

OF BAD FATHERS AND WORSE SONS

Poetry Collection for The Evaristo Poetry Prize 2025

There's Static on the Telephone at a Booth in London

There's static on the telephone,
at a booth somewhere in London.

I'm down to my last coin,
drenched wet from the rain outside.
And it's so jarring how you sound when you pick —

distant —

even when the red box promises
to close miles between us.

But I ignore the chasm regardless,
closing our gap in the firm of my resolution,
By greeting you in my new, unusual way —
dropping memories
so you don't forget you have a son,
who holds all the possibilities of the universe in his heart,
The incomprehensibility of *Imago Dei*.

So today, I tell you of a spoon —
Whose concave end I held to collect my cereal
as it spilled onto the table.
And you gave my head a light knock,
because that's not how the spoon was intended —
to spill milk rather than hold.

But you didn't notice the ants pool over it,
sustenance before a sojourn
to the nooks and crannies of our home —
an answered prayer dropped over their heads
by a spoon that didn't fulfill
what you saw as intended purpose.

And as I tell you today,
shouting to outmatch the pouring torrent,
you laugh —
because I've come again with my *parables*.

But I don't come to you by chance with tales.
I remind you that while I continue to bless the ants,
I'm still your son —
even when I don't fulfill
an *intended* purpose.

At Calvary We Surrender

Honey—

this situation is quite precarious.
We'll put it in our prayers,
throw a penny in the well,
and pray our souls to keep.

No one has to know.
Go bathe in the *Lethe*, and caress yourself,
steaming out devils by way of *Agbo Jedi*.
Never seen a sickness that it can't fix.

And we'll tell you that you've got to die to self —
there's never been a greater honor.
But darling, it's a bit of a quixote.

Don't stop beating till you feel a change,
upcall of the still small voice.

And what a change it will be — your transformation!
To lay down your old robes and don the new,
stand clean before the people,
and earn your acceptance,
deserve your existence —
just to know you'll still be second class,
forever watched for your slip back to filth.

And filth you are!
To entangle yourself with the devil,
To have threesomes with him and your reprobate man —
make it four, for that callous mind.

When you know that urge again, loud rings infernal,
to meet strangers in the night —
don't take it the wrong way.
Tell the pastor; let him get the Goya.

Remind you that you're worthless,
but know renewal by the olive —
that you're still worthless,
but at least someone will hold you through it.
In this house, we're worthless together.

Better that than to know the heathens outside,
jagged reflections of the Creator — *Bizzaro*.
This is destiny, your cross,
and we'll hold it to Calvary,
where there was never need,
except to play jester for the malachite pious —
God's legislators where there was never court.

Shalom.

Showers of Blessings

This weekend,
I'll do the thing they'll kill me for
in my father's land.

This place, to me, is everything.

Heaven will pour its torrent —
God mourning
for a daring sinner.

And the churches will shut their doors,
as Noah did his ark.

But I will bask in His sorrow,
under the heft of a thick blanket,
letting myself *feel* —
for what will be the first time —
a touch where I don't flinch.

And then I will know
how God feels above, to be worshipped.

And perhaps I'll understand then,
this jealous God.

The Organ And The Saxophone

The Organ and the Saxophone know themselves—husband and wife.
And every Sunday, they renew their vows,
Invoking the Paraclete in a duet that crescendos to Heaven,
While the congregation screams ungodly,
Convulsing as they call the Creator's name,
Before falling to the ground.

There is only one language in that moment:
The Organ and the Saxophone.
And yet Babel returns,
Overtaking the church with the language of incoherence.
I can't speak it.

I don't know it.

When the Organ says *I do*,
Tears well in my eyes, my hairs rising,
And my mother smiles, proud that her son knows the Spirit
(No such thing).

I'm in love.
In love with love.
And I wish to be known,
As the Organ knows the Saxophone.

Be Positive

It was the kit that sat untouched on his table,
Three weeks incarcerated in shame and anxiety—
Because he had kissed a man,
And been told that all he would know was disease.

It was the recoil whenever he would hold a man's body as mirror,
And etch the craters and bumps on their chest,
Take them as symptoms—
The curse of the queer man.

It was the kit that he took out weeks later,
To hold a stick to his mouth,
And let his saliva speak truth.
And boy, he had never been more scared of it.

It was the disbelief when the kit said *negative*—
As if the stick could play Pinocchio,
Like he deserved the double lines,
Because he had let a man know him.

It was the new kit that sat on his table weeks later,
Maybe the old one lied.
There had to be justice, some penance,
For his unbridled desires.

That was all he knew awaited the queer man:
Since it was lust, not love—
And because he never knew the difference,
Sodom and Gomorrah must be unleashed within,
Or the story could never hold true.
That all he knew was depravity.

This Quiet Desolate Place

The halls of my flesh are a desolate temple,
Knowing no God, and fearing no man.
Cobwebs strum as a lyre,
Tone deaf notes of unrepentance.
These halls are my mother's haunting.
I am the thesis of her prayers.

My place in church is dichotomy:
Hedonist, believer.
Like a cross-bearer could ever grasp pleasure—
Should ever grasp it.
Tell this bildungsroman come unscathed,
And the Great Physician will lay his hands.

The rows of the pews are numerous,
Thousands by my right, ten thousand to my left.
A court of jurors to proclaim my judgment,
In what is known as the house of love.
My tongue will scald with their hymns.

Observe the cactus, prick on its thorns,
Growing in the place feet tire to tread,
A spit to the heavens from its island of fire,
And yet it thrives with God's green.
Perhaps this temple knows a God,
Unbounded by the Pharisee's gaze.

Laodicea's A Monopoly

Laodicea's a monopoly—
Written word to the contemporary
From tablets of stone,
On what it is to be a freeman in a world of plenty.

To hold the joys of life in fiscal and religious covenant,
The bonds of which are consanguineous.

Do you feel lukewarm yet?
Indemnify for your survival.

To reject the written word and believe your freedom is individual,
Unshackled by the cries on which you give your life meaning.

Do you despise the taste of you—sulphuric,
As you descend into black collar slop?
The message is lost on you.

Could not afford freedom when I lived in comfort,
Shielded to the cries around me.
But I'm singing loud about it now,
Orpheus' song,
Long after the snake bit Eurydice;
To know that my elysium banks on the incongruence of populace.

Do I feel lukewarm as they spit me out?
A rejected stone.

Understanding now, I was never free,
Under this Laodicea.

The Latter Rain

A stalactite and stalagmite race to meet,
Sending hope by way of the water dripping down—
Echoes of these drops, the chorus of God's whisper.
I don't know what they'll be when they meet,
But the latter rain will begin.

A Zulu man pointed at me,
Said I should get out of his country.
When I greeted him, *Sawubona*,
He looked past me—
Hatred displacing this wavelength.

They call it *Ubuntu*.
Shows language is more than the word.

The latter rain is here—
In that I can no longer speak my brother's tongue,
Confounded by my lack of belief.
His mouth runs with disdain's fervor.

The sick are plenty, don't you know?

The latter rain is here—
By hand of white-coat prophets,
Who never lift their hands from the bedridden,
Lest they reclaim monopoly on their lives.

Incendiary words to the spirit,
Preached on hospital beds.

The latter rain is here—
Shut the upper room by way of immigration,
Mark supremacy by those begotten of Isaac.
Keep out the foolish virgins—
They had their time.

Did you fake how you felt
When I told you I loved you?
"The latter rain is here," you cried,
"I won't be your umbrella to the outpouring."

It was the last I saw of you.

I said I didn't know what they'd be when they met.
Know now—
It is new being, new story,
Our unfolding and undoing.
Journey's ending.

The Death Of Mmuo Mmiri

[Eulogy for the Niger Delta and the Spirits that lie within]

My skin pulses, obsidian ripples of the delta banks,
Turned black by the greed of a people
Whose language commands an *I* and not a *We*.
Caked in ochre—
Bloodied mud from my people who became their people.

The delta no longer greets me when I meet it,
No ecstatic gurgles of the *mmuo mmiri*,
As cool water rises to my head.

Replaced now by something malevolent—
It strangles the fish, kills the grass, scoffs at the gods,
Clogging my lungs till all it knows is fire.

My hand rises to meet my chest,
To quell this burning—
But they're held at *passe*,
Stuck in the viscous grasp of this evil.

The riches of the delta turned back on it,
The people don't dream of tomorrow—
Unable to see past the black of the banks.

The *mmuo mmiri* have died,
And it's a people that killed it.

Diokpa's Home

As mud floor licks my hardened feet,
Caking them lightly in the morning's unswept dust,
I am in Diokpa's home.

I know the living room smells of Seaman.
He swears it's only for the visitors,
But his eyes are too longing,
Watery with the aroma of chicken boiling next door,
And old age's wear.

His rifle is where it always is,
Crossed over an elephant tusk —
His way of saying, I'll do what I said I'll do,
Even pulling that trigger.

I count the grooves of his hand-carved armchair,
Wondering if any part of me fits.

Everything is as I remember it.
Except me.