

# KENYA

*Through a*

# Foreign Eye

*A Collection of Poems*

**VOL. 1**



Kistrech Theatre International



*Edited & Compiled by*

# Christopher Okemwa



**KENYA**

*Through a*

**Foreign Eye**



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**This anthology has been sponsored by Dr. Christopher Okemwa**

## About the Editor



**Christopher Okemwa** is a literature lecturer at Kisii University, Kenya. He has a PhD in performance poetry from Moi University, Kenya. He is the founder and current director of Kistrech International Poetry festival in Kenya ([www.kistrechpoetry.org](http://www.kistrechpoetry.org)). His novella, *Sabina and the Mystery of the Ogre*, won the Canadian Burt Award for African Literature in 2015. Its sequel, *Sabina*

*the Rain Girl* (Nsemia Inc., 2019) was selected for the UN SDG 2 Zero Hunger reading list in 2021. His short stories, *Chubot the Cursed One and Other Stories* was picked by the UN SDG in 2022 and Okemwa has subsequently been invited to be a guest author at the Sharjah Children Reading Festival in UAE, May 2022. Okemwa is the editor of *Musings During a Time of Pandemic: A World Anthology of Poems on COVID-19* & *I Can't Breathe: A Poetic Anthology of Social Justice*. He has written ten books of poetry and been translated to Armenian, Chinese, Greek, Norwegian, Finnish, Hungarian, Arabic, Polish, Chinese, Nepalese, Turkish, Russian, Spanish, Catalan, Dutch and Serbian. He has also translated four literary works of international poets from English to Swahili. He is the author of ten folktales of the Abagusii people of Kenya, three children's storybooks, one play, two novels and four oral literature textbooks.  
Website: [www.okemwa.co.ke](http://www.okemwa.co.ke)

# Introduction

I founded the Kistrech International Poetry Festival in Kenya in 2013. I began this event after my participation in poetry events in various countries around the world. My aim of starting the event was, and is, to bring international and local poets together onto one platform to share literature, culture and the arts.

The festival creates time to allow poets visit Lake victoria, Maasai Mara, Schools and the local villages. Poets get time to interact with students and local people. In their visit to the village, the poets learn about people's traditions, norms, beliefs and cultural practices. They also watch dances and the African story-telling art, and listen to African oral poetry. This interaction provides materials for poetry written by guest-poets who attend the event.

Reading poetry to African students and subsequent interaction with them enables MA & PhD students to acquire materials for their scholarly research and theses. Many of those students discover authors and literary materials they never knew existed. They also learn and hear for the first time of countries, people and cultures they never heard before.

This anthology, *Kenya Through a Foreign Eye*, comprise of poems written by poets who attended Kistrech event from 2013 to 2019: Althea Romeo-Mark (Switzerland), Professor Arif Khudairi (Egypt), Dr. Diti Ronen (Israel), Daniel H. Dugas (Canada), Godspower Oboido (Nigeria), Hilde Susan Jaegtnes (Norway), Joanna Lundberg (Finland), Katharina Koppe (Germany), Lauri García Dueñas (Mexico), Valerie Leblanc (Canada), Libor Martinek (Czech Republic), and Dr. Molly Joseph (India).

*Kenya through a Foreign Eye* reflects Kenya's myriad cultures, as well as the economic, political and social issues. Being a third world country, Kenya like any other African country, poses a culture shock to foreign poets, especially those travelling to Africa for their first time. With meager resources, Kenya does not provide first class services and hospitality to visitors as other developed countries do. Our amenities are undeveloped and inadequate and therefore may not provide the comfort to visitors as expected. With this backdrop in mind, poets have written poems from various perspectives and tastes. Many, though, state that the people of Kenya are happy, kind and friendly despite the harsh economic conditions they face in the country.

Other poets in here express shock to see people living in such abject poverty, while others view the people as hard working, determined, lovely, kind and resilient. Long live Kenya, our mother-land!

***Dr. Christopher Okemwa***

*Director, Kistrech International Poetry Festival in Kenya*

*Lecturer, Kisii University, Kenya*



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# ALTHEA ROMEO-MARK

## (Switzerland)

Born in Antigua, West Indies, Althea Romeo-Mark is an educator and writer who grew up in St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands. She has lived and taught in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, USA, Liberia (1976-1990), London, England (1990-1991), and in Switzerland since 1991. Althea Romeo Mark is the author of two full-length poetry collections, *The Nakedness of New, If Only the Dust Would Settle*, (English-German), three chapbooks, *Beyond Dreams: The Ritual Dancer* (chapbook), *Two Faces, Two Phases* (chapbook) and *Palaver* (chapbook) and a poetry collaboration, *Shu-Shu Moko Jumbi: The Silent Dancing Spirit*. This anthology includes poems by Althea Romeo-Mark and prose and poetry from participants in a Black Writers' workshop conducted at Kent State University. Some recent publications include: Short Story, "Easter Sunday," published The Sunday Observer, Jamaica, 24.04 2022, [www.jamaicaobserver.com](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com); Poems, "She," and "Scalded Dreams" published in Shakti: The Feminine Principle, Energy & Lifeorce, an international anthology of poetry, KKPC Publishing, India, 2022; Short story "Wimmelskafts' Hill," published in Bookends, The Daily Observer, Jamaica, 30.01.22, [www.jamaicaobserver.com](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com); Three poems, "Dopo Di Te.." (After you..), "Un Pinguini Si Congeda," (A Pinguin Takes Its Leave," and "L'Ultima Traversata," (The Final Crossing) published in Antologia di Poesia, Contemporanea Internazionale, Universalia, Trento, Italy, 2021; Three poems, "Carrying the Spirit of a Siafu," "Nyam," and "The Endless Tugging," published in Letters from the Self to the World, Abrazos, DoveTales 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary anthology, A Writing for Peace Publication, 2021.

# Back in Your Arms Again

*(Tribute to Kisii Villagers)*



Every day you walk in dirt and dust, live on the land,  
live in the warmth of earth's bosom,  
smell daily her dewy breath as you dig into her fertile sod.

You share the joys of earth's giving.  
They are the fruit of the seed, the fruit of the roots you  
planted.  
They are placed before us, strangers on your soil.

You give us all you have—plump, roasted, sweet potatoes,  
bananas, long, fat, and short, succulent sugarcane stalks  
and cups of millet porridge.

You dance and sing for us. The joy you spread  
is measured by the bounce in our walk,  
the loudness of our laughter.

What we take with us is more than postcard memories.  
Another life can be lived if we allow ourselves to take part in  
it.

We must become like a snake, shed our skin.

© Althea Romeo-Mark, 19.05.15

# PROF. ARIF KHUDAIRI

## (Cairo, Egypt)

Egyptian poet, novelist, short story writer, and translator, **Arif Karkhi Abukhudairi** (better known as Arif Khudairi) is professor in Arabic literature. He has written nine poetry books in Arabic. His English anthologies include *Trees Leaves* (1998), *Rubaiyat of Arif Khudairi* (2004), and *Love Poems of Arif Khudairi* (2011). His novel, *The Eighth Voyage of Sindbad* (2019) is seen by critics as a highly symbolic narrative of good versus evil, altruism versus selfishness, of materialism versus spirituality. He received numerous awards and has participated in international poetry festivals in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. His works have been translated into twenty languages. He has been included in *the International Who's Who in Translation and Terminology*, London, 1995, *the International Who's Who in Poetry*, California, 2005, *the Anthology of Universal Poets*, Madrid, 2010, and *the Encyclopedia of Global Poets*, Argentine, 2016. In addition, Arif Khudairi is an accomplished translator and biographer. He translated into Arabic eight Korean, Malaysian, Bruneian, Pakistani, English, and American volumes of poetry and he wrote biographies of poets such as Kim So Wol (1984), Muhammad Iqbal (2004), and Shukri Zain (2006). Khudairi is a member of the Egyptian Writers Association, Cairo, Egypt, and the Haiku International Association, Tokyo, Japan.

# Ode to Nairobi

Nairobi,  
A pretty tawny hour  
That escaped from paradise,  
A soft tulip of twilight  
That comes from a deep  
Sacred night,  
And a pearl of moonlight  
In the vast blue skies,  
We have come  
To listen  
To your songs,  
To learn  
How to become  
One body,  
One heart,  
One soul,  
How to grow  
Blooms of hope,  
Of Justice,  
And truth.  
May you remain  
A fountain  
Of poetry,  
A land  
Of goodness,  
And a river  
Of affection  
That runs  
In your valley  
Like pure  
Melted gold.

*(2013. Translated from Arabic by the poet himself)*

# Dr. Diti Ronen (Israel)



**Dr. Diti Ronen** is a poet, an editor, a translator of poetry and a scholar. She has published twelve full length poetry books, five in Israel and the seven in other languages. Her poetry is translated into many languages and is published worldwide. Ronen was awarded three international poetry awards, two national awards and numerous prizes of honor, poetry residencies and

scholarships and she is regularly invited to perform her poetry in Israel and around the world. Beside her literary work, Dr. Diti Ronen is a researcher and a lecturer of Arts, Theatre and Cultural Policy. Born in Tel Aviv, Israel, Ronen is the mother of five and lives in Neve Monoson, a community near Tel Aviv.

# When I came to Africa / Diti

## Ronen

When I came to Africa  
The earth and I became one.  
Years of pretending, gone.  
In the process of merging  
We stood facing each other  
Past versus future  
One long food chain  
Untangled, untied.

I never dreamed myself with her.  
She seemed distant and far  
A continent from another galaxy.

But the blush of the earth  
And the redness of my blood  
Have already begun to mix.  
At once I knew: This is how humans were created.  
This is how I was created.  
Earth and Blood.



# DANIEL H. DUGAS

## (Canada)

Daniel H. Dugas is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice includes video, interactivity, audio, music, graphic design, and writing. In the exploration of social and political issues, he uses themes of ecology, technology and the shifting baselines throughout his work.

Daniel has participated in festivals and literary events as well as exhibitions and performances internationally. He was an artist in residence at the Banff Centre, in both in the Visual Arts and in the Music Department; Sculpture Space, New York; EMMEDIA, Calgary; A.I.R. Vallauris, France. He was a visiting scholar at the Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney, Australia; Everglades National Park; the Deering Estate in Miami; and at the Conservation Foundation for the Gulf Coast, Osprey, FL. More recently, he was the writer in residence at the *Festival acadien de poésie* in Caraquet NB.

*Fundy*, his thirteenth publication, co-written with Valerie LeBlanc, was published in May 2022 through Basic Bruegel Editions. The book is a poetic text/image exploration of the Fundy Biosphere and surrounding region.

Daniel currently resides in Moncton, NB, where he was recently awarded the 2021 New Brunswick Lieutenant Governor's Award for High Achievement in French Language Literary Arts.

# Thitima (Energy)



In this landscape  
of shovelled earths  
and un-shovelled earths,  
of arched goats  
looking thoughtful,  
of speeding Boda Boda  
and Boda Boda sheds

In this land of Churches  
and Choma zones,  
of men with shovels  
walking empowered

In this cosmology of tracks  
extending outward  
shortcutting everything

In this endless network of paths  
of life and death, of paths taken and abandoned,  
of paths of energy and inceptions

of music rising from every bus  
every stand, in the music  
that envelops everyone

There is no stopping  
the going of the rhythms

A path goes here  
another one there  
they overlap  
become larger,  
veer between bushes,  
they are the tentacles  
of giant octopus'  
dancing a waltz

The neurons  
sending electricity to each limb  
light up this East African night

The paths are  
the way to go,  
the way to come back home

They are what is left  
of having or wanting to go

They are what is passed down  
to the children, who in turn  
will invent new roads to travel upon,  
and new rhythms to walk along

*October 9, 2016*

# Gods



God is everywhere!  
Especially in decals on buses

**GOD ALMIGHTY**  
in bold letters  
racing on a dirt road

God in the middle of the wilderness  
incarnated in every speeding Boda Boda

God is everywhere!

I see him  
in the diesel fumes of buses,  
I see him  
in the whirlpools  
of papers and bags,  
in the tails  
of small goats

eating in ditches,  
I see him  
in the yellow plastic jugs  
balancing on heads,  
I see him in the tarps  
flapping in the wind,  
in the wind that controls everything,  
I see him  
in the smoke of every fire  
of this never ending choma zone

He is here,  
everywhere,  
present in each kernel of corn

*Oct 10, 2016*



# Godspower Oboido

## (Nigeria)



**Godspower Oboido** is a Nigerian poet and cultural researcher. Critics have described his poetic voice as both matured and assured, comparable to the voices of Christopher Okigbo and Leopold Senghor, leading figures in African poetry and

writers who have influenced Oboido's work. Some regard Oboido as one of the most promising and distinguished contemporary poets representing the future of Nigerian literature. *Wandering Feet on Pebbled Shores* is his second book, following *Songs of a Chicken Bone*. His poetry has appeared in *The Istanbul Review*, *The Indiana Voice Journal*, *African Writer* and other literary journals.

## Waiting

Kitengela, I am waiting to escape  
from the smell and spell of your dust  
billowing in the swift exuberance of cyclones  
and all kinds of rude winds without course.  
I am waiting to escape to West Africa's  
tropical savannahs where rainforest trees  
with leafy ears collect loose gossips  
from the lips of the wind expelled from Sahara

that hides in its sand dunes lost histories  
and merchant stories of the Mahgreb and Timbuktu.

Nairobi, shoot me to your Heavens soon,  
into your pensive clouds—altered by sunlight—  
let me escape on boron-made wings  
in the labyrinths of sky.

From Kisii to Kisumu I have not eaten  
your cherished *ugali* and *sukuma wiki*  
for I am waiting to escape  
to the familiarity of *eba* and *eguisi* soup  
prepared by a brother who wants me home soon,  
a brother I will be leaving again soon  
for the magic of London and an America  
that beckons now with uncertain fingers.

*The homecomings shadow my departures.*

O Child, half child of the world that I am,  
what troubles the itching bum at home  
that it barely sits before the seminal  
feet, betrothed to the world's ways,  
is at the door again, going,  
coming and going like Abiku betwixt two worlds?  
I am waiting, on this Nairobi-bound Rembo *matatu*,  
for the conductor that holds my change,  
to meet with Khainga at Kenya Broadcasting  
Corporation.

I am waiting and hoping on one, mountains and seas  
away—  
Lord knows who—for a sign like a Pharisee  
that the man in me may enter a kind of rest.  
The child in me waits for a mother that will never return

after several seasons that come and go.  
So, then I must wait for the second epiphany  
of the King Immaculate.

(From *Wandering Feet on Pebbled Shores*)

## Three Cities

### *Lagos*

Is like London  
(but not how you had  
heard it told as a child)  
only  
bereft

of  
magic

and  
imperial gloom.

### *Kitengela*

Early sunset peel through  
the film of indolent clouds  
pierced by octopus-like rays  
over vast Maasai land.

Cows, food laden  
on both sides of the womb,  
gallop home on low farms  
as Maasai boys, some cattle owners,  
also return from play.

## *Nairobi*

These skylines with high rise  
structures, erected  
on resistant Mau-Mau blood,  
haunt the spectral shadows  
of colonial wazungu  
that apportioned Nairobi's  
whitewashed earth to themselves.  
Kibera today is a postcard  
of yesterday's apartheid.

(From *Wandering Feet on Pebbled Shores*)



# HILDE SUSAN JAEGTNES

## (Norway)

Statement from Hilde Susan Jaegtnes on her poem,  
“The Stubborn Helper.”



This poem is about my encounter with the beautiful and special country of Kenya. In addition to my own point of view and observations as a Norwegian, I have been inspired by things the students wrote in my workshops, about

the meaning of their names, about their everyday lives, and about what makes them angry (these were some of the writing assignments I gave them). I therefore hope that the poem represents not just my own point of view, but includes some of the words of the Kenyan students.

## The Stubborn Helper

*(a bus ride in Kenya)*

1.

I've been looking for signs  
that the roadwork in Oslo  
will be finished soon,  
waiting for building managers to fill  
the gaping holes in the ground.

Today, another dig begins.  
I walk in circles around  
orange cones, fenced-in manholes  
men in yellow vests diverting traffic  
from the city's uncovered entrails.

A new subway line.  
A new library.  
A new opera house,  
the old one is just the tip of the iceberg.  
Office buildings sprouting  
like a barcode along the marina.  
Tinted glass, prickly angles, milky curves,  
tree park, car park, sculpture park,  
Midas' touch of organic green.  
Patches of cobblestone, clip-clop go the heels of  
Nigerian prostitutes with Visa terminals,  
ovaries contracting in the magnetic fields  
surrounding subterranean high-speed internet cables.

When will my streets be finished?  
When can I look out the window  
without seeing scars from bulldozers,  
city planners mounting the shoulders of Atlas,  
when will the high-rises stand erect once and for all,  
when will civilization be complete?

2.  
One morning, before the roadwork had begun,  
I travelled to Kenya.  
You invited me.  
I wanted to see zebras and  
the sun in zenith, anything with a z.

You wanted me to taste your sweet potatoes,  
ebisukari bananas and fermented brews,  
hear your words, watch you rise,  
see your dances, watch you shine.

In a hotel by the cement factory,  
I left my window open for  
cocks crowing, calls to prayer, dance music  
for unseen dancers, TV news of the re-election,  
calls to riots, children playing,  
the screeching of bats, roaring motorbikes,  
the gentle splashes of  
hands washing the sleep  
out of faces.

In the morning, we are alone,  
with no pictures to show of our dreams.  
Those of us who survive the blackout  
open our eyes, put our feet  
on the cold floor.

3.

You asked me what I felt  
when I woke up in Kenya.  
I said: I feel new.  
I asked you what you saw  
when you opened your eyes  
the morning of our first meeting.

You said that you awoke from  
the neighbor's screaming child,  
yawned carefully to avoid flies getting in.  
You took water from a container

and bathed in this cold morning,  
boiled some water and mixed it with  
sugar and cocoa power,  
bought a snack at the gate shop,  
burned your tongue on the tea,  
did some knitting while eating,  
you always needed an activity when eating,  
your boyfriend wanted a blue scarf,  
not the green one you had almost finished.

4.

You asked me to describe your home.  
You asked me what you looked like to me,  
would I remember your face, carry your heaviest  
words,  
learn to sing the traffic noise, taste the dusty air,  
greet you in Swahili, mambo wasee,  
fit all your smiles and silences into a single space.  
I said: The soil is red,  
the air is yellow.  
I walk by falling forwards slowly.  
I have no memories of tomorrow.

On a bumpy school bus with half-open windows,  
you gave me a bracelet with your name on it  
so that I would remember  
what my name sounded like  
in your tongue.

I asked you what made you angry.  
You answered: Betrayal,  
those who talk behind your back,  
Your Dad, for leaving your Mamy to die,

your Mamy, for leaving when you were seven.  
Getting attacked by sudden diseases.  
Men who impregnate young women  
and abandon them,  
sponsors, teachers, gangsters, medical students.  
Remembering the days when people ran away from  
you  
because your clothes were torn and had  
many different colors from being mended.  
You found your shoes in the rubbish pit  
and wore them with your toes peeping through.  
But it is through failure that success is built, you said.  
We must go on living.

5.  
Men on motorbikes.  
Men holding speeches.  
Men driving buses.  
Men fixing the sound equipment.  
Men diverting traffic.  
Men holding machine guns.  
Men walking back and forth  
in front of shops.

Women carrying  
water on their heads.  
Women arranging vegetables  
in neat rows by the road,  
please buy my roasted corn,  
please buy my carrots.  
Women deciding what to wear  
before going to school.  
Women chatting with their friends on WhatsApp.

Women helping their sons with homework.  
Women sending pictures of friends  
to other friends.  
Women crying over bad memories,  
women trying to remember  
the lyrics of their favorite  
love song.

6.

You asked me what I had seen.  
What will I tell my people,  
do I like the colors of your flag,  
do I like your zebras and gnus,  
warthogs and hippos,  
lions, dragonflies and buffalos.

I like the antelopes, but most of all  
the topi, its swift steps  
would not pierce a cloud.  
While the herd grazes,  
the buck stands guard,  
only taking time off  
for a thumping mating swagger  
to impress the doe with the longest name.

In your family, the strong guards the soft,  
the soft heals the strong,  
many arms carry food and drink,  
your names carry ancestors and wishes for the future.  
Joyous. Successful. Kind.  
Immortal. Great warrior.  
Honey.

Leader. Stubborn. Egyptian god.  
Helper.  
Security. Respect.  
Son. Daughter.

7.  
I've been looking for signs  
that the roadwork in Oslo will stop,  
no more digging,  
no more tearing down  
old buildings to make room  
for glass towers  
with speed gates,  
please show your digital ID,  
only one person  
may enter before  
the gate slams shut.

*(2015)*



# Joanna Lundberg

## (Finland)

**Joanna Lundberg** (born 1978) is a visual artist, writer, poet and photographer based in Oslo, Norway. She has a Master of Fine Art degree (MFA) from The Trondheim Academy of Fine Art, Norway. She was born in Stockholm, Sweden, and moved to Norway in 2001, where she since has lived and worked.

Joanna Lundberg has exhibited her visual art works in different countries, such as Norway, Sweden, Finland and Scotland. She has been a student at the Nordic writing schools Skrivekunst akademiet i Bergen (the Writing Academy in Bergen, Norway) and Biskops-Arnö författarskola (the writing school in Biskops-Arnö, Sweden) and has attended the feminist writing course Häxskolan (The Witch School) held by the Swedish writer Johanne Lykke Holm and Danish poet Olga Ravn.

Joanna Lundberg's work has appeared in several literary publications and magazines, such as Skrivekunstakademiets "Stemmer fra Sardinfabrikken" ("Voices from the Sardine Factory", published 2015). She has attended various literature readings in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Lundberg has written interviews about literature and art for magazines. Her poetry and prose approaches themes such as family and close family relations, reflecting on memory, childhood, mental illness and domestic violence.

# Streets Dark from Rain

Streets dark from rain  
the sky is a white lake  
names have meanings  
A woman with a blue bag on her head  
it's important to catch many colorful birds  
deep under water  
I am fear covered with sharp spikes  
we are not related to each other  
it is thought to be poisonous  
The rain never stops  
stay in your house  
turn off the engine  
A violet tree  
a pale green building  
there is a forgotten day  
I roll into a ball  
I use my left horn  
thinking about stones against stones  
Heavy rain it is not known for certain  
my name has been used for cutting and scraping  
forming a defensive shield

# KATHARINA KOPPE

## (Germany)

### Oh Kenya, My Love



Oh Kenya, my love.  
If I had to paint you, I'd  
paint you as a woman.  
Cause not only did the  
cradle of your valleys  
give birth  
to that strange species  
which now crowds the  
earth  
but also cause you  
have this strength and  
endurance  
that it needs to hold  
together a family in

times of turbulence.

And your family might be among the most diverse I've  
ever seen.

Although it was founded on an injustice that should  
never have been,  
you've made this country your kingdom and you are  
the queen.

Oh Kenya, my love.

If I had to paint you, I'd paint you with a thousand  
tongues.

Cause the air that you breathe through your lungs

leaves your lips in a melody of a hundred harmonies  
which might sound to a stranger like the buzzing of a  
billion bees  
but it contains the beauty of each and every language  
that you speak  
and although it may disrupt you, it's what makes you  
so unique.  
Oh Kenya, compared to the challenges you have to  
face every day,  
building the tower of Babel was just a child's play.

Oh Kenya, my love.  
You're stuck in corruption beyond reason  
like your feet get stuck in mud during a rainy season.  
But I know that with time and proper gardening  
if you remove all the harmful seeds and bad weeds  
even the thickest mud can be transformed into  
something nourishing.  
You're certainly blessed with the richest soil  
but oh Kenya, my love, I just know too well  
that social injustice still keeps you under its spell.

Oh Kenya, my love.  
On your wrists and ankles I still see  
the marks of the colonial shackles  
that keep you from being free.  
It's like your hips already swing  
to the beats of a modern melody  
but in your head you still sing  
the songs from the past,  
repeatedly.

Oh Kenya, my love.  
I see it in your eyes  
that you keep dreaming the American dream  
but is it as glorious as it might seem?  
Could you tell the difference between truth and lies?  
Does progress only have one direction?  
And is western culture more like an infection?  
You believe in God, education and soda.  
Is heaven a place you can reach with a boda-boda?

Oh Kenya, my love.  
You can be as sweet as the sugar in your black tea,  
but then again, your red rage can make me flee.  
And despite all the conflicts that tear you apart,  
green is the color of hope and of mama miti's heart.  
For in the end, I just hope for you,  
that your dream of peace will finally come true.  
And while the white clouds come and go  
daima mimi mkenya, mwananchi mzalendo.

*(June 2015)*



# Lauri García Dueñas (Mexico)

Lauri García Dueñas (San Salvador, 1980), born in El Salvador, Central America.

Translator: Robin Myers (Nueva York, 1987), writer and translator.

Laura states, thus: "I do not want to explain my poem. My experience in Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania was so complex that it is untranslatable. I wrote my "African Notebook" and here I leave one of my texts".

*Saturday, August 10, 2013, Nairobi Airport*

*"For he himself is subject to his birth. / He may not, as unvalued persons do, / Carve for himself," Hamlet, William Shakespeare.*

## XI Birth/Lineage

Sporadic many-natured images  
long hours waiting on the highway of a ceaseless land  
outlines of a man  
rips in a small room  
more hours  
how many hours do we need to say  
birth  
lineage  
and that the idea of a primitive/sudden beauty  
strains until a black horse bites my right hand

and sketches me a stain-shaped wound  
that matches  
those of the Maasai giraffes  
I saw yesterday.

A puddle of things charging disconnectedly  
unrelatedly  
an entrenching of Earth because it was necessary  
a tremor of air  
a continuous quaking  
of that soft substance some call soul  
puddle at the start of the sternum  
others' illnesses the illness isn't mine  
others' accidents I don't long for my own accident  
the thousands of kilometers expanded the well  
and sparked the fear that someone would pull off the  
alphabet's prosthesis  
I confirm that the excessive search for meaning  
prompts an unassailable irruption in translation  
it's not my illness, I repeat  
loading  
lost in translation  
just my lineage that linked terrestrially with  
the song of the dancing centuries  
the rejection  
time distorted and the little girls who heard words in  
other languages confessed—hairless—the outburst  
at the code  
the scent of paste centuries without smelling (that)  
since it's no longer ours  
a different, acrid sweat suffuses everything  
birth lineage  
I whisper soundlessly

impossibility / a certain sorrow at the celebrations of  
forgotten relatives  
the golden meadows  
the savannah the mountain the stones the flies piercing  
curves and patience  
in the feline's line of sight the burning belly of those  
centuries  
everything vanishes  
language strays in the presence of the cat full-stop in  
the dry leaves lavishing stains (you)  
to see a wild animal is to hang the screw of something  
half-known  
knowledge drenched in that incomprehensible scent  
in that time and abandon we were subjected to  
but  
children waved goodbye at the edge of the highways  
women grew from the asphalt in photographs of colors  
bicycles asked forgiveness for the lack of water  
the sky collapsed in its tarnished warmth  
I danced with the ancient fire that turned me to stubble  
(sewn palms)  
sewn sex?  
the inner dark with distance and anonymity buzzing in  
the Dados Hotel spotlight fortune  
and if someone gave me light  
and if I don't know why  
maybe I'd better press jaws  
and over the ashes of an intercontinental terminal  
drive the beating blood-flow into the earth  
even facing the blackened lake  
even despite the curses and dead fish  
because the blood of birth and lineage  
will endure intact even when

this painful journey is over  
this passage I submit to with the vehemence of a  
woman opening herself to a stranger.

---

*Sábado 10 de agosto de agosto de 2013, aeropuerto  
de Nairobi, Kenya.*

*“Está sujeto a su linaje: no le es dado, como a  
personas sin valor, darse gusto a sí mismo”, Hamlet,  
William Shakespeare.*

## **XI Linaje-Estirpe**

Imágenes entrecortadas de diferente natura  
largas horas de espera en la autopista del territorio  
que no cesa  
trazos de un hombre  
jirones en una habitación pequeña  
más horas  
cuántas horas son necesarias para decir  
linaje  
estirpe  
y que el ideal de una belleza primitiva/repentina  
se resquebraje hasta que un caballo negro muerda mi  
mano derecha  
y me dibuje una herida con la forma de una mancha  
que coincide  
con las de las jirafas Masai  
ayer.

Un charco de cosas cargándose sin conexión

sin relación  
un atrincherarse a la Tierra porque era necesario  
un temblor de aire  
un temblor continuo  
de esa sustancia blanda que algunos llaman alma  
charco en el principio del esternón  
enfermedades de otros no es mía la enfermedad  
accidentes de otros no deseo mi propio accidente  
los miles de kilómetros hicieron crecer el pozo  
y provocaron el terror de que alguien remueva la prótesis  
del alfabeto  
confirmando que la excesiva búsqueda de sentido ocasiona  
una irrupción insalvable en la traducción  
no es mi enfermedad, repito  
loading  
lost in translation  
solo mi estirpe que se conectó telúricamente con  
el canto el baile los siglos  
el rechazo  
el tiempo se distorsionó y las niñas que escucharon  
palabras en otra lengua confesaron -sin cabellos- el  
arrebato ante el código  
olor a engrudo siglos de no oler (eso)  
que ya no nos pertenece  
ese diferente sudor ácido lo invade todo alrededor  
estirpe linaje  
susurro quedamente  
imposibilidad/ cierta tristeza por las fiestas de los  
familiares olvidados  
el dorado de los pastizales  
la sabana la montaña las piedras las moscas que  
taladraron la paciencia y las curvas  
a la vista del felino arde el estómago de esos-siglos

todo desaparece  
se desvía el lenguaje ante ese felino a secas en la  
hojarasca prodigando manchas (usted)  
ver un animal salvaje es ahorcar la tuerca de un  
conocimiento a medias  
conocimiento empapado en ese olor incomprensible  
en ese tiempo y abandono al que fuimos sometidos  
pero  
los niños dijeron adiós con la mano a la orilla de las  
carreteras  
las mujeres crecieron del asfalto en fotografías de  
colores  
las bicicletas pidieron perdón por la falta de agua  
el pozo fue la alegría de los poblados rumbo a la ciudad  
el cielo se desplomó en su tibieza deslucida  
bailé con ese fuego antiguo que me devino rastrojo  
(palmas que se zurcen)  
¿el zurcido del sexo?  
la oscuridad desde dentro con la distancia y el  
anonimato zumbando en el Datos Hotel subrayó la  
fortuna  
y si alguien me dio la luz  
y si no sé para qué  
tal vez he de apretar mandíbulas  
y sobre las cenizas de una terminal intercontinental  
clavar a la tierra el flujo sanguíneo que palpita  
aún frente al lago ennegrecido  
aún a pesar de las maldiciones y peces muertos  
porque la sangre del linaje y la estirpe  
quedará intacta aun cuando termine  
este doloroso desplazamiento  
al que me entregué con la vehemencia que una se  
entrega a un desconocido.

# LEBLANC VALERIE

## (Canada)

Originally from Halifax, Nova Scotia, pluri-disciplinary artist and writer **Valerie LeBlanc** has worked in Canada, the United States, Europe, Australia, and more recently in Sao Paulo, Brazil and Kisii, Kenya. Her creations travel between poetry, performance, visual and written theory. Personal and public aspects of the human condition; the issues that emerge in the bigger pictures of economy and environment are often the subjects rooted in her projects. Valerie has been creating video poetry since the mid 1980's, and is the creator of the MediaPackBoard (MPB), a portable screening / performance device.

### **Valerie LeBlanc's Statement on "Land of Shepherds":**

This is based on observations from the many bus rides we took to various locales in Kenya. The videopoem started during a lecture delivered by one of the Kisii University Professors. He began his talk by mentioning that no matter which day people worship upon – Friday, Saturday or Sunday, it is important that everyone is able to do that. Originally, I wanted to write three works addressing this concept of freedom and hope to get back to it.

## Land of Shepherds

Donkeys carrying bags of firewood and other burdens  
munch grass amid piles of broken glass and plastic refuse.

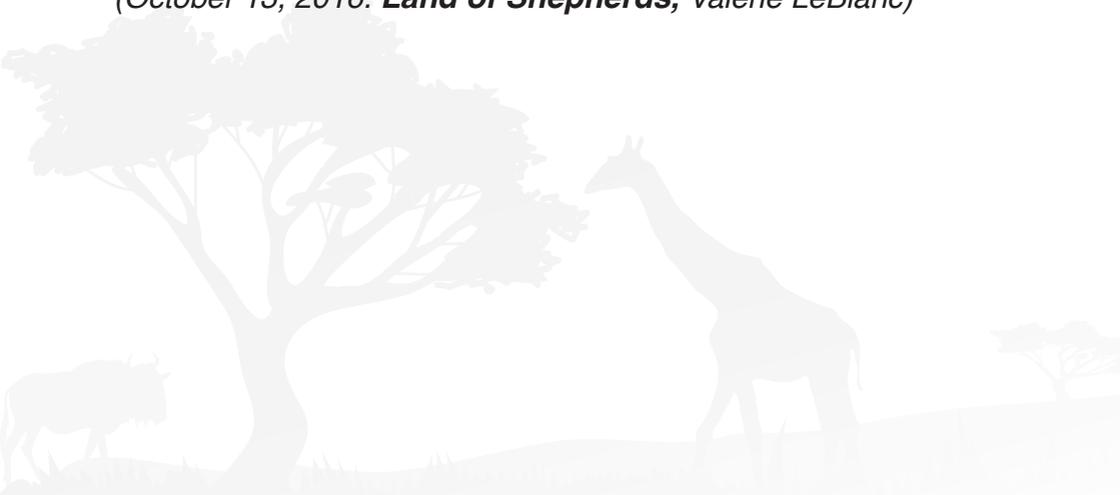
And if a savior was to be born again, surely it would be here, in  
this land of market stalls and Boda Boda sheds, in the district of  
David, who now drives a bus.

In this land of thorns growing by the roadside, crowns of hardship  
meet broad smiles of people who never forget to acknowledge  
the presence of others.

If Jesus came back, surely he would choose Kenya as all of the  
mangers are still here.

Amid the charcoal braziers that warm hands and cook meals,  
lambs awaiting resurrection, flatten their white bodies into the  
warmth of the soil.

*(October 13, 2016. **Land of Shepherds**, Valerie LeBlanc)*



# Libor Martinek

## (Czech Republic)



**Libor Martinek** was born on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1965 in Krnov, Czech Republic (Europe). He studied at the Pedagogical Faculty of the Palacky University in Olomouc (1984-1989, Czech language and literature plus musicology), then taught at the Pedagogical High-School in Krnov. Since 1993 he has been working at the

Institute of Bohemistics and Librarianship at the Faculty of Philosophy and Science of the Silesian University in Opava. Since 2012, he has been working as a professor at Wrocław University in Wrocław, Poland. He deals with literary history and theory, literary comparative, literature and music relations, translation theory and practice. Prof. Libor Martinek is a member of the Writers 'Association of the Czech Republic, the Czech PEN Club, the Czech Translators' Association and the President of the Opava Branch of the Literary Society of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

Since 2001 he has been living in Opava. He has published his poems, studies, reviews and translations in daily newspapers, professional literary and cultural-social journals in his own country and in Europe and the Middle East. He has also contributed poems to a number of

Czech, Polish and Slovak anthologies, collections and almanacs. He himself was editor of several thematic poetry almanacs and anthologies. He works with Czech Radio 3 (the Vltava station) and the Radio Vatican (the Czech section) where he translates from the Polish literature both fiction and professional works.

He is the author of several professional books on the literature of national minorities in Central Europe, as well as the history of Czech literature or musical works (among others Fryderyk Chopin). His poetry first *Co patří Večerníci - Sekrety Gwiazdy Wieczornej* (Engl. "What belongs to Evening star – Secrets of Evening star"; 2001) was awarded at XXIV International Poetry November in Poznań, Poland, as the best poet's debut of the year. Also his second collection of poems, *Jsi mým Signifié - Jesteś moim Signifié* ("You Are My Signifié"; 2012), is bilingual, Czech-Polish. He is currently preparing a collection of poems *Africké imprese* ("African Impression").

He received the Prize of the Polish Committee of UNESCO for translations of Polish poetry abroad (2004), the Prize for the Development of Czech-Polish Literary Activities, awarded by the Statutory City of Opava (2004), is a laureate of XXVI Warsaw Poetry Autumn for Translating and Popularizing Polish Poetry Abroad (1997), Bronze Medal of Silesian University "For Extraordinary Publications" (2009), Franz Kafka Medal of the European Circle (2010), Władysław Broniewski Prize (Warsaw 2010), London Literary Award (Union of Polish Writers Abroad in London 2018), The European Medal of Poetry and Art HOMER

(Brussels 2019), Prize of Rector of the University of Wrocław for the scientific results achieved in 2015 and also in 2016.

## Zrcadlení

(Dr. Christopheru Okemwovi)

Stříbrná hladina  
Viktoriina jezera  
Jezera Viktoriina  
Hladina stříbrná  
Já na molu nad hladinou  
Můj dvojník pod hladinou  
Na molu černé perly  
Dívky Chlapci  
Chlapci Dívky  
Objímá mě černá perla  
Pod molem jsem v objetí  
Lesknoucí se černě perly  
U břehu je zakotven člun  
Na hladině modrých vln  
Bárky bílé břicho  
Kolem dokola ticho... a pak  
Chechot racků nade mnou  
Na hladině mihotá se **Li**  
Na molu nehýbe se **Bor**  
Byl jsem  
Nebyl jsem  
Namol?

(Z cyklu *Africké impresy*)

# Mirroring

*(dedicated to Dr. Christopher Okemwa)*

Silver surface

Lake Victoria

Victoria Lake

Surface silver

Me on the pier above the surface

My double below the surface

Black pearls on the pier

Girls – Boys

Boys – Girls

A black pearl hugs me

I'm embraced under the pier

Shining black pearls

A boat is moored at the shore

On the surface of blue waves

Barges white belly

Silence all around... and then

The giggles of the seagulls above me

**Li** flickers on the surface

**Bor** does not move on the pier

Was I?

I was not?

Was I drunk?

*(From the series **African Impressions**)*

# Dr. Molly Joseph (India)



**Dr. Molly Joseph** retired as Head of the Dept. of English, St. Xaviers College, Kerala, India and now serves as Professor of Communicative English. She, a bilingual writer, has had her Doctorate in Post War American Poetry (of William Carlos Williams). She has published 13 books of Poems, namely, *Aching Melodies* (Patridge, Penguin), *Autumn Leaves*, *December Dews*,

*Myna's Musings*, *It Rains*, *The Bird with Wings of Fire*, *Where Cicadas Sing in Mirth* (all by Authors Press New Delhi), *Firefly Flickers* and *Hidumbi* – novel (by Xpress Publications, Kerala), *Pokkuveyil Vettangal* (poems, Malayalam) - *Kurukiyunarunna Mainakal* ( Poems, Malayalam), *Water Sings over the Stones* (2021), *Beyond Mist Mountains* (2021) and *Songs of Silence* (2022). Dr. Molly writes travelogues and short stories and has won several awards, including The India Women Achiever's Award 2019, Wordsmith Award 2018 and Award on Experimental Poetry 2020. Dr. Molly attended Kistrech International Poetry Festival in Kenya in 2018 and attended World Congress of Poets held in Bhuvaneswar, India, in 2019. She represented India in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Literary Festival in 2019.

## MY NAÏVE GENEROUS HOST.

In your earthen hut  
inhaling the earthy feel  
I stand,  
smelling cow dung...  
flecks of sky peep in  
through the corrugated bamboo roof  
covered with tin sheets that break up...  
the daughter of the soil  
how closer you are to  
mother earth  
than me the stray peeper in...  
O, young, teen age mother  
you toil day and night  
in your yards tending the swaying sugar cane,  
to make a day's meager living...  
your poultry smell wafts in...  
the mother hen I find,  
mindful in her scratch to search  
feed for her chicks  
cackling, pecking it to them, who huddle around...  
Your courtyard, an ensemble of  
a woman's struggle to sustain life,  
to fill up hungry stomachs...  
the men who enforced maternity on you  
have left berserk,  
shedding away a past  
that only frustrates...  
yes, sweet it is  
the cut sugar cane  
you offer  
my naive generous host...  
but sour it is the thought  
how much you struggle and suffer  
while at other edge we bask in plenty, wasting away  
only to complain...



# Rosemarie Wilson (aka One Single Rose) (USA)



**Rosemarie Wilson a.k.a. One Single Rose™** is an award winning poet and playwright, spoken word artist, singer, actress and filmmaker from Detroit. She is currently a featured artist and songwriter with Defected Records, the United Kingdom's #1 house

music record label and she's one of the first poets published under the Broadside-Lotus Press merger, two of the oldest African-American presses in the United States. One Single Rose™ performs nationally and internationally wherever her words are welcomed.

[www.onesinglerose.com](http://www.onesinglerose.com)

## Eyes Back to Basics

Intriguing eyes as rivers to swim  
Deep blue as the sea  
Clear as the aquamarine sky  
Coarse as a brown beaver  
Smooth as dark chocolate  
Black as coal and dark as night

Shining full of power and light  
Green as pastures and the Chicago River on March 17  
Yellow as sunflowers melting like butter  
Truth comes forth while gazing into these eyes  
Emanating from a vast place where goodness subsists  
Eyes sparkle like diamonds on a sunny day  
Glisten like gold worn by kings and queens of yesteryear  
Crimson when angered  
Calmed while scarlet letters are corrected  
Stars fill the retina with bright ideas  
Pools of sadness bag when things aren't quite right  
Clouds fail to deter as the dolphins dance  
Fireworks spark through the pupils  
Exciting minds with every color of the rainbow  
Whites pure as freshly fallen snow  
Emerge fierce as a polar bear when threatened  
At dusk eyes become as carrotty as the sun  
Hanging onto the promise for tomorrow



**Kenya through a Foreign Eye** is a collection of poems written by foreign poets who participated in the Kistrech International Poetry Festival since its inauguration in 2013 to 2019. The poems bisect Kenya, revealing its myriad cultures, as well as the economic, political and social issues. Being a third world country, Kenya like any other African country, poses a culture shock to foreign poets, especially those travelling to Africa for their first time. With meager resources, Kenya does not provide first class services and hospitality to visitors as other developed countries do. Our amenities are undeveloped and inadequate and therefore may not provide the comfort to visitors as expected. With this backdrop in mind, poets have written poems from various perspectives and tastes. Many, though, state that the people of Kenya are happy, kind and friendly despite the harsh economic conditions they face.



## About the Editor

**Christopher Okemwa** is a literature lecturer at Kisii University, Kenya. He has a PhD in performance poetry from Moi University, Kenya. He is the founder and current director of Kistrech International Poetry festival in Kenya ([www.kistrechpoetry.org](http://www.kistrechpoetry.org)). He has written ten books of poetry, ten folktales of the Abagusii people of Kenya, three children's storybooks, one play, two novels and four oral literature textbooks.

**Website:** [www.okemwa.co.ke](http://www.okemwa.co.ke)

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Kistrech Theatre International

