

Afterlife of Poems

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In the cities,
chit-chatting women
with broken heels
right their slipping sleeves with one hand
and remove gums
from their mouths with the other to
paste the obituary of poems
merely to do "justice"

Posters
hanging on for life
to traumatized walls
bearing the vague impression of poems
tortured contortionists dissolving
into amorphous ink
Their death
a ravenous mist
Their presence
a snare befuddling
sleepwalkers

...Once, a curled-up primal yell,

its entire body a heart,
slowly unfurled into many broken poems
like vintage mismatched trinkets
being poured out of
a lost-but-found box
by the old woman who hid them
when she was a little girl
and then forgot that she did
Their roiling
a restlessness
haunting everyone
but none as much as itself
lingering in the air long enough to trouble it
unclad
Nakedness shaming
onlookers
As if their nudes
suddenly came up on a projector
at a family reunion

This nothing refused the garb of something,
no matter how much it was worried...

...see the women.
Women who seem to know things
intimately
(What things, no one really remembers)
... called upon to make impressions of the poems
See them make vague drawings that look
less like the dead poems the bolder their
brush strokes
The poems will be missed
but not missed
Errant poems
clinging on to the tips of the posters
...to the kaleidoscope of a baby's life
Grazing the chin of a young woman
and muttering, you are it...
Leaving her poring over the meaning of "it"
Fluttering in the place the old man's
womb would have been and wondering whether to set up shop or not,
Burdening him, lulling him with the pathos of indecision
Hiding out in plain view in the divorce between the eyes and mouth of a
middle-aged woman

Funmi Gaji earned her first degree and Master's in Literature-in-English from the Lagos State University and University of Ibadan, respectively. She is currently a doctoral student at the University of Ibadan, where she is researching multicultural literature. Her poetry was described by Jumoke Verissimo as one that "moves between the simple struggles of being, of locating self in the din of selfhood, to emerging into something that seeks to be recognized." She is the author of *The Script of Bruises*. Her poems have appeared in ANA Review, Jalada, and elsewhere.

