

AFTER THE END POETRY COMPETITION 2025

BY

David Chukwuebuka Achibiri

COVER NOTE — AN EKPHRASIS OF NOK:

This poem is an ekphrastic meditation on a Nok sculpture exploring the ethical and temporal dimensions of historical endings, particularly through the lens of the victimized, which isn't told as much. Seen through the eyes of a thief who believes the sculpture belongs at home, not in a foreign museum, it reflects centuries of colonial violence that erased and objectified African art and culture.

Through visceral, tactile imagery, the poem captures the trauma of historical events—The Atlantic Slave Trade—and the enduring wonder and resilience embodied in the sculpture, reflecting the resilience of its makers, who endured enslavement and abuse. The Nok's hollow eyes symbolize lost histories, silenced voices that convey stories that survived violence and neglect.

Engaging with the competition theme, "After the End," this poem explores the aftermath of historical rupture, displacement of memory, and cultural inheritance that bears ethical responsibility to preserve or restore. It juxtaposes past suffering with present reflection to imagine liberation and cultural reclamation. The closing invocation, "*Gban Kan Wa Pada*", *take back what is ours* in Yoruba, situates the poem in a temporal continuum, emphasizing that endings are never absolute and that the work of witnessing, remembering, and restoring transcends centuries, and perhaps eternity.

AN EKPHRASIS OF NOK

Through the Lens of A *Thief*

Sweaty thumbs pressed over hollowed eyes,
Giving way to the back of your head,
You gauged everything as if for the first time,
That the world is something to be surprised at,
And your wonder is still intact,
Knowledge is untouched.
An ekphrasis of Nok.

When those ships rocked the Atlantic,
Dragging storms to the Meridian,
How was my mother beholden?
Neck clasped in hot iron,
Salt licking the terrains of raw flesh.
Did your face remain frozen?
Or did it for once waver,
Head bowed beneath the lash,
Realising in horror
that veneration is not the universal way?

You have no purpose to assign yourself,
Other than benediction at the behest of your makers,
Before knowing *apotheosis*,
Championed by crimson coats,
To see, not regard you,
Locked behind glass.

I touch you now,
In the darkness of such chambers,
And your eyes remain hollowed,
Still unable to name yourself,
And yet your wonder transcends mine,
Unfazed by the centuries.

Through the pane,
I promise liberation,
Restoring veneration once more,
As I whisper —

Gban kan wa pada.