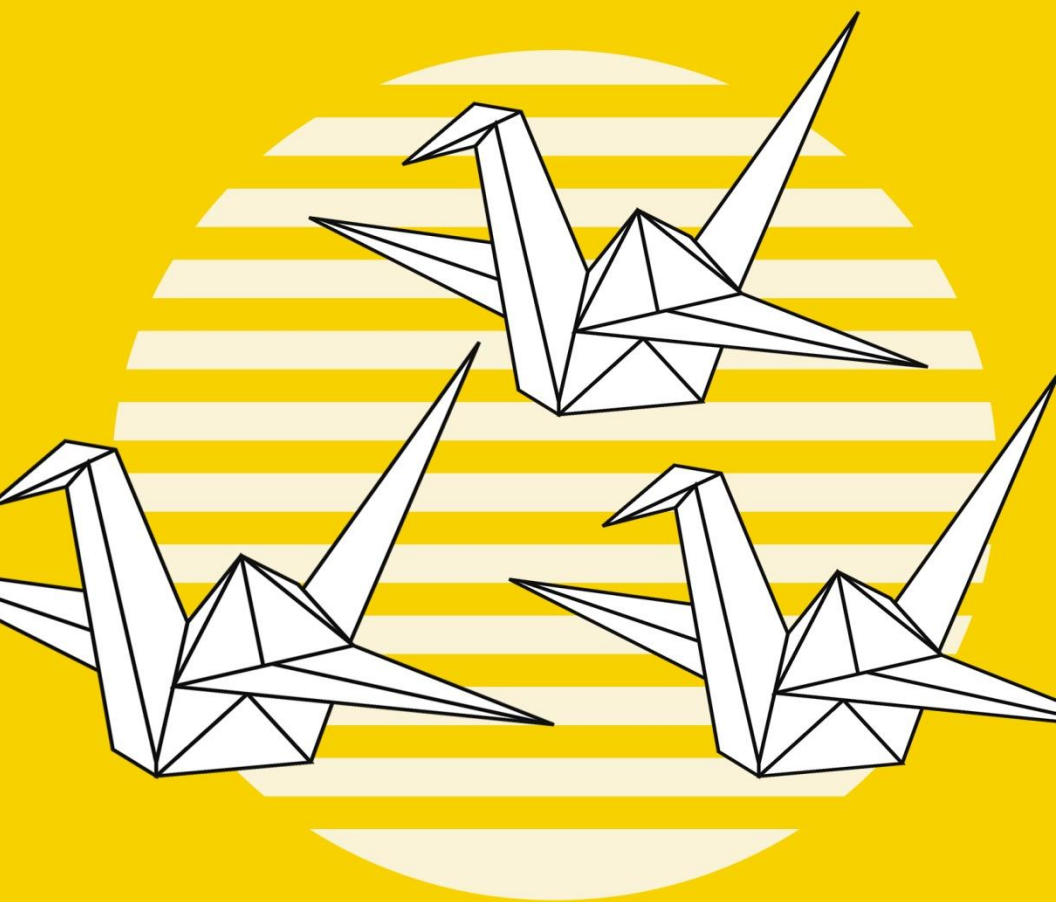


ORIGAMI



**ADELEKE
BABATUNDE**

ORIGAMI

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POEMS

ADELEKE BABATUNDE



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Book Cover Design: Dhee Sylvester |
dheegenius@gmail.com

Book Layout & Design: Nosakhare Collins |
Collins.nosakhare1@gmail.com

*This is for all the people, all the experiences that held the boy and folded
him into a man. You all are the best.*

Praises for “Origami”

‘**O**ne day, centuries from now, the archeologist will turn over your bones. He will declare:...!’

Origami is a masculine body of work. The poems hold manly experiences. There are inquisitions perched somewhere and everywhere in each poem.

The chapbook comes with the ability to remind us that for men the cause of death may be different but post mortem results will always reveal their death is the same.

—**Tobi Abiodun**, *Poet*

In Origami is a melting of hearts & building of bloods. What Babatunde has done in this book is a finding of self, a folding—& an acceptance! There’s the past—the rock, the now—the water & the forward—Babatunde, in this book. Enjoy!

—**Henneh Kyereh Kwaku**, *Poet*

“**T**his chapbook collection truly lives up to its title—Origami. Adeleke folds eros into origamic glory in his brave attempt at intertextuality. He explores life and sexuality with a three-fold language: Japanese, Yorùbá, and English. This literary offering is a spectacle. It will dazzle you like it dazzled me. Orgasmic work!”

—**Kolawole Samuel Adebayo**, *Author, INVOCATIONS (APBF & Akashic Books)*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brief Note

Poetry is an embodiment of life, in the case of this chapbook, mine. Most of the poems here are a reflection of my growth; some are abstract and not remotely connected to my life. I would have loved to pick out the ones that are personal and the ones that are not but what is poetry without a little mystery?

It was Pascal Mercier that said '*We leave something of ourselves behind when we leave a place, we stay there, even though we go away. And there are things in us that we can find again only by going back there.*' I do hope that I have left enough of myself in this chapbook.

Adeleke Babatunde

A boy, the boy is a piece of paper – he can be folded,
balanced and damaged.

Origami

Traditionally, it was believed that if one folded 1000 **origami** cranes, one's wish would come true. It has also become a symbol of hope and healing during challenging times.
The boy is an origami, he can be folded, balanced or torn.

Folding

Boy, come here. Give ear to me.
Son, do not spend your strength on women.

Father said to the boy.

Balanced

The boy, a day after his eighth birthday, wakes with a start. A straightness he cannot explain shoots from his shorts. He finds a shift in his metabolism - the origami is straightened.

Torn

The boy melts into her; a caress was all she needed to give.
The origami topples, its folds loosening;
all that is left now is shreds.

The boy is a shell of what he used to be.
His strength now drains steady.



Bundle of questions

Do clothes fall from heaven?

Why does daddy get two meat while I get only one?

How do people get pregnant?

I have always been a bundle of questions

Some I have asked, some I kept close to my chest.

I still ask those questions

I fold the memories of my childhood like a paper,

Daily, I balance this origami.

I know it will topple someday, but not today.

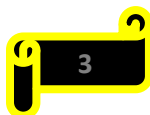
The poem in which I come clean

When we first met, I introduced myself with a smile or an attempt at it;

it never got beyond a fold of the face.

I can't remember the things I said, here is what I should have said:

1. I was born on a Sunday; cold, hard morning I must say. Mama said it felt like the sea of blood was taking me on a seesaw ride.
2. I used to be very fair-skinned and chubby as a toddler. (Maybe that is my way of saying, permit this body, it is a work in progress).
3. I once had a long sleep in the afternoon, and I woke confusing that day for the next.
4. I have never fainted.
5. My name has been used in more heartbreak tweets than I can read through. It was only recently surpassed by Femi.
6. The global board game industry is expected to reach a value of 12,000,000,000 (that's twelve billion) USD by 2023. That's not supposed to be your business, just like all the above, but I am telling you still.



Of failures

“The phoenix must burn to emerge.” - Janet Fitch

Sometimes, even the fire that burns the phoenix will see nothing stirred except its ashes.

It is not said often that failure can be fatal. I have failed before:

1. I never told my grandmother that I loved her. I did, and I thought she could feel it because I ran errands. I was enraged until I heard the things she said in my absence. She did love me.
2. This is my third attempt at compiling a chapbook, lost in transit, their bodies were never found. I hope you will read me this time.
3. I once prayed for the same thing for six years, saying the same words over and over again. It felt like God turned away from me.
4. I failed mathematics five times in college, why it happened I didn't know. That said, my wife will be the one handling all mathematics assignment, I will stick to English.
5. I begin to see that my failures were not really failures, for out of the ashes, the rebirth of the phoenix will begin.

Pessimist

Sometimes, I am Japanese
危機 - you see opportunities,
I see crisis.

I often remind myself that a
magazine can also be a passport
to hell.



The beautiful ones were never born – an Elegy

Your vein is a clogged pipe, the blood struggles to flow; you
are declared dead.

Mama's face pales out as the doctor relays the news.
Her eyes, twin doves look on lifelessly as the drama starts.

Mother throws herself on the ground like
an amphibian in the wild. Father's eyes fill
up with tears that he wishes away.

The doctor swipes his hand over your face,
he covers the cells that would have been your eyes
and brings up the cloth bag to have you excised.

Reality hits! The one we never got to know is dead!
The beautiful ones were never born.

Echoke / Poetry, a body of water

Drowning is the 3rd leading cause of unintentional injury death worldwide, accounting for 7% of all injury-related deaths. There are an estimated 320,000 annual drowning deaths worldwide.

Wade across this stream of words, swim through
this body of water, for poetry is a body of water.
Submerged, you see figures - of speech - as you were taught
in school.
No!

Your eyes adjust and you see that there's more.
New objects crawl into sight, this body of water is fierce.
On some days, it is smooth, surface tension holding.
Your body held in position by forces beyond you - you float.

On some other days, this body of water is war and
turbulence.
You fight to force the figures into the right lines.
There is water in your lungs, droplet of words that you
cannot swallow or spill out.
E choke!

The genealogy of misery

The British met the natives in the cool of day,
This was the parting of legs that started the lineage of misery.
Misery met sadness; a relationship steeped in cordiality.

Here is the family tree of misery:
Misery begat poverty and his brothers
Poverty begat suffering, suffering killed his brothers
And became king. He took his kinsmen wives and they begat
children.
They begat depression, oppression, racism and other isms
that bring no good.

I know misery, he walks through the street every day,
I know misery like the back of my hand.
Misery might be the governor of my state.



Boys are stones

On the day the boy was birthed,
his father whispered into his ear
"my strength, show no fear! For when you do, your enemy
will seize you."

There, a boy became a stone, cold and impervious.

.
Hardened
and set in my ways
Father started chipping,
for boys are stones.
Boys are stones; nay, rocks
Shaped by the tender hands of society
Denudated by everyone around them.

.
Blame me not when I wear the flint for a face
for I must sharpen the stone that I am.
Boys are stones, yes, they crack
When they do, they become sand...
the sand of time upon which others walk.
Boys are stone, not born but made.

My grandmother never runs out of songs

My father's mother is a choir on standby,
She is one woman with multiple voices.
My grandmother never runs out of songs.

On some days, she just breaks into a tune,
Asking anyone to sing along. Songs of wisdom,
Of a soul that knows that this world is not her own.

On some days she would sing,
B'edele yin ere ro, omo omo wa la nko!

- When you get to your house, tell them we are celebrating our grandchildren.

My grandmother never runs out of songs.

On some other days, she would sing
One of her *salat* songs, those ones we love to bastardise
And sing in our own words.

At her graveside the other day, I had no tears,
No words, only songs. The same songs she sang when she was here.
I sang, hoping that she would ascend by the tone of my voice.

The prison called freedom | in praises of Ajike

Until I got in here, I could make only little sense of what it means to be free, to have liberty.
Until I got in here, into this prison called freedom.
They told me, that love is foolish, that it has a way of making the toughest of men soft.
My friends warned that love is similar to *Ala*, the night dream.

My friends warned that it will end in tears, hot, supple, of sighing and of eyes miffed.
I recall one reading a line,
Alagemo gbaso lowo alasbo
Igbo ni gba ona lowo olona

He said love will take from me what I held the dearest - my freedom.
I already laid my freedom on the altar,
an Isaac, as I listened, waited for God to speak.
but he said nothing.
I have since slaughtered my freedom—it bled to death under my watch.
I have entered into this prison, my hands and legs shackled by the chains of affections.

Since you said yes, I have found rest in this same prison, of love.
Aro nigba iyi lowo Aso funfun
You took away my loneliness.
Recently, I have found myself staring into the night skies and muttering your name.
Nobody told me love would be like this.
I am a man who is not for himself,
Ajike, I live to be yours.

Bi alaboyun ba bimo, gbogbo aye ni mo

This is a love I will show to the world, proudly.

We will love, with words unspoken.

We will love, with tears shed.

We will love, with muttering lips and stuttering tongues.

We will find bliss, in this prison called freedom - love.

An Ode for those who will not return

Eni ba lo lo ma de

He who goes on a journey will return
- From Yoruba.

We say it, as though it were a standing rule
that he who goes on a trip must return.
Maybe, perhaps this might be a rule in saner climes.
In my country, not all who goes return.
The land is hungry, the landscape has since
opened its pores, waiting to sip blood.

Not all who goes return
If the kidnapper does not snatch one from the
safety of the vehicle,
Asarailu, the messenger of death who lives in the
cover of a cop's bullet will take its spoil.

My nation finds a way to kill you.
I was once alive, long before the day I was
born to this land.
I was once alive before this stranger called death
breathed on me.

Now, I am only waiting, longing to die.
I have won today's battle, the war is still on.
So, I take a break to write this for those who
will never return.

Where is home?

You say home is this place,
This place that has the echoes of father's voice
As he scolds Maria for coming late from choir practice

You say home is this place
Where mama folds her hands pensively
As she waits beside Uncle Ben's voice, nursing him back to
health.

This can't be home!
Home is not the mouth of a shark.
Home is not a fireplace
Slowly lapping away at the woods that are its inhabitants.

If this is not home,
Then where is home?
Where do we go when the place we call home becomes hell?

Schadenfreud

“This is a confession: sometimes I feel good when others feel bad.”

In my mind, I sometimes feel that there isn't enough good to go around.

So, to improve my chances of getting goodness, I feel misfortune must come to some.

Forgive me, how would the mind of a teenager who has seen terrible things think?

I would sometimes pray:

Let none be hurt,

Let those who will be hurt not be me or mine.

Now, I have learnt to rejoice with those who rejoice

To mourn with those who do.

The best of both worlds will always come to us.

It will find us prepared.

Life is a bed of roses

We have all been lied to.
They said life is not a bed of roses, in reality it is.
Life is a bed of roses, More thorns than flowers.

It grows when you water it, it dies when you neglect it.
Life is indeed a bed of roses.
Comfort and pain,
Intertwined.

Interlude

You said you had never ridden a rodeo.
Why lie?
What is a rodeo if not a Nigerian bike on
an untarred patch.

My first girlfriend was a poet

She flirted without saying a word -
Each flutter of the eyelids is a million
sentences in a thousand languages.

She was free-form, floating across
love's page. She was haiku in my arms,
lithe & mystical.

Her smile like a comma,
sparkling crescent in all its glory,
never failed to enchant me.
I still miss it.

I got my breakup note
in lines and stanzas, I had to
read twice to understand.

My first girlfriend was a poet.

A story of pronouns

Let me tell you a story;
of the beginning and how silence
Impregnated the night in an intercourse
of secrets.

You shouldn't know this but a boy was eight
and I was the only spectator, I saw....

I saw as a boy became prey to the antics of a lady
She sought satisfaction and seeing no one was home
She took the boy and shattered his naivety.

I witnessed the initiation of a boy into the world
She, the rider perched dangerously,
the boy, oblivious to his fate, stared sheepishly.

For a moment, I wished I was the boy but I was just
another boy peeping through the keyhole seeking salvation.

I waited for what seemed like an eternity and half,
they came out of the room - all smiles.
"you can go out and play now," a boy was told.

I shouldn't have been there,
I swear I wasn't there.
Maybe my mind was tricking me.

End

Letters to Aduke

1

This letter needs no address for you know where your heart lives.

It needs no signature, for only one man could have written this.

Aduke, your smile, like the hoe pierces the ground of my soul.

There is nothing more to ask for, nothing more to take.

This is a journey of no return; one of eternal bliss.

I am packed and ready to go. I trust you are too.

Shall we meet under the Odan tree at night fall?

How about we savour the beauty of the night together as the moon illuminates the curve of your face?

2

In this city where the trails lead nowhere

In this town where everyone rushes without an end in sight,

I have chosen you as my compass.

You are my starting point and finish line;

the motivation that keeps me going.

When others fall and falter,

I think again of the curve of your lips when you smile.

The work of the day is made light knowing I am coming home to Aduke,

the one who summons the universe with a twitch of her lips.

Aduke, the one who sets the sun in motion with her candour.

This city that is my body

Some nights, I take a leave of my body by way of sleep.
Sleep is now a task, a chore you drag out of the mouth of the night.

I have to sing myself a lullaby, a litany,
say a prayer that the gods of slumber bear me on their wings.

My body is a city without walls, broken into by my beloved.
My body is a church without a shepherd, it moves
on its accord.

Every pore becomes an exit, I become smoke, broken, a
shard of glass.

This city that is my body repels the country that is my soul.

The country that is my soul ask my body if it can
nestle in its shade. It says no. A city cannot house a nation—
it will burst at its seam.

The portrait of a boy as a book

They say every story has a beginning,
a middle and an end. That's cliché,
it might not be in that order.

The boy is a book with a torn-out spine.

Read -

Line 674

The boy is 17 years old,
haughty, always up to some trick.
He has refused to greet visitors,
he writes in his journal.

Line 102

The boy is 8 years old,
his nanny had her way with him.
His innocence fell like a castle of cards.

Line 1736

The man is 26 and he has decided to forgive,
to forgive his nanny, to forgive himself.
He has decided to let the past stay in the darkness.

Line 1

Once upon a time, a boy once lived.
His adventure are penned in this book.

Line 30595

And the man died in his sleep full of years.

Line 107

He felt it, for the first time - a shame he could not describe.
He wanted to run, to hide but the nanny was not done.

Conversations with my demons

“You don’t even know what you are doing.”
“What if you fail, remember what happened the last time”
“You belong on the ground, nay, In the cesspit”
“You will.....”

Hey! you shut up scumbag, you are saying your reality, not mine.

Again no one invited you to this thinking session.

“You will return here, we are your only friends”
“No one will ever love you, you are too vile”

I have got friends, idiot and they love and support me.
You are affecting my thought process.

“You will fail, you won’t get a hang of it”
“You will humiliate yourself again.”

I face my demons head-on and dispel them with a line
“I am enough, I am the man Jesus died for!”

Go, call your legions, you all are not enough.

Therapy session

It has been a long time since I have been here

A lot has happened;

Lockdown Depression Thoughts of suicide

I have seen friends lose those close to them

The centre

seems not to be holding

A litany of losses

Bullets making bodies of men their

home

Chaos and its younger brother, unrest are the new chiefs.

The last time I was here, you told me to breathe easy

To bide the time and allow the universe work its healing.

What are you going to say this time?

Talk to me o therapist.

Or go heal thyself.

Love

How can a house of fright
become an object of light?

How do you give yourself up
to burn for others the way
you do not for yourself?
Love causes us to do strange things,
to become new beings.

New normal

Two years ago, no one would have
thought that the phrase 'I am attending a wedding'
would mean priming only to sit in front of your
phone and peep into zoom -
The reception ground where the pastor is wedding
Your best friend and her heart throb.

The thought of you

Is downing two cheeseburgers
and some cans of lager.
Unhealthy yet irresistible

Is chain-smoking three joints
My lungs will collapse, it will bow
to this smoke or your kiss.
It is the things we do that kill us

You, Oriaku, are the genesis of
all that cannot be let go in this world.
The feeling of hope in a tattered nation.

Breaking bodies

A boy got a roller skate kit as a 10th year birthday gift
He rode it like everything we love -
he took each fall as his error.
He left out the knee and elbow pad
so his body could tell the stories of
the scars he endured.

The boy came to love his first girlfriend the same way.
The second too, after the first broke his heart.
He kept up the act till he lost count.

No roller skate at 10, no bicycle at 12.
No wonder I cannot seem to take myself through pains the
way lovers do.
I cannot even dare to break my body, how much more,
my heart.

Maybe that is why I am single.
Blame this on Aunty Gbemi,
No, blame it on her roller-coaster of promises.

Lies they told us

1

Time will heal all.

So, we wrap our flaps of wounded flesh
and wait for the passage, of time.

I sat at Times Square; dude told me
the truth. He said, "Time is no Therapist,
find your healing elsewhere."

2

Your heart belongs to your lover.

Look around you, your lover, I mean your
sixth lover in three years.

Senorita, your heart is lost and you know it.

No! You don't know it, and that is why you keep
hurting others.

3

You can always talk to me.

No! Sorry, you can't even talk to me.

I am buried beneath a pile of tweets as I Struggle,

I must assert my thoughts on these group of No-bodies.

Sorry, you can't talk to me except about money.

There are lies, more than I can remember. Maybe my
memory is even a lie. One I have learnt to believe in.

Bones

One day, centuries from now, the archaeologist will turn over your bones.

He will declare;

Here lies the remains of a man who mortgaged his fears and took a bank loan on them.

His head appears to be slightly bulky, a testament to his ability to overthink sceneries.

He belongs to the specie *Homo perfecta*, the race of humans who are always out to do things only when the conditions are perfect.

He died in his seat, most likely thinking of the things he should have done.

A toast

May we all die twice and emerge inbetween as Babatunde.

May we be in heaven a full half hour before the devil knows we are dead.

Raise your glass, say a prayer. Pour spirits down your throat. Drain the cup, what is a toast? Is it not a prayer said in the presence of hard drink?

Baker

Knead me, for I am dough.
Though the sun is not up
Yet, the dough shall rise.

The heat is in your palm,
the yeast in your mouth.
Let's make the dough rise.

Stroke your hands through
Make a sausage; long and hard
The egg-white is only a few strokes away.

The dough shall rise
For you shall ride it.

There are still people like us

I don't believe I am a limited edition. I will never do.
I know that there will still be people like me, like us.
People who plan a fun time out and suddenly want to be left alone.

There will still be people like us;
Who call their friends to come over and when they arrive,
slam the door and lock it from inside.

We are not rude. We question our own actions and inactions
sometimes, we evaluate ourselves. Sometimes we apologize
for being us, some other time, we just live our life.

There will always be people like us, who can speak to a
thousand people but prefer to binge shop rather than talk to a
lady. We are not shy, it is just the way we live our lives.

There will always be people like us; scattered all over the
globe, living our own lives in our own way.

Reintroducing myself

O n sbe Omo oloku beni, a ni si n mo oku re.

The son of the bereaved is only mourning, he won't be buried with the deceased - from Yoruba.

Standing by this grave, I still have questions –
of why you chose to die. For death is a decision.
Why did you choose to will up your ghost?

Now, you have chosen death.
Closing and lowering your coffin down is proof that
memories are views from the window of a moving car.
Today, we are here, tomorrow we are there –
in the coffin, six feet underground.

I had once died, hovering above this surface, seeking rest.
I found it in this body - to be called Babatunde.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Babatunde Odeleke is a Nigerian poet, writer, and columnist with the Nigerian Tribune. He believes that words can be used to recreate our existence. He explores various themes and experiences to sharpen

his creative edge. His poems have appeared in SpringNG, Erogospel, Kalahari Review, and anthologies, including *Today I Choose Joy, For Those Who Find Love* and elsewhere. He writes a weekly Erotica series, *Eros on Sundays*, where he explores the mysticism and godliness of the erotic experience. He lives in Ibadan, Nigeria. You can connect with him on Twitter and Instagram; @lakezWrites



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