

## Spirit Center: 15 Quotes from Akwaeke Emezi's Dear Senturan

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Dear Senturan: A Black Spirit Memoir by [Akwaeke Emezi](#)

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1. “An Ogbanje is an Igbo spirit that's born to a human mother, a kind of trickster that dies unexpectedly only to return in the next child and do it all over again. Humans call them malevolent because, well, humans take things too personally. Ogbanje come and go. They are never really here-if you are a thing that was born to die, you are a dead thing even while you live. Igbo ontology explains that everyone is in a cycle of reincarnation anyway: you are your ancestor, you will become an ancestor, the loop will keep looping within the lineage. Ogbanje, however, are intruders in this cycle, unwelcome deviations.”- **Mutilation | Dear Eugene**
2. “The magician tells me that other people can't do what I do, and maybe I believe him a little, but that's not the point. People can do such spectacular things if you forget to tell them it's impossible. I want them to try.” - **Execution | Dear Nonso**
3. “We sit in three and a half cafés at the same time and he orders us a pot of hibiscus tea while we talk about authenticity, and how stories can be more true than facts. "If you accept that masks are gateways to larger truths," the magician says, "then you can slip from the bondage of what is considered authentic. You wear the mask, you are the thing." My tea is deciding to turn into coconut water. I drink it anyway. "In possession rituals," he continues, "the god is present however the god presents, in whomever the god rides. The god cannot be inauthentic." - **Masks | Dear Maki**
4. “The rules are clear, no matter the stakes: when anyone fucks with the work, burn them to the ground.” - **Muse | Dear Nonso**
5. “The dreams translate power as violence — which makes sense for gods, even young embodied ones — but there are other possible choices. The absence of fear. The certainty of self. The ability to catalyze change in tired eyes clustered under a gray sky. The capacity to love past human sense. A knowledge of the future made firm because you're the one shaping it. Being free; all choices that seem desirable, colored only by the costs

that come with them. There's no power without sacrifice, without losses, without a necessary insulation that can end up feeling indistinguishable from isolation. Embodied nonhumans are often terribly lonely.” - **Dreams | Dear Katherine**

6. “I let all of that go when I accepted not being human: blood is only a flesh thing, and there's no way that humans would be the ones with the authority to "authenticate" me. Gods don't give a fuck about what outside bloodlines run through these bodies; we belong to them so utterly either way.” - **Home | Dear Jahra**
7. “My point is: This is between us and the gods, not between us and the humans. The gods are always clear with us, they are the ones we need to listen to. Recently, I've been thinking about these earthly homes less as homes and more as places of origin for our embodied forms.” - **Home | Dear Jahra**
8. “We never understand how vast we are. We may spend the rest of our lives finding out that we have no borders, no boundaries, pushing into greater sizes, being both terrified and delighted when we discover that there's nothing there to stop us.” - **Holy | Dear Eloghosa**
9. “Ann was the one who taught me that the word holy means to be set apart for a specific purpose.” - **Holy | Dear Eloghosa**
10. “We could solve so many problems if we just went mad. I mean all the way mad, so lost that it never occurs to us to even think about how other people see us, what ripples we're casting in our families, what hostility we will provoke by showing our true faces. When we push forward with power, other things push back. I wonder if madness would function as a shield.” - **Anointing | Dear Ann**
11. “It's a constant practice, I think, to hold on to what we know is true even with human realities shrieking around us. It strengthens our centers, roots us deep in them, iroko trees planted by the waterside. It is a different kind of power to be able to anoint yourself instead of kneeling for someone else to do it. We could spin out endlessly if we listened to their stories about how we aren't what we are - what would it be like to never forget that it was God who marked us directly and set us apart? The oil drips from our fingers onto our own foreheads. The world between us and God is the only real one. Maybe this is what madness is. I can live with that.” - **Anointing | Dear Ann**

12. “I am a ragged imperfect entity, and yet there is a community that holds me when I am in pain. I didn't expect embodiment to come with grace like this. I just wanted to say, thank you for being my friend.” - **Pain | Dear Daniel**
13. “A god is still a god, no matter what. My ontology isn't something fickle that depends on humans and their loyalties, thank goodness. I am golden even in isolation, perhaps especially then, my light bouncing off surfaces and amplifying itself off me.” - **Glory | Dear Tamara**
14. “Fashion is a game of skins I can play with, because the body is the first masquerade. Think about it, what do spirits need to move in this world? A skin whether it's made from raffia or wood or fabric or mirrors or flesh. With fashion, I get to customize the skins to reflect the spirit within, and that often means extravagant, bright colors and textures bursting across me.” - **Opulence | Dear Kathleen**
15. “I wrote these letters to remind myself that there is always a hack. There is always something I can do, even if it is the smallest seed that will grow into something almost as unrecognizable as I am becoming.” - **Regeneration | Dear Ann**
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**Featured proverb:**

- Onye kwe chi ya ekwe (“If you say yes with enough force, your chi will say yes, too.”)
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- FRESHWATER
- YOU MADE A FOOL OF DEATH WITH YOUR BEAUTY
- CONTENT WARNING: EVERYTHING
- BITTER
- THE DEATH OF VIVEK OJI
- PET

- LITTLE ROT
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