

# Afterlife of Poems

Salawu Olajide  
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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

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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.

