



**issue three**

VERUM LITERARY PRESS



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## EDITORS NOTE

### 03

When I decided to make issue solely for Black writers, I knew it would be different from the previous two issues of Verum I've curated and edited; literary spaces are, more often than not, dominated by non-Black writers. To be clear, the purpose of this issue is not read about and consume Blackness, but rather to filter through the long established barriers that seek to keep Blackness at the edges of literary spaces.

I received a record low number of submissions for this issue, and in all of them I saw talented, intelligent, and intentional writers. I also saw voices and names that had been pushed to the sidelines. And despite this, I saw Black excellence push back. Keep pushin'.

-Jude

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## **NORTHSIDE TRASH WIND**

*BY LESTER A. BATISTE*

Despite the empty Cheetos bag perched on the porch  
Despite crinkled and grease-stained paper plates potted in the asphalt  
Despite the cracked bottles of Courvoisier, Cuervo, and Modelos,  
Despite Merwins on West Broadway illustrating the ghetto

Still, I hear the chirps of the American Goldfinch in my backyard

Despite the plastic bags that flutter through the breeze  
Despite cognac queens lost on that sauce less than seventeen  
Despite the little homies getting out of grown men cars claiming  
Despite old heads asking “got any change for me today?” youngblood

Still I see the cardinal stop me at the street light as I hand him a dollar.

Despite the Folks posted up on N Deuce Six,  
Despite the Bloods beating-up my babysitter because she’s white  
Despite the Vice Lords looking at my 8 year old as if he right  
Despite the police not showing up at all after they fight

Still I hear coco kids cackling with joy as they practice their dunks at Farview

Despite the helicopters that fly over head  
Despite neighbors who don’t pick up their dog’s shit in my garden beds  
Despite the surprised faces that squeal, “Oh you live over North?!?”  
Despite the stereotypes that run back and forth.

Still I feel the Norway Maple’s shade upon my face.

Despite the neighbor in the apartment building who parks on my lawn  
Despite her ignorant ass ripping up the grass and not getting along  
Despite the neighbors setting fire to their gazebo next to my house,  
Despite this concrete tomb continues to tests my youth

Still, the trash-bag in my hands get heavier with things thrown in  
Still, I think about what plants can survive underneath these black walnut trees.

## POLLINATE, NOT POLICE

BY LESTER A. BATISTE



This photo was taken during The Uprising May 2020, in Minneapolis, MN. Rest in Power, Mr. George Floyd.

## DEIFIED

*BY DANNY FANTOM*

See, it's when you're sitting in your car after closing shift, haven't left the employee parking because moving your hand even one more time is just asking too much- but the quick taps to get your last played song up is less of an ask and more of an automatic function. And you sit there and let the song play out, the mood of it ill-fitting like the seams of the cheaply made uniform shirt you've got to wear. Oh, but then . . . but then the song you need comes on. The one that lifts your hand and your head, and you take a deep breath and start murmuring the lyrics, and then you're driving a mobile karaoke station.

And then it's like the gentle babble that fills the open spaces and pads the sharp corners of your little home, suffusing energy throughout the area, when you were struggling to keep the blood from freezing in your veins. You put it on to pretend like you've got a movie soundtrack while a worthwhile project sits prettily before you- bare, untested, new. Or maybe it churns out silky waves, a molasses thick aura that spreads across the floorboards and soaks the blankets you've made a nest out of on the old couch.

Or maybe it's the hymn that dances across the lacquer of your altar, physical or metaphysical. Is it what you chant, pray, swear to? It could very well be the only altar you'll ever keep. Maybe all of it. Maybe it's your only hope, your dream, your nepenthe! Your aerial courage, your garden soil, your secret ingredient!

It's the personal prayer that rushes in your ears just overtop your blood, unnoticeable to the rest of the world. A delight that's equal parts passionate, gentle, enthralling, pricking all senses. The benediction of intimacy sometimes, or perhaps the sugared shroud of popularity, and sometimes the heavy press of lost souls . . . all rushing into your head, private and hushed, out of wireless plastic acting as a social shield.

It's the friend you want and don't always need- it's the only family you've got for the next ten minutes- it's gonna save the world- it's gonna end us all.

In other words, music is probably the kindest god you could pray to.

## SHAMAN OF DICHEMSO [II]

*BY CHIDIEBERE UDEOKECHUKWU*

A savage bite throbs  
my surviving nipple and a scar  
winds over my broken nose and  
down along my chiselled cheek.

But stay your tears and  
cry them for Nina, my friend.  
That girl was well sculpted,  
and she strode tall and graceful.

Death in the dark would be her lot;  
for once, was a time when  
lots of Johns called her away and

forward two nights, there,  
at the ends of Kumasi, she laid  
lifeless, breastless and bare,  
and sprawled, and eyes to a clueless sky.

My tale will not be wholly spent.  
Each man-hood I have known for  
a nightly handsome pay of  
20 dollar notes, is a trophy of shame  
on the pride of my woman.  
For 10 years, I chewed my shame,

bitter like paracetamol,  
on the darkling streets of Dichemso.  
and sipped it rancid cold, like spoiled palm wine,  
in my pornographic pawnshop.



# LIVE

*BY ABDULGAFAR YUSUF*

run, soldier, run  
to the battlefield, to your fight  
and you may live the thrill of war

run to your scars  
to your demons and to your woes  
and you may wallow in melancholy

run to your fears  
to your trials and to your half hidden struggles  
and you may sip from the cup of survivor's guilt

run to your love  
to your wild dreams and your worst nightmare  
and you may wake up to a brand new day

run to your chaos  
to the wildfire and exploding trenches  
and you may tell a tale of a lifetime

run to your bloodshed  
to the slaying and to be slain  
and you may get to dirty your hands

run to your death  
to your tears and your certain fate  
and you may know how it all ends

.

## TO SERVE WITH BLOOD

*BY IFIOKOBONG ETUK*

Just a night ago,  
The news of a boy dying in front of a closed hospital broke before the brittle  
face of my television  
screen  
It made me wonder how it must have felt  
To die of blood loss at the door step of a blood bank  
I think he must have stretched in a bid to reach out to salvation  
but faith alone is never enough to hold on to the lab coat of striking doctors.

In all of this,  
I locked my fingers and prayed it will be the last  
because for all I've known,  
I've lived in this country where boys become seeds  
Planted into the earth to sprout a tombstone.  
There's too many to mention  
From the ones sent home by trigger happy policemen  
To those swallowed in train attacks  
And even the ones who's killers are the unknown gunmen  
Turning fathers, brothers and sons into gone men.

When a child says what he wants to be when he's grown up  
There's no part of the picture that imagines him growing to become an  
hashtag  
Hung up on Twitter trend tables and his blood becoming colours for the front  
pages.  
A Nigerian girl is missing on her way to school  
A river of hashtags wash her body ashore the timeline  
So by the time the daily sun rises over the nation,  
You realize it's too late to call the guardian to do his job.

I wrote this poem to remind you.

That there's an army of archangels fighting for God in my country  
They are willing to burn a girl if her tongue dares to lash on their messiah  
This is justice measured by the circumference of a burning tire  
enough to cover the country with the sooth her body has become.  
This poem was written to remind you  
That your voice can be stolen before you learn the words of the freedom song  
So I've learnt to tuck my throat behind a kind of revolution casted into ballot  
boxes.

Last night

A wailing mother searched for her son at the mouth of a mass grave  
all she could find was a screenshot of his last tweet "this country will not end  
me"

Minutes before his body became another statue  
In memory of another unfinished story.

Another hashtag

Another planted boy

Another tombstone at the foot of my country's flag  
with a broken line from the pledge

"To serve my country with all my blood"

.

# PROVIDENCE

*BY J.L. MOULTRIE*

Each twilight a bank of clouds sits behind  
the houses  
but not today a lifetime  
spent departing my family  
consists of people with no qualms about  
harming the  
truth's often spoken  
softly  
it's costly to be  
yourself many would soon  
choose death's pursuance alcohol's  
influence on my  
tongue  
at the age of seven  
my mother's drinking buddy  
suffered  
a seizure on our garage floor the same  
garage my older brother stashed  
stolen cars one day we caught  
a pigeon in a milk crate I wanted to hold it  
with both hands our pact unspoken our  
eyes wet with voices

# SÉANCE

*BY MOROUJE SHERIF*

I went to a funeral once, my first. Foxleaves pillaged me all the way home, & the pavement turned blacker than October. I spent the afternoon fingerpicking dusk from voile; grace from rust. Death unvirgined me with a mouthful of horrors, several lovely birds I have embraced into each spare cavity of my chest. The forest is forked & silver-tipped. I spin love as though it is more than half a myth, but the science of God whispers in my ear moonless truths, a million different songs coded for departure. The branches are wired like fire, & even countries made of stone have fallen with less. What comes after all this lies like a wounded serpent: the forest is forked & silver-tipped, so let me rest in the summer of our wilderness before the trees curl undone. Hold me under until all our wounds must settle into requiem & carbon.

## SHARDS OF SOMATESTHESIA

*BY OLUWAPELUMI TOBUN*

let your body take the shape  
of a fish struggling to survive  
a polluted water, you twist, you turn,  
you gasp, choking at the wreckage  
done to your home.

let your body take the paintings of  
a graveyard stuffed with dreams  
that swam into despair.

let your body take the form of  
a kite that moved freely in the sky  
& got lost in space.

let your body take the aura of an orphan,  
whose body took shape of a casket where  
he buried his siblings, & morph into a tombstone  
of unspoken condolences, as grief swam into his home  
like a shark, devoured his family one by one till he became  
a remnant of broken things.

## THE START OF SOMETHING

*BY CHINWE OKONKWO*

Cars rush the ever growing nightfall  
It's a junky, run down green machine  
The tires fall from teenage gleam  
We sing (or scream); We dance I think  
We are privileged naughty pigs  
We are not heavenly  
We are hurtful, we're insensitive, we are laughing, life is good.  
I try to think of a synonym for bliss, ecstasy?  
We're elated  
We are children; nothing else exists in this moment  
We are animated, stimulated  
I can't believe this is a feeling  
It didn't even feel like I felt like I was alive; I just was  
For the rest of my life I will chase this  
This, somehow content enlivening  
I think I am thrilled  
I think, maybe, perhaps, my life has begun

## AUTHOR BIOS

### IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

**Lester A. Batiste** is a savage writer in living color who writes for political, social, economic change and Black futures. Born in Chicago, IL, he holds an M.F.A from the University of Southern Maine, and an MS. Ed. from the University of Pennsylvania. Influenced by the likes of Gwendolyn Brooks, Carl Sandburg, and Toni Morrison, Lester strives to weave traditional forms and techniques with the vibrancy of African American experience and speech. The attention paid to the line is seen in versatile ways as Lester often invokes chants, music, or lyrics into knuckles knocking notes and immersive landscapes. Rich details are enhanced by the musical tones from Lester's childhood on the Southside of Chicago all the way to his present on the Northside, Ward 5, straight across the street from the Farthest view of Downtown Minneapolis, MN.

**Danny Fantom** lives in the Godless void of Florida, and her personality is mostly Halloween- bar the occasional pop culture reference. She has work published in Defunct Magazine, The Daily Drunk magazine, and The Deeps. You can find her on Twitter @ThrillandFear, retweeting pictures of desserts, horror movies, and sunsets.

**Chidiebere Udeokechukwu** is an LLM student at the University of Nigeria (Enugu Campus). He reads poetry for CARVE MAGAZINE, and is a poetry mentor at the Writers Space Africa Academy. He is the 3rd prize (for poetry) winner at the 2022 IHRAF CREATORS OF JUSTICE LITERARY AWARDS. He appears in the longlist of the 2022 BRIEFLY WRITE POETRY PRIZE. He also appears in the shortlist of the 2023 WRITING UKRAINE PRIZE. His poems have appeared in Adanna, Poetic Africa, Writers Space Africa Magazine and elsewhere.



## AUTHOR BIOS

### IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

**Abdulgafar Yusuf**, a young poet and software engineer. He loves to write on topics such as feelings and what meanings he makes of images. He lives in Lagos, Nigeria. Besides writing, he's a lover of sports and fitness. He's @abdul\_xs on Twitter.

**Ifiokobong Etuk** (KING of the QUILL) is a Nigerian student of Communication and Media Studies in the University Of Uyo, poet, writer, and a broadcast producer with Premium 89.9 where he presents and produces a literary appreciation show titled "LAUREATES LOUNGE". His writing focuses on ideas of social consciousness as his works have appeared on [thepeaceexhibit.com](http://thepeaceexhibit.com), Fiery Scribe Review, The Shallow Tales Review, The Loch Raven Review, THE MUSE JOURNAL; A Journal of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, BANSI Issue III, and his debut spoken word "Homecoming The EP" on Audiomack and YouTube etc. His socials are; Facebook: @King Ofthe Quill. Twitter: @Kingofthe\_Quill. Instagram: @kingofthe\_quill. Linktree: <https://linktr.ee/k.o.g>

**J.L. Moultrie** is a native Detroiter, poet and fiction writer who communicates his craft through words. He fell in love with literature after encountering James Baldwin, Hart Crane and many others. He considers himself a modern, abstract expressionist.

**Morouje Sherif** is an Egyptian-Canadian writer and artist. Her work has appeared in The Poetry Society of the U.K., Foyle Young Poets of the Year, the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, Dust Poetry Magazine, Plum Tree Tavern, INKSOUNDS, among others. In her free time, she enjoys gazing at the horizon.

## AUTHOR BIOS

### IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

**Oluwapelumi Tobun**, formerly known as Pelumi Tobun, NGP III, is a black writer & 3D artist from Africa. His works have appeared/are forthcoming in Arts Lounge Magazine, Nymphs, Erato Magazine, Eunoia Review, Poetic Africa, TSTR, Ibadanarts and else where. You can say hi to him on Twitter & IG @pelumitobun.

**Chinwe Okonkwo** is a student in the Metro Atlanta area. Her work can be found in The Ice Lolly Review, Rhodora Magazine, and We Write Here. She's a staff writer for the Write Through The Night blog and works as a fiction reader for the Levatio Magazine. She was part of the BTL young writer's workshop with critically acclaimed poet Jose Olivarez and The University of Iowa. She was the recipient of the 2017 Honoring Our Heroes Writing Award. When she's not writing, she runs varsity track and field for her school.