Leaving Home at 10

It was an old Peugeot 403
They don't make them anymore

Tyres inspected, engine oiled, brakes checked
All in order as only an old Peugeot can be.
Its creaking body held together by care,
My father drove me to the boarding school
In a small town one hour away from home ...

My tears and the car held through the journey
Through the pothole in my heart and the tear on the road
Through the window, I watched the world rush past
The houses and the trees and the streets and the names
I had known and loved, all running backwards, with
No time to pause for a goodbye, no time to wave
To the departing son leaving the embrace of home and hearth

We arrived over an hour later, father and son,
driving through the school gate to the dormitory
that was to be my home for the next five years.
Then my father left ... and, averting my eyes, I cried.

On initiation night I recited the prescribed words:
"I am a fag, a rotten green toad. I promise
to give up all my rustic and outlandish ways
and to become a true student of Government College, Ughelli."

Soon after I lost the language of guavas and spirits
And ever since I have been boarded up in a new home,
A new language with neither spice nor bite.

I miss all the coarse and colourful words I can no longer use
The power and potency of the curse uttered with a gob of spittle
Let loose in the language of the body and the spirit

I miss the language that once lived in my body.

Harry Garuba