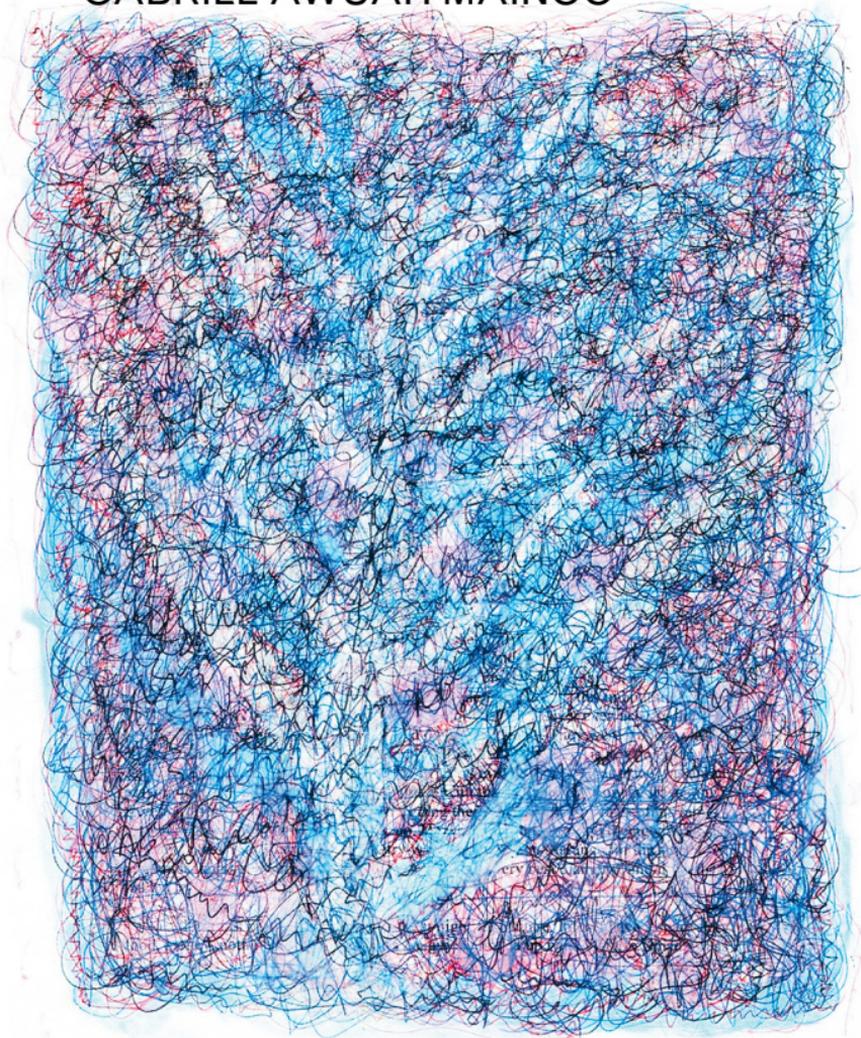


GABRIEL AWUAH MAINOO



We are Moulting Birds

A Chapbook by
GABRIEL AWUAH MAINOO

We are Moulting Birds

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Currency for the labourers

We hoist relics;
nail bones, tales,
trinkets of ivory
bracelets—aromas,
street names on
our collar bone.
Conventions of clans.

Dump the weight
in the rust of
border bars.
For new records.
Work permits.
The clearance
of allegiance.

For new names.
We deposit
shells for stones.
Cowries for
green cards. The
mines, for factories,
For grape plantations.
For nursing homes.

Indigenes of war
 forced upon ourselves.
 We dump April
 mangoes for drought.
 Sound home for
 hurricanes.
 For gun-chorales.

As we dig trenches
 of gas lines from
 pole to pole,
 sapphires pass through
 our pockets like
 wind. So, we bury
 our shovels

and auction
 our necks for
 dust. Understanding it
 is the sanctuary of
 our remains. We
 will preserve emaciated
 spines with herb,
 sow them for
 years. Chant down
 the tribes of
 rain & we will
 grow new nations.

Talking—journeys

what these places are like is
 what the topography of my memory is like
 when i dig behind footprints. despite
 the distance between cliffs & waterfalls.
 grandfather tells me it is the same
 body of sea that meets us everywhere.
 it's fine, if the water forgets
 the keys to the house.
 it's an ultimatum to say i must survive here.
 last morning, sheriffs yanked Melissa
 out of the wood cottage in Great Marlborough.
 mortgage arrears, subpoena, elapsed taxes,
 plummeting rents; fine strand of words
 dressed in the regalia of legalities.
 for us life doesn't stop... it
 simply gets quiet like ocean
 choked-in-silent morphemes;
 it only continue in new ways. because
 we have water to remind us
 we can turn at all places.
 and when the torrents are
 departing we won't be here
 punching back-hand
 in palm—kneeling for citizenship

Mushroom shade

how broad is your citadel for shield ?

we have gazed at the dollar for long &
 you feel we are hungry? the way we stare
 into your trashcans? & lick the blood-clot
 from our broken lips? the mould is
 surrounding our bones. spreading to
 fresh dreams creeping up on the sternum.
 it is sunset in New York &
 dust beneath
 feet of wanderers
 are sinking into the grass. orphans.
 feet with no owners &
 rooms & doorsteps. the
 line of black bodies, welcome
 each other into the long-thin silhouette
 clunking against the pale-orange sky.

A voyager's footprints

childhood dream
 now I plant it
 in snow

train station-
 I step out
 to return home

hardship climax
 a black man chilling vinegar
 with snowflakes

address hunt
 the cab driver is playing
house of exile

The ritual that makes her stay

she doesn't need to flip glossy photos of me
chin up & body loose, leaning

in the amber of acacia trees.
i transcribe for her with braille. the dialect

of those who forget the touch of places.
what i paint for her
is always what it is. i design

shapes of onion &
separate the liquid into a vowel; a 'u'
shaped jar; for her migraine & choked nose.

her graduation day on the 6th floor,
i've imagined her making hard living
in Ohio. i trace the staircases, for her climb.

the bushes are more bearded in April,
her 6 acres sugar cane plantation, she
may miss the path. for assurance, look

into old maps & computers
make a GPS for her ease. capture
the warm laughter of her children

into a croquis of thin taffeta. that while she
waits for winter to go by, she'll lose the
fire & learn to adore solitude like woods.

Going—airport blues

First your mother is leaving,
 you cry & then beg the aviator.
 Lifting a dead cat from

the red sack, kiss it in the paws &
 slip a prayer on the runway.
 Feet are gathering on the metal bird. For

this trip she yearns to know more. Onigiri,
 chardonnay, wet pasta, pop magazines
 makes her not disremember the flavor of *Adowa*.

Home is graffiti on broad pillows, remembrances
 morphing themselves in your sleep; the sketch,
 the slow shuffling gait of your mother, as she

drags herself to the barn door, not allowing
 earth to breathe. Contemplating;

legumes or amaranth or black-eyed pea. & She
 chows down

up with a tongue in Ottawa, licking
 the bliss dribbling down the maple bough.

Goat cheese, scoopful of chocolate mousse
 topped with a dollop of whipped cream &
 a sprinkling of shaved almonds. This is how

she understands the sweet-tongue of your father;
 the women who nailed him to the wall, & the
 delight to dally in 2 worlds at the same time.

Adventure, blood culture & familiarity

And you throw yourself
 into the shebeen, smelling
 like spider plant & dry
 leaves of powdered okra.
 you crane your eyes around
 the dark room. in the
 perennial darkness. you feel
 who your brothers are
 how they smell, the
 occupied places in their
 cranium; dirty beaches, dead
 cockroaches sheltered in
 saline swamp & shit &
 moldy water. & you
 love them for their
 distinct cologne.
 yesterday we had our
 bodies washed in
 the ancient semen. the
 way you smell like me.
 i cannot see you but
 you guffaw & i remember
 this voice—the baptism
 at the Nile.

Wherever your passport falls

at airport
 we burry all
 our secret names

sunset-
 the complexion of home
 on our bodies

phone contacts-
 the strength of spare feet
 in case

portmanteau
 all the relics
 between two worlds

Migratory wings

Sometime in exile feverish bodies would toss
themselves on the towering shrubs &

wish the basil would drain the leech
out of their skins, for wind to

adopt them as birds. Hot cheeks blazing vermilion
beneath face shields. A temperature of kiln clouds

churning under the feet of a sister; experimenting
compound names
H₂O, C-o-v-i-d-19-20-21-22. . . vaccines.

It's hard to grow her own food, hard to
trust the soil, reject 70 dollars, find
mating partner on 7th Street Avenue.

It's hard to seek closure on zoom without hugs.
KK is waiting at Accra bus station,
offering the last piece of cigarette.

During former reunions, you talked about
Walmart, racism, Jamaica, & the drastic drop
in tobacco prices. Night would spread its pavilion

on our heads, listening to talking toads
on the terrace. I hum along. You would pierce me
with laughter for withholding my feminine voice.

In America you try to fly away from bedlams
striving to make a home out of nothingness
but the wings deny you; watch fireflies
through the louvers. Leaping stars on earth.

Gone—Harbour blues

This scent; the torrent that dragged
 father's hair on the sea. The
 smell is washing itself in the water. He

carried white calico, dried almonds, kola nuts,
 his wearied tyre sandals; waiting the apocalypse

kente. Wrapped
 into the blue threadbare portmanteau. His

rotten lantern for Cincinnati, a city
 too dark for black bodies. A
 shilling, a muscle, for good beer. Calabash

for taste of home. Bread.

The only thing cheap for journeys-
 nostalgia. Remembering all good names; 22

hours to the train station, eating
 the last square, recalling complexion of

benevolent hands;
 the soothing weight on his neck.

A poem in exile

At dUsk,
 over the bOrder
 the gaUnt moon
 crumblEd into stars.
 glittering shArds
 quietly plunge themselves
 into the frOst.
 we wAke
 from the nIghtmare
 with frigid fingErs &
 deAd fireflies
 in oUr palms.

Displaced 23:18 at Waterloo terminus

This is where we leave the
part of home we cannot lift
beneath the trench of railways.

The conductor said “Yo!
there’s no room for you here”

but I see the empty spaces,
on the train
filled with dead tickets,

sweat, dirt, crushed
pieces of hamburgers &
they give back my stare.

Something makes you
want to tell me to raise my flag

but you cannot see
because you do not see me &

you wag your head at me in
high-tidal-wave motion.

We are moulting birds I

mother shrieks, inflated with apology/ “wait for the stars to take
their place in her mouth” but father would replace stone-salt with
my milk tooth/ i heard his supplications on the *yoyi* farm/ praying
for a white boy & naming him after a street in Accra/ a dark girl
meets him at morning/ he covers the face of the sun with a wave/
catapulting her to a place/ where sunlight leans across the water/ in
it you picture yourself in Brazil, distinct—behind the samba flailing
your arms

on the shores where a boy with huge enamel juggles many moons
on his sole/ somewhere Nebraska a brown brother maintains his
discrete identity/ although places shred & wear greener boughs/
since 1885 no hoary head spewed out the kola nut/ but my father
has converted 7 times/ maybe once more, after making me respond
to *bom-dia!*/ after enstooling me king in the men/ after immersing
my gill in the/ caliphate’s prayer, after/ the proclamation of the
Hammurabi/

We are moulting birds II

Let's take my Afro-Caribbean father for example/ he embroiders the dark children with his grey fur/ cloning their limbs out of *copaiba*/ i tell him this hinge does not hold flame to a static Caribbean calypso. he beats the woman out of me/ hurling my nape against the wedge/ a room trimmed, heavy like the weight of a jab/ i shout Jesus but he quenches the miracle/ he says Jesus can live everywhere, not here/ he says our factions repel/ in his eyes history is shredding/ the brown feathers rattle against ancestral bones/ reminding him how even dead things can submerge/

imagine the sea runs to you/ floating fragments; jawbones, names, birthmarks revealing the peculiar markings on your father/ the mystery, relics, coming alive, gurgling towards your heels—wondering, about the people—like you/who lost their things, forcibly wore a name, gender/ a body named after a bird, a bird named after a river/ the rightful angle to name a twisted gender/ stand & discover a missing language/ for these findings, in the crossways tadpoles clash their voices behind 10,000 tongues/ contemplating where to plant this abdicated body/

The great halt

quarantine
homes turn into
houses

arrival confetti
flying back home
on a paper plane

the long conversation
with the train window
quarantine rain

family reunion
part of me absent
in the aroma

We don't get muscular in large numbers

Leave out the towering palm trees
 swaying their slender trunks on the wall
 imitating the skeleton of black boys. Begin

counting through the heat,
 curling over the pale black pot
 reddening the dainty blotches on

mother's femur; on her delicate wall
 cold bodies revive their warmth after
 the final spin of her wrist.

On the warm ladle, Kwame Bronze,
 Adele, Beatrix, Sandema = one mouth. Sucking
 the teeth of 1000 bodies & their cavity.

/Inside a pub in Denver, a white kid
 shows us his tiny automatic-pistol
 requesting a portfolio of allegiance/

We sing anthems, each
 beginning & ending with our lover's names. But
 he did not believe us.

Brave black boys bitten by bearded pumpkin.
 Angola, rupee, Ethiopia, cedi
 The disparity in warrior songs.

GABRIEL AWUAH MAINOO, special prize winner of Soka Matsubara international Haiku contest, winner of Forty Under 40 Awards for Authorship and Creative Writing, and semifinalist of the Jack Grape International Poetry Prize, is the author of *Travellers Gather Dust and Lust*, *Chicken Wings at the Altar*, *60 Aces of Haiku*, and *Lyrical Textiles* (Illuminated Press, US). He serves as project manager for Ghana Writes Literary Group, creative editor for *WGM magazine* and African poetry editor for *Better Than Starbucks Poetry and Fiction Journal*. Mainoo's writing has appeared in *The Cicada's Cry* (US), *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Leicestershire* (UK), Writers Space Africa, *Fireflies' Light* (Missouri Baptist University), *Liberio American Journal*, *aAH! Magazine* (Manchester Metropolitan University), *Kalahari Review*, *Wales Haiku Journal*, *EVENT*, *The Mamba*, *Ghana Writes Journal*, The Haiku Foundation, *Ntbanda Review* (Malawi), Best New African Poets anthologies (2018, 2019, 2020), *Bodies & Scars*, *Black Bamboo*, *Poetry Leaves Bound Volume*, *Quesadilla and Other Adventures: Food Poems*, among others. Mainoo is a tennis professional in the morning, a student in the afternoon, and writer in the evening.

TENDAI RINOS MWANAKA (cover image) is a Zimbabwean publisher, editor, mentor, thinker, and multidisciplinary artist with over 40 published books. He writes in English and Shona. His work has been nominated, shortlisted, and has won several prizes. It has also appeared in over 400 journals and anthologies from some 30 countries, and has been translated into Spanish, Shona, Serbian, Arabic, Bengali, Tamil, Macedonian, Albanian, Hungarian, Russian, Romanian, French, and German. Outside the arts, he is an avid entrepreneur, farmer, gardener, and marketer.

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About Ghanaian Writing On Migration and Diaspora



Library Of Africa and
The African Diaspora

Ghanaian Writing on Migration and Diaspora is a series of three chapbooks that were produced through a partnership with The Library of Africa and The African Diaspora (LOATAD) in Accra, Ghana, and Reading the Migration Library (RML) in Vancouver, Canada. The project asked creative writers to consider the meaning of migration, diaspora, and belonging.

The chapbooks in the Ghanaian Writing on Migration and Diaspora series are,
On Loss: Two Poems from Ghana by A.B. Godfreed & SAAN
We are Moulting Birds by Gabriel Awuah Mainoo
Walking on Water by Jay Kophy

LOATAD is a decolonised library, archive, and museum dedicated to the work of African and Diaspora writers from the late 19th-century to the present day. With an expansive collection of books and ephemera from writers representing 41 of Africa's 54 countries, and Black authors from the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe, LOATAD makes explicit the historical and contiguous links between the global Black experience.

RML produces small chapbooks and artist books that speak to the larger theme of migration as experienced by humans as well as non-humans. All RML chapbooks are freely available as digital copies, or through exchange.

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