people in the face of adversity past,



present, and future. His characters embody the traits of the heroic characters of Fagunwa and Tutuola too. The men and women of *The Last Harmattan Of Alusine Dunbar* (1990) battle demons, false gods, and their own weaknesses similar to those chronicled in the classics *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (1968) and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952). However, Cheney-Coker incorporates some of the wisdom and epic crusades of the New Negro into his characters. This is the same wisdom sustained by an African people on the shores of a new land.

### **ALLEGORY, AS AN AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL LEGACY**

Within the allegorical trials of the ancient Greeks, there were battles, conquest, and eventually a level plateau of peace and harmony....for a time. Rare are such plateaus in African allegory. One may attribute this lack of fantasy to the reality of the contemporary 'present' in African lives. The Greeks distinguished time in temporal terms.<sup>11</sup> Today, Westerners find solace in allotting a fixed time period to events and even their lives. Africans, in adherence to their philosophy, do not equate life in such a fashion. The past, the present, and the future continuum of the life, eternal, are reflected in the allegorical trials of the African and African-American people.<sup>12</sup> Life for the living is a perpetual challenge. The reality under colonialism and neo-colonialism is that the enslavement is a permanent fixture in Black life universal.

For example, D.O. Fagunwa alludes to the perpetual nature of life's journey in the final passage of *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (1982):

"My story is ended at last, let it receive solid kola and not the segmented, for the first is what secures a man to this world while the latter scatters him to the winds. And so, adieu for a little while, I have a feeling that we will meet again before long; let me therefore utter a short prayer and then raise three cheers---the world shall become you, or your nation will wax in wisdom and in strength, we black people will never again be left behind in the world. Muso! Muso! Muso! I trust you have enjoyed this tale." (Fagunwa:140)

The narrator of Fagunwa's work is a journeyman. He states that his immediate story has ended, but he feels that he shall encounter his audience again. The journeyman blesses and offers a prayer that "the world shall become you, or your nature will wax in wisdom and in strength." Fagunwa also illustrates, through his protagonist, a prayer is for 'black people never to be left behind again.' Perhaps, *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* responds in literary terms to this prayer. Cheney-Coker's text attested to the allegory of Black life sustained and continuous. There were, however, no illusions in terms of the perils and dangers that stalked in the shadows of this eternal life. For, the Nubian visualized future tragedies:

'One day a great disaster...(would)...take place...and many years after that, black people from across the sea, who...(would)... be speaking a barbarous language...(would) come here with their wayward manners.' (Cheney-Coker:19)

"...(T)he nineteenth century...(there would)... be born an emperor with a spurious claim to the lineage of the Queen of Sheba, who...(would)... feed meat to his lions, and he will be followed by a chimerical king who...(would)... be remembered for his cruelty to children and for cutting off the hands of thieves." (Cheney-Coker:21)

"...(T)he boy picked up a shiny pebble, the size of a duck's egg but with the dazzling colours of the rainbow. The colonial official who inspected the pebble did not at first realize what had happened to that part of the world on that day, but when he sent the pebble to London, it took a geologist only one minute to look at the stone, before jumping out of his chair with excitement: 'It's a rare diamond!' he exclaimed. Malagueta... invaded from all parts of the world that day." (Cheney-Coker:376)

Malagueta, of *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, is seen to be doomed in the prophecies revealed in these passages. One wonders if the author is allegorically a succession of events which



contributed to the doomed status of Africa today. Firstly, the Nubian spoke of invaders from 'without' that caused problems. Perhaps, Cheney-Coker's narrator quotes the Nubian's prophecy in terms of Liberia, a country that borders the author's own homeland Sierra Leone. Liberia became home to many emancipated Blacks from America. Many returned to Liberia through the promise of immediate citizenship. Unfortunately, the exclusive status granted to these 'foreigners' caused derisions between the resident people and the newcomers. The foreigners formed an exclusive class. And many newcomers spoke only the language of their enslavers. Some deemed this language to be barbarous. Secondly, in another prophecy, it appears that the Nubian refers to The Great Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, was known as the King of Lions. After his death, a ruler, of questionable authority, came into power and his governing was deemed less than 'just' for many of the people. Lastly, one of the final prophecies of the Nubian is in fact folklore in the country of Sierra Leone. It is said that a diamond of rare quality was found by a native. The diamond was brought to a colonist. The colonist told the native that the stone was a bad omen. Soon, word of such a 'find' in Sierra Leone reached the outside world. Sierra Leone was raped and ravaged for the rare diamonds.

Invaders, to this day, come and steal from Sierra Leone and the wealth extracted enriches the West and not the indigenous people. These prophecies of the Nubian are miniature allegorical stories based upon fact. Thus, these stories form the cultural legacy of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ethiopia, and all of Africa. In a philosophical perspective, these lessons are offered to man, but barely heeded. And the Nubian speaks the wisdom that Cheney-Coker has acquired through life experience in Africa and America.

Parables were used by Christ to teach and inform the people regarding the pattern of a benevolent life. Aesop used fables to illustrate lessons regarding morals and ethics.<sup>13</sup> Africans have taught the Western world the technique of allegory as a means of illustrating the perils and challenges of within the 'intermission' period of life (found between the past and the future). The last harmattan is a wind that blows through the desert of African and African-American life. The current of the wind may be deemed as unpredictable and render Black men and women extremely vulnerable. The choice, however, to surrender or repel to this wind is the choice and the subject of Cheney-Coker's allegorical wisdom and work.



## ENDNOTES

1. Ethnophilosophy is philosophy, in the truest sense, based on the African experience. The African experience engages tradition, culture, linguistics, religion etc.
2. The formats and styles of the African literatures and the African-American literatures were (previously) critiqued as separate entities.
3. A contrast/comparison of the works of Angela Davis (*If They Come In The Morning: Voices of Resistance*, 1972), Eldridge Cleaver (*Soul On Ice*, 1968), and the early James Baldwin (*The Fire Next Time*, 1992) with the current works of Wole Soyinka (*The Open Sore of a Continent*, 1996), Chinua Achebe (*Arrow of God*, 1969), and Ngugi Wa Thiong'O (*Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, 1986) lend the reader to see the impact of the African-American influence upon African literatures. Similar tones and narrative voices and themes are found in the African counterparts.
4. Ethnophilosophical aspects are inherent in every (truly) African novel. Native to this genre is the cosmic belief that all life is integrated and dependent upon every life form. The metaphysical is an aspect of the Ethnophilosophical as well. In African American literature, one finds the Fantastic and African Realism in the writings of Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison. There is a fourth dimension to these writings beyond what is tangible. Cheney-Coker realizes all of these entities and fuses them into *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*.
5. Hermeneutical philosophy expresses the belief that all of man's experience is interpretive and illustrated in the blueprint of art, myths, and languages of man. Cheney-Coker embodies this perspective in the manner that he inhabits the African as well as the African-American persona in *The last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*.
6. Cheney-Coker negates the Western notion of a particular time slot or period in the interpretive manner of his narrative. This style is akin to the works of Amos Tutuola and D.O. Fagunwa.
7. In the works *Invisible Man* (1952) and *Beloved* (1987), the main characters embark upon a metaphysical, allegorical journey that is symbolic of the struggles of peoples and the times.
8. Toni Morrison unveils many scandals and hidden secrets in White and Black America in her novels. She speaks of 'color struck' issues in the Black community and of White America's fixation with 'Negro' stereotypes to this very day.
9. Often attempts to contain that which is *Africa* (by the European) take form in a perception of the noble, African savage and/or of the Black infidel requiring taming, education, and assistance.
10. Langston Hughes was writing during a time that few publishers accepted and published Negro works. Writing in an accepted vernacular that did not challenge the intellect of whites may have made Hughes more marketable.
11. Greek Society greatly influenced the West in terms of a reverence for the fixed chronological order of things, including time itself.
12. The past, present, and future are not so fixed in the ethnophilosophical domains of the African writers (Amos Tutuola, D.O. Fagunwa) and the African-American writers (Toni Morrison, Ralph Ellison)
13. Aesop, the Black slave stolen from Egypt, provided the Greeks with a means to communicate morals and ethics in the form of fables.

## WORKS CITED

1. Cheney-Coker, Syl, *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*, Heinemann Press, 1990
2. Hughes, Langston, *The Best of Simple*, Hill and Wang, 1961
3. Morrison, Toni, *Beloved*, Plume Printing, 1998



## OUR FRIENDSHIP RUNS AWAY FROM US

*Omale Abdul-Jabbar*

*For "Terhemen Agbedeh" and  
All the friends I  
Used to know but  
Can no longer see.*

00.07 hrs

All fantasies must queue up in  
the traffic of city lights  
I do not blame you, my friend,  
for we can only hold on for a while  
till the birth fluids  
are licked off the calf and the  
meadow springs anew,  
where the young bride now stands simply,  
one hand reaching in  
to part her undies,  
her water clattering  
on dust and stones.



## LITERARY PLACES

### GUARDIAN.CO.UK

In Guardian.co.uk, you find such writings as Howard Jacobson's argument for comic novels. Of course, he won the Booker Prize this year, being considered long overdue for the prize. But in looking for the right, literary, stuff, you should go to the culture page of Guardian. You'd be overwhelmed by the constancy and multifariousness of their presentations. It's good place to spend your time *on*, to read until your eyes become bleary. See more, [here](#).

### AFRICAN WRITING

What *African Writing* has succeeded in becoming is an African *Granta*, the only difference being that it was founded by Chuma Nwokolo when he was not a university student. The site has the authenticity most African lit-sites lack, and it is a 60% chance of being published for previously unpublished writers. Chuma Nwokolo, who might be Nigeria's Jacobson, is the *voice* of AW, and he takes AW as serious as Jacobson takes his comic novels. In recent times, AW's blogs have become as engaging as the site, which has since stopped publishing online-only content. Simply, it's the masterful presentation of the site that captures you. Hopefully, it never lets you go. [Here](#)

### NEW YORKER

It's important that you visit New Yorker once in a while. Not often; you might remain inundated, limp and without guts. This essentially flows from the site's montage-quality, placing everything and everywhere within your eyes at once. But with their 20 Below 40, including such refreshing writers as Yiyun Li and Tea Obrecht, the site has become a literary hotspot of late. The site has *everything*, I promise you. It might take decades to read through. But it's updated daily. So you cannot read *all* of the site, never. Go ahead, [try](#).

### BOOKAHOLIC BLOG

Our Temitayo Olofinlua and her friend have provided literary enthusiasts with this gracious offering. Indeed, they are as committed to *brevity* as New Yorker is to *proximity*. We argue that it's time for a website. And you'd be sure to agree when you [visit](#).

### SARABA

You can bet we'd mention this. We have, with no income, strived to promote the aesthetic value of a literary hub. What we want to achieve is to set up an alternative to only downloading our issues/chapbooks by publishing online-only content in addition to the e-magazines. On the interactive front, Saraba recently opened up a blog, which has Saraba's publishers, Iduma and Ajayi, and her poetry editor, Adebisi Olusolape, as constant bloggers. Only respectable comments are approved. You know where to [find](#) us online.

### STORY TIME

In a most awesome development, Ivor Hartman has succeeded in creating a story blog that publishes the established and the emerging, giving young writers almost a 90% chance of being published there. And then, in a bid to assert his commitment to quality, he has teamed





up with Emmanuel Siguake to edit/publish the most standard of the stories published on the site in the now yearly *African Roar*. For 2011, the book is to feature more than 20 stories, including those of Saraba's Emmanuel Iduma (*Out of Memory*) and Damilola Ajayi (*Waiting for April*). You can read new stories on the site weekly; some stories, truly, you would find depthless. But some, my good Jesus, are without question as to quality and talent. [Here](#) is Ivor W. Hartman's beautiful contribution to African literature.

## MAPLE TREE LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

MTLS is a mix of Canadian creativity and should we say, Nigerian. It's *voice*, Amatoritsero Ede, resides in Canada, and has provided the country with a rich blend of his Nigerianness and his Diasporic experiences. But this is not the core of MTLS. It features great poetry, such as those by Niran Okewole (Nigeria's Muldoon), and Adebisi Olusolape, whose aesthetic sense is considered the most sensitive among his peers. And then good fiction, too. Ifesinachi Okoli and Chika Unigwe are good examples. It's advisable that if you need some intellectual shake-up, MTLS becomes your ready option. No much ado, [see](#) for yourself.

## SENTINEL

Aside the UK version of *Sentinel*, the Nigerian 'branch' has done well to add an opportunity for emerging writers to have their work published. And this is, perhaps, the most wonderful thing given by the site. There is evidence that the site has more dreams to dream. Yet, it would console you to find that more doors are opening. Find this door, [here](#).

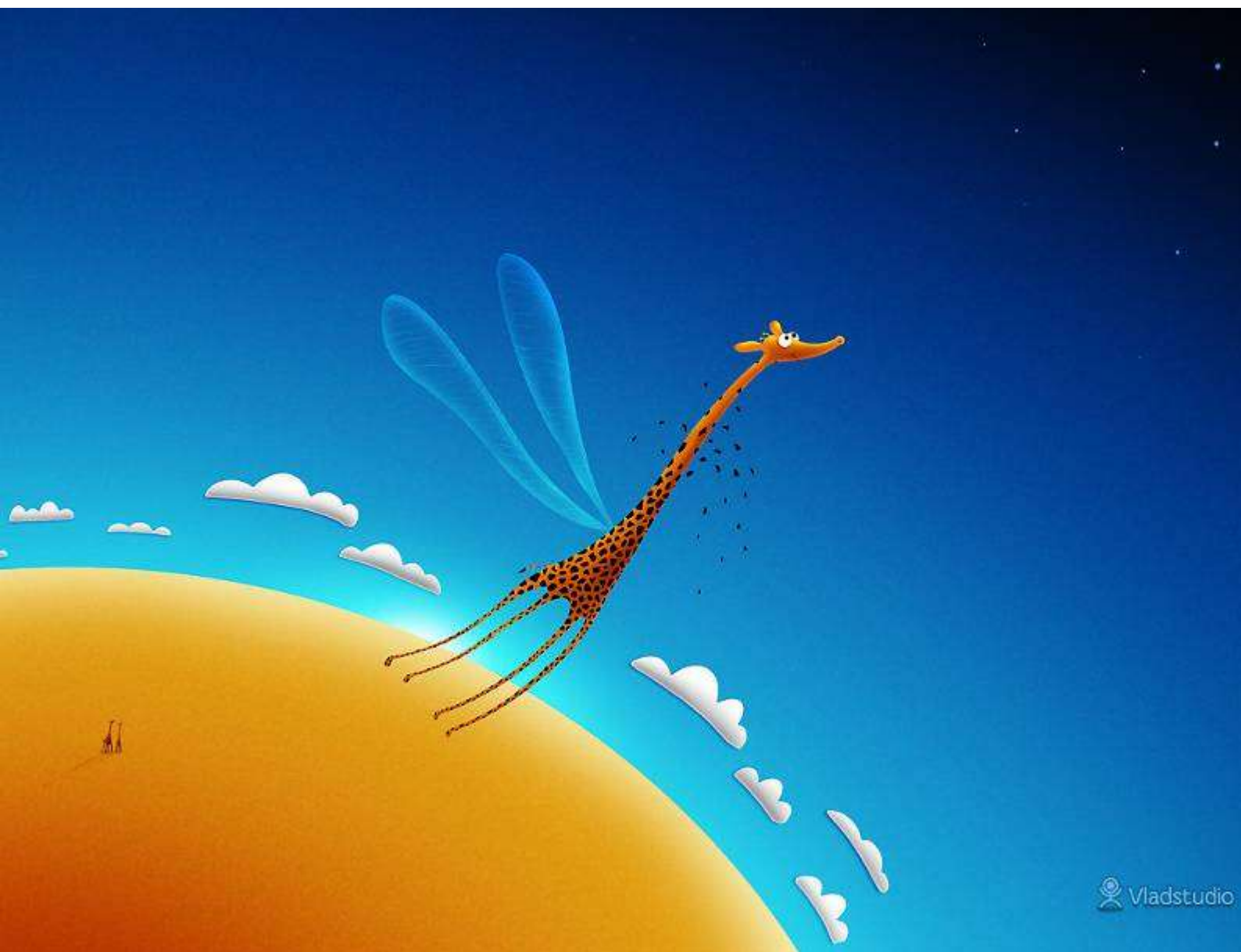
## FIVE DIALS

We learnt a lot from Five Dials, an imprint of Hamish Hamilton, which is Helon Habila's publisher. The layout of each issue of the e-magazine, the constancy of the issues, and the illustrations make Five Dials a benchmark for Saraba, and for any publisher interested in merging simplicity with profundity. [See](#) for yourself by downloading past issues.

## NAIJA STORIES

Myne Whitman might not understand the extent to which she has helped Nigerian literature. Naija Stories is, perhaps, Nigeria's only literary discussion board, where writers can interact on the basis of their stories, poems, and more. Simply. When you become a member, you might not have the feeling you'd have when published by *African Writer* or *Saraba*, but you'd certainly feel *in motion*, of use, a writer. Many thanks Myne for [this](#).



**LEARNING TO FLY**

Vladstudio

**VLAD GERASIMOV**

## FROM MARS

*Mark Lalude*

Shadows enshroud a mystery, a brooding life seeks  
feminine respite; undaunted by Life's wrenching turns,  
the churn the brooding life felt,  
a burning, like the branding iron

A soul floats astride the horse of fantasy

Laughter of derision, gouging wounds,  
a dying pride, a crying side  
Dead, as to amorousness, but now an awakening,  
a sublime and benign smile

Beautiful, as the splendour of the Unicorn's appearance

My Venus, of a captivating presence, of a dainty existence,  
resist the snare of felons,  
but not the chalice of unpretentious affection  
My Venus, allow Cupid, but ignore the destructive call of Mors

A life of convenience, a promise from Mars

To Venus.



## DYSFUNCTIONAL TRUTHS

*Ram Govardhan*

Ambika glossed over the menopausal symptoms nonchalantly, over several months, blaming inclement Trivandrum weather. At forty-five, hot flashes were typical but her physician's assertions on the onset of perimenopause were indigestible. "You are plagued by worries. Undoubtedly you are far away from the median age of fifty-one...and healthy enough not to fret about the 'end' called climacteric," contended her family doctor. But the whole thing made her go hot and cold, cold and hot every night. And, as every lunar month was about to end, she could not tell whether insomnia and night sweats were manifestations of unfolding saga of menopause or of her dread over the capacity it possessed to herald watershed changes in her life.

Despite diabetes and high blood pressure, at fifty two, Chandran, her husband, was robust enough. When he was home for the festival of Onam last year, he sought her out every other day. Ever since marriage, twenty years ago, this was the first time matters of bed obsessed her and the after-effects were too telling on her emotional state. Ambika considered her own powers of recall and retention as far superior to that of her bosom friend Susheela. But, while catching up on days of yore, last week, when Susheela pointed out Ambika's amnesic symptoms, her disposition, genial until then, turned spiteful at once.

As Chandran's arrival from Oman loomed, with Onam just months away, shudders of horror gripped Ambika. She prayed Lord Mahabali to effect deferment of his visit or, most expediently, cancellation. Some time was needed to shape up and to keep herself from the menopausal ignominy. She must be 'useful' to him when he is home. But, having never missed an Onam in seventeen years, she dreaded, Chandran might have firmed up his trip or, most likely, by now, might have bought a return ticket.

Chandran typically rang every other day but, these days, as menopausal symptoms turned perceptibly obvious, Ambika yearned to chat every day, every hour. She wished that he chucked his job and reached Pattom right away. She never felt this passionate even during her prime. In seventeen years, Chandran had scarcely spent seventeen months with her in the flesh; and whiled away fifteen excruciating years on speaking-tube. This was virtual estrangement and every passing calendar day lampooned at the misspent youthhood. "Why are spouses alienated by geography over livelihood? Can't they find work closer home? Being posted in Bombay or Madras would have still constituted as being within a hailing distance; I could land there before a day," Ambika asked herself, "But Oman was too far away and guzzled too much. Can't they outlaw overseas employment? Such distant jobs spawned familial, social discordance. Too much of agony, despondency was in the air and many other allied ills tormented spouses, parents all over Kerala."

These days, most young women were not stoical enough to keep themselves from being wooed. A month or two was tolerable but years were unbearable. Wolves were on the prowl all around to entice you, wolf you down altogether. Flesh had mind of its own, it never listened to your heart and it gullibly sinned beyond a point. It naively responded to overtures from others of its kind ignoring your rational warnings. Naively. Men reaching home, after spending several years in Middle East, discovered their spouses' infidelity within days. In the name of overseas employment, newlyweds were rendered virtual singles within days of nuptials. She had witnessed many an extramarital affair wrecking families. In the most literate state in India, despite being espoused, young men and women frittered away their vigorous years agonisingly alone. And werewolves exploited their lonely hours of darkness. In fact, Rema, Ambika's niece,



whose husband reappeared from Bahrain once in two years, was embroiled in one such controversy; several in Pattom claimed to have spotted Rema going around with a younger man. Getting wind of her infidelity, Rema's husband rushed home on 'loss of pay' leave and banished her unceremoniously. Rema is now subsisting on her own with her three-year-old daughter in her maternal Neyyattinkara. And the young man who courted her, citing overseas employment, melted away into millions of Malayalee expats in Middle East. And several such harrowing stories anguished parents. "This overseas employment is going to wreck our society to the point of no return soon," Ambika often told Susheela who was at variance with such sweeping assumptions.

But Ambika was privileged enough to spurn whenever her flesh felt like sinning since she was surrounded by umpteen sisters, aunts and nieces all the time. There was not a moment when she felt lonely during all the fifteen years Chandran was away in Middle East. But ever since this menopausal mess unfolded, Ambika felt secure only during unaccompanied hours; she despised sisterly camaraderie and squabbled over inane stuff to snub them.

These symptoms terrified her as if her world was hurriedly destined for a doom. "Is it meaningful to be alive anymore?" she often asked herself. All of a sudden survival of her world seemed to be linked to this one issue and, certainly, it also appeared to her that he was coming home only for *this*. While she hated every menstuous morning all her life, these days, even slight delays irritated her. "Can I be same for him as before? Will he tolerate me? Will he disown me? In keeping with the Islamic tradition, of the place he toiled for fifteen years, will he seek a younger woman?" questions of this nature haunted Ambika. She felt like a physically challenged person. Though everything was intact, she felt as if one of her vital organs has been removed or perished. Many a time, she felt like confiding her predicament to Susheela but she did not; her friend was capable of disseminating any news faster than FM radio. Though Ambika and her friend were of same age, menopause had embraced Susheela a good three years ago. Though Susheela was more affluent, more educated and fashionable than Ambika, it was this aspect that Susheela envied in Ambika. Despite manifestation of clear menopausal symptoms, she kept everything from Susheela. Of late, the 'envy' thing had become the most enjoyable aspect for Ambika and she wanted it going as long as possible.

Now life seemed to be all about being useful to him; in bed. Will he be the same man sans 'this' aspect of life? Last year, when she was perfectly menstruant, a day before Chandran left for Oman, Ambika turned querulous, "How many more years you intend to work in Oman. In the name of livelihood, we have squandered precious years separated by seas. We have enough to spend rest of our lives more contentedly than many in Pattom or, for that matter, in whole of Travancore." "Just five more years honey...we would have enough to acquire Kunjappi's rubber estate in Punalur...and to construct a hotel on our piece of land in Thampanoor... so that we spend rest of our lives in peace...so that we are not at anyone's mercy," Chandran had beamed. "But we already have enough to live more peacefully than many," Ambika had retorted. "Given the rate of inflation, we would be paupers in a couple of years...please be prudent, patient...life is not that easy," Chandran had prevailed upon her.

"Of course a bread winner was more worldly than a mere housewife. After all he was struggling...spending lonely nights in Oman just for the sake of his family. And when such men come home, after a year or two, spouses have to go out of the way to please, comfort them," Ambika told herself, "let alone comforting Chandran, my physical state is such that he would be instantly put off and may even regret having come all the way spending so much."



She certainly had to do something before he returns for this Onam. It would be six months before he returned; enough time to medically reverse the symptoms. There were umpteen quacks, medical experts who claimed mastery in reversing delay or cessation of cycles. There was one specialist in Cochin who specialised in estrogen replacement therapy. Cochin was just five hours away but Ambika had to go all alone since she wished to keep everything from the newlyweds: her daughter and son-in-law.

The doctor said the full effects of the therapy will be perceptible in about six months. When Ambika griped that she had just a few months before he returned in *Chingam* August, the doctor comforted, "He will have no inkling of the therapy at all. Our experience in treating your kinds of patients is world class. Many Arabian women come here to get this therapy done." Though the doctor pronounced the word as 'mensuration,' actually meaning menstruation, the Arabian thing indeed reassured her, if not any of his other claims. "Given your age...instead of estrogen therapy, I will treat you in a more natural way that would have no side-effects whatsoever," said the doctor. The 'more natural' proposition enthused Ambika and the treatment began right away. "Your cycles will attain normality in two months time...do not worry...just relax...being relaxed is the key," counselled the doctor.

Three months later, when the menopausal indications showed up with a vengeance, she rushed to Cochin by an early morning Venad Express. "You are too excited about the outcome...just relax. More importantly...I think you are leading a sedate life. Get a bit more active...in fact you have put on six more pounds since I saw you last," said the doctor, "you are very far away from the climax...don't worry." Once again, the doctor's 'climax' thing, in place of the word 'climacteric,' was nauseating. Ambika wondered whether she was consulting an ideal doctor. For a second time, the presence of few gaudily, scantily robed Maldivian patients settled her misgivings. "These Arabian, Maldivian patients would not fritter away their dollars unless the doctor is efficient. After all, therapeutic know-how is more essential than medical jargon," she answered herself.

She was very reclusive since her last visit; no one, including her daughter, was to know anything about the medication. She started morning walks on the terrace. And soon, tenacious to attain fitness within weeks, taking everyone in Pattom by surprise, she began walking up to the majestic Legislative Assembly and back. A woman who drove even to the nearby Murinjapalam market was almost jogging even before dawn! With Nike shoes on, while she tramped, everyone, including Susheela, around SUT traffic circle nattered. And the spreading gossip scandalised whole of Pattom and, before long, snowballed as far as Statue, where Ambika's well-heeled cousins lived.

And then the e-mail, that would have otherwise broken her heart, made her ecstatic. Her husband was, after all, not coming for this Onam citing pressing deadlines. It was an unusually long mail that enumerated several things for the cancellation of his trip. He narrated everything at length, linked unrelated things and tried to cite reasons for giving those reasons. Of all that the mail consisted of, one thing was glaring: incongruity. That was certainly strange. His cocksureness was missing. Ambika was agonized that Chandran, of all, was setting forth so much over such a trivial matter. "But why is he e-mailing? Chandran always preferred phoning. Nevertheless, a relieved Ambika called him to ask more about the decision. "My managing director wants me to go to Europe for a month on an urgent assignment. He has asked me to not to go India for the first time in fifteen years I have been working here. How can I say no?" asked Chandran. How can she say no? The cancellation has augured well and, now, there was enough time to get back into shape. And she thanked King Mahabali.





The Cochin doctor's therapies were proving ineffective and she sought alternate therapies in Trivandrum. For over six months she tried yoga, aromatherapy, homeopathy, acupuncture and massages. She consumed, prescribed by a quack, evening primrose oil, ginseng, dong quai, black cohosh and raspberry leaf tea. She even tried aerobics as Susheela had proposed.

Two weeks ahead of his arrival, after a long while, she had her first period that was almost perfect. That was the most fulfilling one she had all her life. But she was advised to use jellies, creams. She had to toil and spend money and energy to get back this *treasure*. But how will she keep the messy jellies, creams from Chandran's explore-happy eyes? Her doctor had an answer for such questions too, "I would prescribe an odourless gel that would be unnoticeably wispy." And a few weeks before Chandran's arrival, she felt almost ready for him. But, given Chandran's libido, being almost ready was not good enough. As a last resort, she doubled the dosage of every medication starting from primrose oil to black cohosh. Just a few days before his arrival she felt delightfully perfect. And then her world turned green, warm and, suddenly, even Susheela seemed trustworthy.

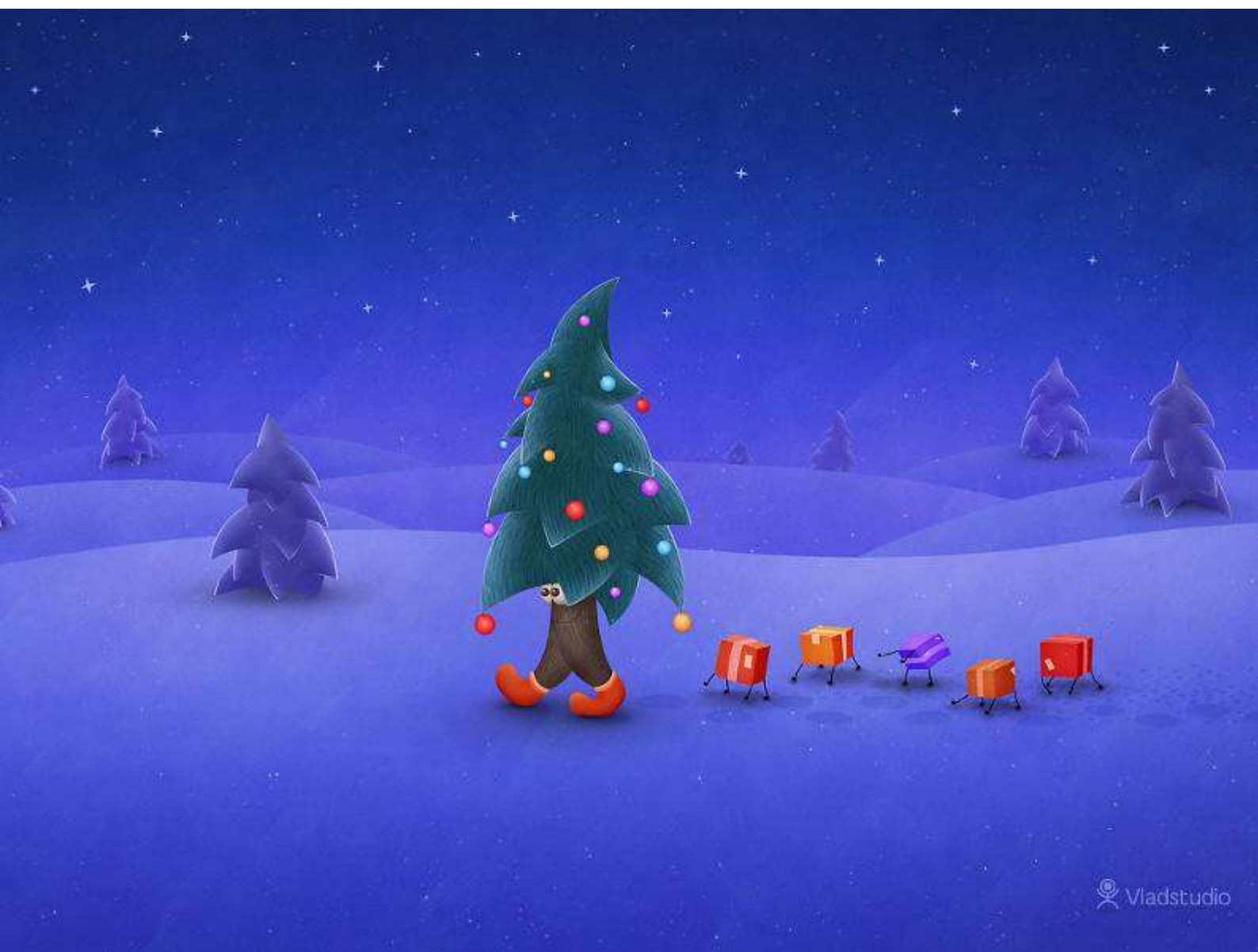
And then the d-day knocked. She had her best make-up on. She was nervous and drops of sweat were undoing all the make-up. She quickly slid into the car and sprayed her face and applied face cream, talcum powder. Just as she was about to come out, the driver spotted Chandran. He did not smile or hug her at the airport; Chandran just shoved his huge bags into dickey and, without returning driver's salute, curtly gestured towards Pattom. But this was not an atypical behaviour on arrival and Ambika smelled nothing fishy; a night with her always cheered his normalcy back. Despite air-condition at full-throttle, her make-up was running down her cheeks, neck. Ambika, forgetting the hand kerchief in her handbag, started wiping sweat with the long end of her sari. She squinted at him, he too was sweating. "Might have aggravated his blood pressure and diabetes," she surmised. Though he was sweating profusely, Chandran did not try to wipe the sweat and when she began wiping his forehead with the same end of her sari, he smiled. Within moments he was cheerful and everything seemed normal along the thirty-minute drive until they reached home.

He adored her Pookalams with Indian tricolour intricately sketched into them, but he did not appreciate her Pookalams this time. From Atham to Thiruonam, he was not his usual self all ten days. He neither commented on the preparation of Onasadya nor indulged in any of the dishes. Nor did he show any interest to witness *Vallamkali* the snake boat race on river Pampa.

It was twelve agonising days since he had landed and Ambika's patience was wearing thin. On the thirteenth night, the moment he sat on bed, she switched the lights off; he always preferred to switch lights off just before. She tried to coerce him but he turned the other way. Then she tried to persuade him into a conversation. Unusually, despite her coercion, he was quiet. Then, with no other choice, using aggression and a few harsh words, she browbeat him to reveal the truth. He climbed down the bed, walked to the window and clutched one of the steel-iron crosspieces. And stood there for a while staring out as if beseeching the skies for help. Ambika ambled and saw the vehicular beams revealing melancholy on his face. Just before she asked a question more, turning away in slow motion, facing the traffic, he said heavily, "I am seeing a specialist for erectile dysfunction for over a year now." She switched the lights on.



## TRAVELLING CHRISTMAS TREE



**VLAD GERASIMOV**



## AFTER THE WHILE

*Uche Uwadinachi*

Do you still meet love  
in my subtle kiss  
Sipping into your lips  
from the bosom of dew  
freshness anew you?  
Honey,  
do you find care  
in my devoted outline  
caressing your mind?

In that blue stripe  
across the twilight  
of that Friday night

do you still see me  
the brightest star  
in the darkest sky  
starring behind the curtains  
far beyond the fields

untrammeled  
in lustful spheres of the lake?

Do you still feel me  
in tiny fingers

falling as the rain pellet  
dripping down the avenue  
of your spine  
cutting you apart  
like earth melting warmth  
within its yearning apertures...  
swearing to feather you  
from sad old songs on the soh?

Do you still  
touch yourself  
to touch me?  
Rapidly with erupting  
pleasure  
flickering your tones  
aloud, the dark secret of the door,  
cracking the cold-blooded walls  
causing sodomy mares,  
to the sleeping neighbours?

Do you  
still want me?



## A NIGHT WALK

*Olusola Akinwale*

The man had switched off the car ignition before he pulled up in his compound. It had become his tradition to come home quietly; not allowing the car to squeal. He got out of the car and started towards the front door. He paused momentarily and waved to his neighbor, a man in his forties, who was sitting at a table on the lawn with his adolescent children – a boy and a girl. The girl was older. They were having dinner. He could make out something that looked like apples on the table, but he could not make out the food they were eating. The house was a side-by-side three bedroom-bungalow and a barbed wire fence separated the two apartments. That was typical of the modest neighborhood. Look-alike homes and look-alike yards in central Calabar. All gazing at one another.

The neighbor had no wife living with him. The man knew this, only that he did not know whether the neighbor's wife had divorced him, or had died. They were not enemies, but there was not much of interaction between them except "Hello?" "Welcome," "How are you?" Often from a distance. The only time the man had stepped into the neighbor's apartment was some days back. The neighbor had returned from the hospital to continue his convalescence after undergoing appendectomy. So the man had gone there to wish him a speedy recovery.

It was deep twilight. The halogen lights at the neighbor's end had illuminated the man's yard too. He entered his house and turned on his own yard and sitting room lights, locked the door, removing the key. When he had taken a bath and put on fresh clothes, he stepped into his study. He went to the shelf instinctively and his eyes roved the books lining up the upper part before he picked up one. *Me against my brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda* by Scott Peterson. He had read it before. Twice. Each time he had made some notes in the book to express his take on each chapter. This time as he sat at the desk, he knew quite well that he wanted to go through it once again to while away the time. On the desk was a picture of a two-year-old girl, grinning into the camera. The girl was his daughter. He had lost her to malaria over a year before and thought the negligence of the girl's mother had cost him her life, though medical people had said the girl died of 'adverse drug reaction'. He could not come to terms with the demise of the girl and, often he would see her in his mind. He would see himself reaching over and putting his arms around the girl. Cuddling her and making her smile. The girl's death had done nothing to the enmity which had been brewing between him and the girl's mother for some time over a perceived neglect. And communication had been strained between them ever since.

In the next few minutes, the man heard the sound of the door open and then some movements in the house. He could hear the squeaking of stilettos on the floor until he heard the sound of another door open, a bedroom door. He did not bother. Why would he when he knew the person? For long he and the woman had both been keeping separate keys which they had been using to open the entrance door whenever they got home.

The woman moved to the kitchen and surveyed the whole place for no particular reason. It was only filled with the hum of the fridge. She opened the fridge and fetched a can of pineapple juice. She tore the lid open and directed the opening to her mouth. She had taken only a little when she put the rest on the kitchen table because the juice did not taste like a juice. She was under a pressure that had affected her taste bud too. The night was a decisive one. She and the man had been advised by a counselor to dialogue one more time before filing for their proposed mutual divorce. They both had thought there was nothing to lose if they went their separate ways. I'd be better off without her. The neighbor has no wife, yet he lives fine, the man was thinking.

There's no point living with a man who cares no more about me. Single women live well too, the woman was thinking.



They had been using different bedrooms, so she was not sure if the man was in. She returned to the sitting room and plopped herself on the sofa, remaining quiet. A little later, she stood up and began to take a look at the pictures hanging on the wall. They used to create time, at least twice a month, to go to the studio for photoshoots. And like models they would adopt different poses for the camera under the studio lights. She glowed at one specially made. Gold framed. It was that of a happy-looking couple clutching themselves and smiling at her. The dazzling man in the picture had been her husband. The woman clutching him and smiling like the happiest woman on earth had been her. Those were earlier times, happier times. She did not know why they still left the pictures hanging on the wall. They were a perfect couple then, visiting places together, like a snail and its shell, inseparable. Once they had emerged the winner of a couple's dancing contest. The award plaque was hanging on the wall as well and the trophy was on the shelf in the study. The trim woman in the picture was nowhere to be found again. She had gained more weight, though she still retained her face. People did compliment her new size, but in her mind she would disagree that she became plump because of any special nutrition. Her nutrition had not changed, only that she had not, like before, been going to the Gym for fitness lessons and to burn off excess fat. The man had always been the one prompting her, pushing her to the treadmill.

The woman had almost put her hand to the gold-framed picture when the voice of the man came out in a near whisper, "Shall we move?" She turned to him, looking somewhat unsettled. He wore a face which contrasted the colored polo neck he had on.

"Please, give me a few minutes to dress up," she requested and then left for her room.

The man was watching the prime time news on the TV when the woman returned. She had changed into an embroidered black top over patent leggings with a long vintage neck piece and a black pair of sandals. The leggings accentuated her figure.

"I'm set," she said.

The man glanced at her over his shoulder and turned off the TV as he got up from the chair. The woman was the first to exit the house. She waited on the lawn - beside her own car - staring at the road as the man locked the door. They had decided right from the counselor's office to talk while taking a long walk on the Friday night. And whatever shock they might have given each other in the process, they thought, would have worn off by the time they returned home, separately. Perhaps.

The man walked past the woman and she trailed after. They turned to their right, away from their yard, and trudged down the quiet street, muted. But in the street of their minds was noise and chaos, legion of thoughts clashing against one another. At a point, the woman folded her hands. The man buried it deep down in the pocket of his trousers. The scent of flowers adorning the street hung in the air. On the asphalt road, some tiny particles glittered like broken pieces of glass under the glow of the street lights. A grey car with no plate number and one headlight on came hurtling towards them. It seemed the driver had lost grip as it was nearing them. The man, sensing danger, quickly grabbed the woman's hand and moved further away from edge of the road. They could hear giggles in the car as it screeched past them.

"Those guys must be silly," the man fumed, "or how would you describe that?"

"They could be drunk," the woman sighed, "they could have hit me if not you."

Nearby was a bench under a small tree. The man went to sit on it. And as he sat, a thought dropped into his mind about the car: it could be one of the cars being chased by security agents for entering the country through the backdoor. The woman joined him on the bench.

"It was a long time you said the word 'please' until tonight," the man said.

"You were never patient with me for long as well until you allowed me to dress up tonight," the woman replied.

The man rubbed his palms together as if feeling cold and let out a ball of air from his mouth and then broke the silence which had ensued again.

"Maybe I over-reacted, but I couldn't have been happy with her death. A good father wouldn't."



"I loved Savannah. She was my daughter. Yes, I felt you were giving her more attention than me . . ."

"You were jealous of the innocent girl?" the man snapped.

There was silence again. The woman was struggling for composure. "I loved her. I couldn't have killed my own daughter, never." Her voice was cracking.

The man closed his eyes. His next set of words was forming in his mind like a cloud. The woman wiped her dewy eyes with the back of her hand.

"I never wanted to be a poor husband for my wife," he began again, "I thought I was always thinking of ways to make you happy until . . . maybe I behaved irresponsibly; maybe I hurt you first. I really did?" The woman was silent, her head bowed. "Kaone?" the man called the woman. He wanted her eyes to meet his.

"I had my fault too, Malik." the woman quivered. She raised her head up gently to look the man in the eyes.

"I didn't treat you as good as I should have?" the man lamented, "I didn't, I admit."

"I never knew I still meant a lot to you until the car almost hit me."

"I'd not see evil coming your way without stopping it." He looked straight into her eyes. "I'm sorry for all my wrongdoing. I still need you. Something still craves for you deep down in me. If you'd not mind we can give this marriage another shot. We can do better than we had done before."

He opened his hands wide. The woman drew closer and threw herself into them. She was struggling to suppress her sob.

Now the tangled roots of bitterness that had established themselves in the soil of their hearts had been uprooted. Their faces were aglow like a newly-wedded couple.

"You look glamorous in this wear." the man complimented the woman.

"I know I've not really looked after myself in recent times."

"This is no time to spill sarcasm. I mean what I've just said, Kaone. I love your new figure."

"Thanks. People say the same thing," the woman beamed, "but I didn't really like it, I must confess."

"You're looking pretty well. Nothing more to say."

"This pair looks good on your legs."

"Thanks, I bought them two weeks ago."

The woman regarded the man disturbingly. The man noticed her fleeting change of countenance.

"Anything the matter?" he asked.

"You look lean, honey. You've not been eating well?"

"The nudge to eat regularly was something I missed about you. I think we've seen the other us, what it could produce. We dare not give it a chance again. Don't worry; I'll regain the lost weight. I'm already regaining it. Take a look at me very well." He ballooned out his cheeks and the woman poked it, laughing. She leaned on him and breathed in sharply.

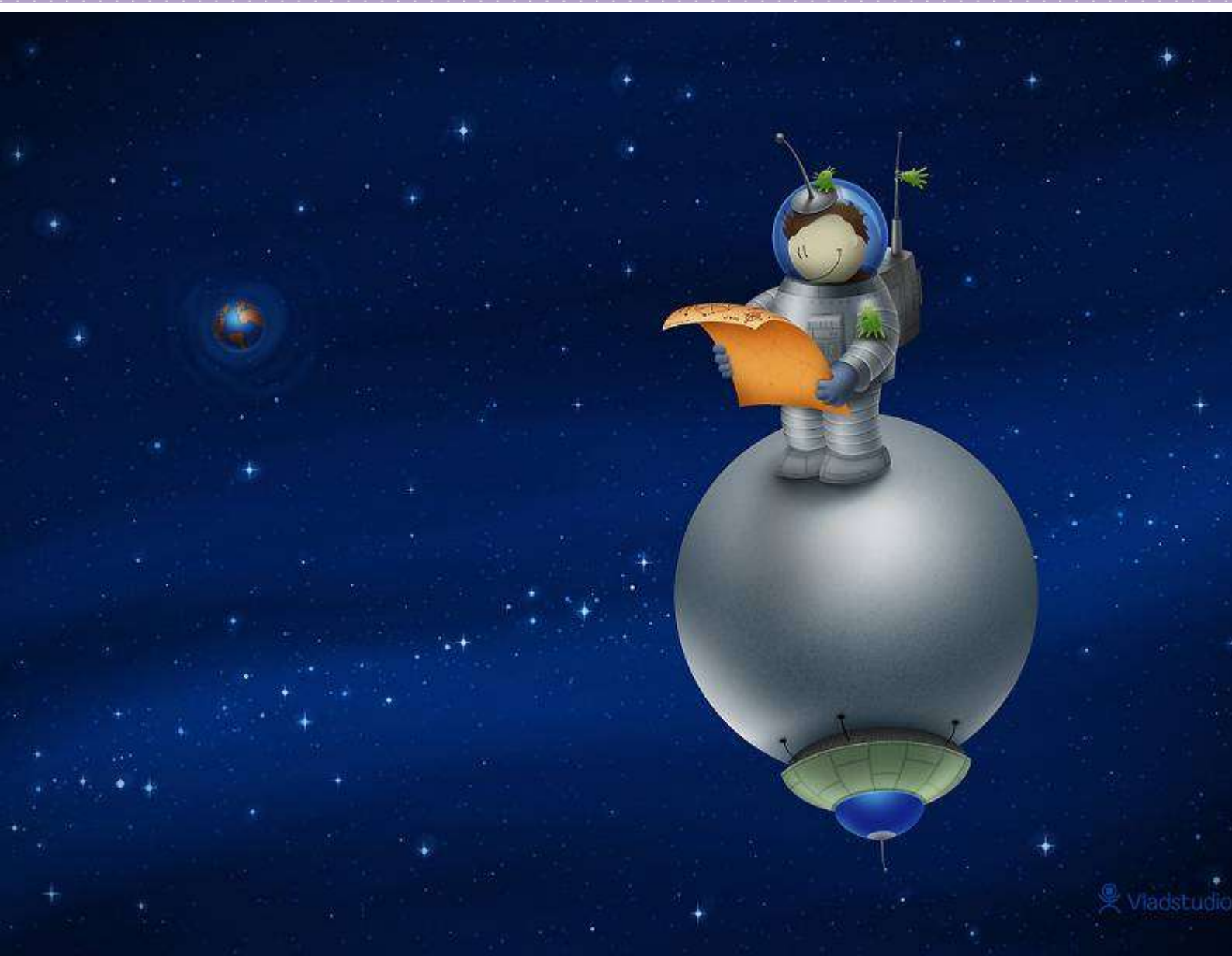
"What's the matter again?"

"Nothing, I'm just relieved. Peace of mind, nothing like it."

Up in the star-specked sky, the August moon was glowing in its full splendor. And it seemed to be beckoning at them to behold its beauty. To see how it had taken the shine off its countless neighbors that were like sequins on a barmaid dress. But the man and the woman were oblivious to the moon's motion. They could only feel a warm breeze whispering through the leaves of the tree.





**ASTRONAUT**

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**VLAD GERASIMOV**

## SARABA'S 2011, IN FOCUS

*Publishers & Editors*

### THEMES

More highlights would be made available online at least two months before the issue is published.

*March 2011: Fashion*

*June 2011: Food*

*October 2011: Sex*

*December 2011: Music*

Please note that the **deadline for submission** for each issue is the 30th of January, April, August and October. We would be more stringent with these deadlines in 2011. See, generally, the submission guidelines ([www.sarabamag.com](http://www.sarabamag.com))

### THE ESSENTIAL SARABA

Plans are on gear to publish in **print** a collection of the best works published in Saraba since February 2009. It is to be known as "The Essential Saraba." The works would be selected by Saraba's publishers and editors and by our readers, through an open process. The time phase for this has been set between December 2011 and March 2012. As details become clearer, they would be passed across.

### ISSUE 7 ONLINE ^ ONLINE-ONLY

*Talking Self, Interview, Emmanuel Iduma interviewed by Sokari Ekine (Online Only)*

*The Blank Sheet: On Blogging, and other Botherations, Non-Fiction*

*Technology Served with Tears, a Memoir*

*Elect Freed, Flash Fiction*

*Our Friendship Runs Away From Us, Poetry*

*After the While, Poetry*

*Dysfunctional Truths, Fiction*

### ADVERTS & DONATIONS

From December 2010 until June 2011, the following rates are applicable for adverts in Saraba:

₦30, 000 – 1 Quarter advert online and in magazine

₦ 20, 000 – 1 Issue of Magazine

₦5, 000 – Monthly Advert online

Payment can be made in the name of any of the publishers. Interested persons (in Nigeria) can contact the publishers for account details. Outside Nigeria, due to the impracticability of setting up an online account, interested persons can pay through Western Union, using any of the Publishers' names. Details of the transaction should be forwarded to the publishers. This also applies to **Donations**. We encourage readers to donate to Saraba. Given the great efforts being put in by Publishers and Editors of Saraba, we are faced with the need to pay commissions, pay web fees and so on. Donations would be used for the purpose for which it is intended. ([www.sarabamag.com/donate](http://www.sarabamag.com/donate))



## CONTRIBUTORS

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**UNOMA AZUAH** teaches English at Lane College, Jackson, Tennessee, U.S.A. She is an MFA graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. She also has an MA in English from Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio. Her undergraduate degree in English is from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. She has received a number of awards for her writing, which include the Hellman/Hammett award, the Leonard Trawick award, Urban Spectrum award and the Flora Nwapa/Association of Nigerian Authors award. Her works have been featured in anthologies and journals like *Karogs*, *Stimulus Respond*, *Revue Review*, *Gumbo*, *Sentinel*, *Othervoices*, *Weaverbird* Collection, *Mindfire*, *renew*, and *Okike*. She has published a novel entitled *Sky-high Flames* a collection of short stories: *The Length of Light*, and a collection of poems: "Night Songs." Currently, she is working on her second collection of poems, entitled, "Home Is Where The Heart Hurts."

**UCHE UWADINACHI** the author of *Scar in the Heart of Pain*, a poetry collection (2009), is a performance poet with a passion for selfless romance.

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**DR. ROSETTA CODLING** is a literary scholar and critic. As a literary critic, her critiques of African and African-American literature have appeared in numerous journals throughout the world. Most notably, her latest critique appears in *The Journal of African Literature* 2010. She is a graduate CUNY, New York University, Teachers College/Columbia University, and Bircham International University (Madrid). Her professional career spans over 25 years in university and secondary education.

**RAM GOVARDHAN'S** first novel *Rough with the Smooth* was longlisted for the 2009 Man Asian Literary Prize. He is currently scripting his second novel and a bunch of short stories. A post-graduate in sociology, he is a quality controller with Hansa Research Group Private Limited, Madras, India.

**OMALE ABDUL-JABBAR** has been published in *Water Testaments*, *AWF Calvacade*, *New Gong Short Stories*, *Weekly Trust*, *Fifty Nigerian Poets*, *Margin*, *THESE!* Magazine online, was a Finalist in Poetry.com 2002 for the poem "Love Affair" and subsequently published in anthology *Letters From the Soul*, *The Ker Review*, *Blackbird* online, *ANA Review*, *Farafina Online*, *Munyori Poetry journal* *Africanwriter.com*, *CAMOUFLAGE*, *Story Time* amongst others. He is influenced by the works of Toni Kan, Helon Habila, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Ben Okri, Isabel Allende, Margaret Atwood, Pablo Neruda, Maik Nwosu, Toyin-Adewale-Gabriel and David Njoku. He is a planning officer



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**IRONKYO** lives and works in Lagos.

**EMMANUEL IDUMA** has been published online and in print. He holds a degree in Law. While studying for his B.L., he is working on a novel.

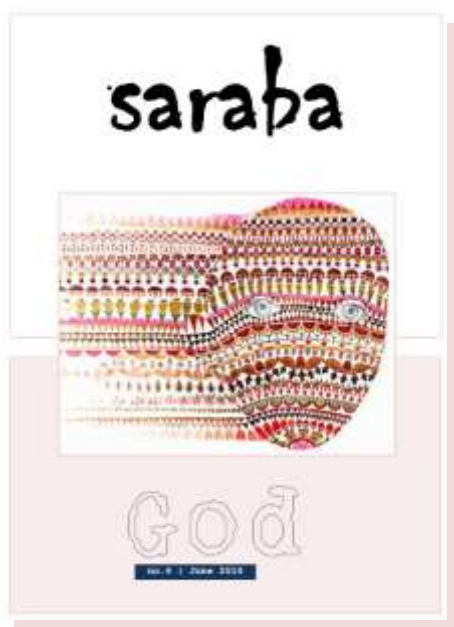
**DEJI TOYE** needed to clean up his clogged creative arteries by publishing his now yellowing collection of mostly poems, some plays and few short stories. This is with a view to returning to active creative writing. *Saraba* has now offered the first suction pump with his works in the current edition being the first to be published in any such medium in some six years. In the meantime, he runs a commercial law and governance advisory practice in Lagos, Nigeria while also engaging in mainly technical writing, including writing the Corporate Governance pages for the Guardian on Sunday.

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## **END POETRY**

**STOP THIS TRAIN  
I WANNA GET OFF  
AND GO HOME AGAIN  
I CAN'T TAKE THE SPEED  
IT'S MOVING IN  
I KNOW I CAN  
BUT HONESTLY  
WOULD SOMEONE  
STOP THIS TRAIN**

**JOHN MAYER/  
STOP THIS TRAIN/  
IN HIS ALBUM/  
CONTINUUM/**