

ISSUE 1

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# CÓN-SCIÒ

POETRY | PROSE | ART | PHOTOGRAPHY

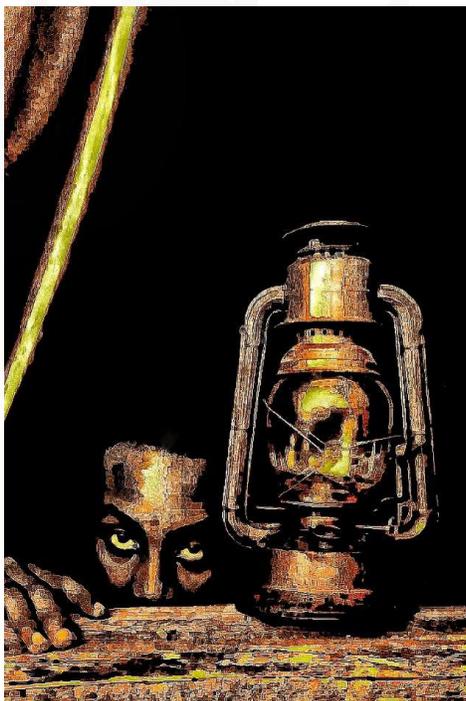
I NEVER  
STARTED  
WRITING TO  
WIN PRIZES

— RASAQ MALIK  
GBOLAHAN

## THE LOCKDOWN

REGINALD C. OFODILE / EMEKA ANIAGOLU / TAOFEEK AYEYEMI / ADESINA AJALA / QUEEN NNEOMA KANU /  
SHEDRACK OPEYEMI AKANBI / EMMANUEL UDOMA / CHIBUEZE OBUNADIKE / TAJUDEEN ALAYA / NKET-AWAJI  
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MARTINS DEEP / TERRI WITEK / AYOMIKUN OLUWAGBENGA / KIRSTEN C. OKENWA / AHMED MAIWADA

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

*i did not know humans are the sun  
that nourished my seedling into fruiting tree  
until the Great Lockdown denied me of their rays  
& i slowly withered away, unable to photosynthesize*

— THE LOCKDOWN (May 11, 2020)

I am pleased to introduce the maiden issue of our magazine of collective knowing – *CŌN-SCIÒ MAGAZINE*. The poems, essays, stories, photographs and art in this issue evidence the unstoppable flow of human creative juices, even during a pandemic so great it put the entire world on lockdown.

Inspired by and/or created during the pandemic, the offerings speak for themselves as fragments of individual experiences creatively recorded and freely donated to our collective knowledge. We cannot thank our contributors enough for their works.

Feel free to read and share this gift with everyone as you continue to observe the recommended #Covid19 safety practices. Remember: spread the magazine, not the virus.

Thank you.

**Kukogho Iruesi Samson**  
*January 2021*

# EDITORIAL TEAM



- JIDE BADMUS [*Poetry Editor*] is an electrical engineer, a literary promoter and poet. He is the author of two poetry collections: *There is a Storm in my Head* (2017) and *Scripture* (2018).



- DAVID ISHAYA OSU [*Photography & Art Editor*] is the author of *'When I'm Eighteen'*, a poet memoirist and street photographer. His work has appeared in *Magma Poetry*, *Poetry Wales*, *The Griffith Review*, *The Oxford Review of Books*, among numerous others.



- EHI-KOWOCHIO OGWIJI [*Features Editor*] is a writer who examines womenfolk issues, mental health, and environmental realities. Her works have appeared on several literary platforms and she has won accolades for her writing.



- EUGENE YAKUBU [*Fiction Editor*] is a seasoned book critic, reviewer and storyteller. He loves art and nature and spends his time reading beautiful novels and writing stories.



- KUKOGHO IRUESIRI SAMSON [*Editor-in-Chief*] is an award-winning writer, communications professional, publisher and entrepreneur. Kukogho has authored four books including *'Devil's Pawn'*, winner of the *Dusty Manuscript Prize* 2018.



# IN THE SPOTLIGHT



**IN THE SPOTLIGHT:  
RASAQ MALIK GBOLAHAN**

**I NEVER  
STARTED  
WRITING TO  
WIN PRIZES**

*Interview by Ehi-kowochio Ogwiji*

Rasaq Malik Gbolahan (RMG) is a graduate of the University of Ibadan. His chapbook, "No Home In This Land", selected for Chapbook Box edited by Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani, has been published. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in Colorado Review, Crab Orchard Review, LitHub, Michigan Quaterly Review, Minnesota Review, New Orleans Review, Prairie Schooner, Poet Lore, Rattle, Salt Hill, Spillway, Stand, Verse Daily, and elsewhere. He won Honorable Mention in 2015 Best of the Net for his poem Elegy, published in One. In 2017, Rattle and Poet Lore nominated his poems for the Pushcart Prize. He was shortlisted for Brunel International African Poetry Prize in 2017 and was a finalist for Sillerman First Book for African Poets in 2018.

In this interview with CÒN-SCIÒ MAGAZINE's features editor Ehi-kowochio Ogwiji, RMG talks about his writing, depression among writers and increasing concerns about plagiarism and originality in the literary scene.

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT: RASAQ MALIK GBOLAHAN

**OGWIJI:** "Writing is not what everybody should do –especially the lazy ones." You made this statement in a 2017 interview with Blueprint Newspapers. Now, can you tell us who a lazy writer is?

**RMG:** Well, what informed that response was the art of being a writer, the task of carrying the burdens of generations, the endless encounter with rejection letters and the resignation to silence birthed by the troubling question of being or not being enough to survive as a writer. In many ways, I have had my share of frustration and doubt. I started writing a decade ago, and the journey has been terrific. There are days of hunger, years of editing/reediting, weeks of arranging verses, and months of aridity. These inevitable events are enough to scare us into silence, to haunt us forever. Because they evoke fear in the most courageous of us. They beset us with things that can traumatize us. Reading Rainer Rilke "Letters to a Young Poet," aided my beginning as a poet studying the poems of the masters. I found myself enmeshed in the webs of thoughts, and those thoughts enabled me to map my literary journey. For to be a writer is to seek an acceptance into a world governed by one's constant interaction with humanity, with history, and with events beyond the mirror of time. Your words become a boat that ferries hope across generations. You become a light that illuminates the dark paths of existence. You speak to the souls, and you weave the fabric of hope in the time of disaster. When we consider these, writing, as elevated as it is, becomes mysterious. Thus, being lazy is antithetical to what this profession craves.

**OGWIJI:** Your poem made a Poet Lore Pushcart Prize Nomination and made the 2017 shortlist for Brunel Poetry Prize. In addition, you have several works published in prominent journals and many consider you a successful writer. How long did it take you to work on your craft before achieving these feats? Were there any important growth influences?

**RMG:** I am skeptical about success as a writer. I mean writing doesn't offer you the kind of success you desire. I think it offers fulfillment. When people see you and say they read your work and like what you do with language, with ideas, with meanings. This has nothing to do with money, with prizes. All my life I have always been zealous about writing. I have this unalloyed passion for it. I understand that there is no perfection, and there is never going to be one. Because writing opens into diverse things that teach us the fragility of existence. This frailness emanates from the gradual study of the world. We always quest for wholeness, which also reveals our vulnerability, our inability to conquer life.

*For me, I never started writing to win prizes, or attain the title of award-winning. The first journey was love. It is love, till date. When the love erases other interests, the rest is history.*



IN THE SPOTLIGHT:  
RASAQ MALIK GBOLAHAN



I remember vividly my first day at the university's bookshop. I had visited the bookshop to get acquainted with poetry books suggested by a friend. Before that time, Akeem Lasisi's "Night of my Flight," had become a trusted ally, as I carried it with me like a passport. I bought Niyi Osundare's "The Eye of the Earth," and other compelling books. I started reading voraciously.

Before that time, Akeem Lasisi's "Night of my Flight," had become a trusted ally, as I carried it with me like a passport. I bought Niyi Osundare's "The Eye of the Earth," and other compelling books. I started reading voraciously. Working on my craft has always been a consistent task. I devote ample time to each phase of growth. For example, as an undergraduate I used to perform my poems on campus. Sometimes I would memorize verses, rehearse my lines, master my voice, and face the crowd to deliver. It takes time to complete a poem. The first thing I do is to create a draft. Sometimes I return to this work weeks/months after the first draft. Also, I pay considerable amount of attention to the way I engage books. I read books to learn, and not to bask in the quick pleasure of glancing through pages. I have writers that I read, and I return to certain books to relearn. I have lost count of rejection letters decorating my submittable account. It is part of the craft, part of what constitutes being a writer.

**OGWIJI:** As someone described as "a cultural enthusiast and an indescribable lover of Yoruba cosmology," what do you think about the themes in modern Nigerian writing? How have you managed to retain the African cultural flavor in your works while creating art that appeals to the West as well?

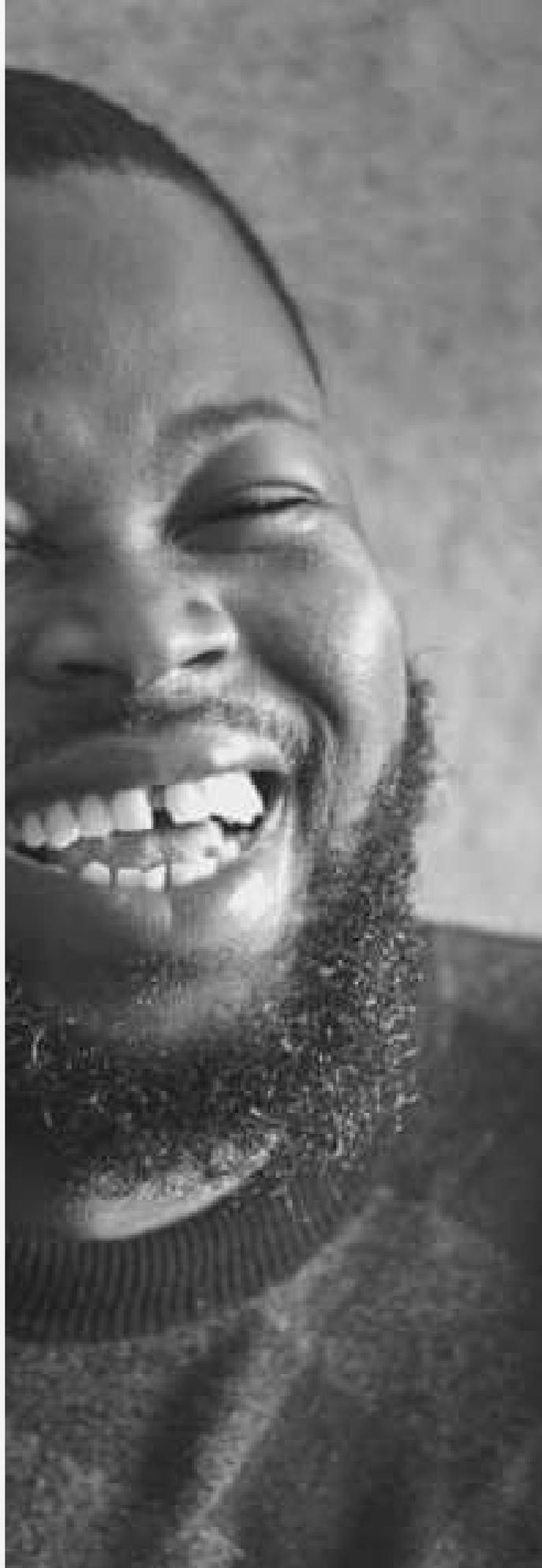
**RMG:** The discourse about themes is not alien to the literary terrain. However, the themes that occupy the modern Nigerian writing nudge us to be more conscious of what inspires us to write, and whether our work foregrounds the manifold happenings in our society or not. It is unarguable that there is no monopoly of themes, and being a creative writer allows that we engage and explore the world as far as we can. Studying Literature, I have encountered the generational differences in the works of older writers and the emerging ones. For example, writers like Odia Ofeimun, Niyi Osundare, Olu Oguibe, Remi Raji, Henry Garuba, and a host of others carved a lasting emblem on the wall of time by being unrepentant in their scathing criticism of the chaotic political state of the military era. In their poems, the themes are both provocative and revolutionary.

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT: RASAQ MALIK GBOLAHAN

In recent times, there has been an increasing curiosity occasioned by the exhibition of supposedly new themes. These themes are familiar. Writing about home, family, lovers, immigration, etc. are familiar. I think the focus should be on how we explore these themes. The way we deploy diction, the way we explore and dissect these themes. I am not ready to do this for anyone.

I once told a friend that we should ask ourselves the reasons why we write. We should investigate thoroughly the impulse that triggers us. What are the goals? What do we want to achieve with every work we scribble? The moment we displace these germane questions, the moment we begin to encounter problems in our craft. Because nothing is written in a vacuum. I learnt this as an undergraduate from a literature professor, and it has always helped me design my thoughts. In my poems, I commune with the language. It is a weapon to me. The way a hunter uses his dane gun to kill animals, the way I use my language to teach, to profess, to invoke, and to incite.

Also, the continuous retainment of cultural texture in my poems is influenced by my background. I grew up in Iseyin, and in my formative years I witnessed different cultural performances that enriched my knowledge about what it means to be a Yoruba man. I started reading Yoruba books under the tutelage of my mother. There were nights filled with her sonorous voice ferrying me to the memories of my forefathers. She inspired me and still inspires me. As a budding writer, I enjoyed most of the collections written by older writers. I have read poetry collections by Niyi Osundare, Harry Garuba, Maik Nwosu, Olu Oguibe, Femi Osofisan, Remi Raji, Akeem Lasisi, Tayo Olafioye, Jumoke Verissimo, Tosin Gbogi, etc. Despite the fact that these collections explore themes that function universally, there is this cultural consciousness in their use of diction. The way you read Achebe's "Things Fall Apart." and find a sense of African identity, of belonging; the way you read Wole Soyinka's poems and feel connected to the root, and the way you speak your language in unfamiliar places and people want to hear you speak it again. That is my dream. My mission. I remember that in secondary school I became a disciple of Kofi Awoonor. I memorized his poems and embraced the lyricism that reflects in his verses. Kofi's poems reminded me of my ancestors and their legacies. I read Negritude poets, and Leopold Senghor's alluring verses united me more with home, with my love for Africa.



## IN THE SPOTLIGHT: RASAQ MALIK GBOLAHAN

It was later in the university that I discovered other poems written by African poets. In my poems, I am keen about projecting my life and cultures, my people and their language, their songs, their stories, their dreams, their rituals, and their performances. In my relentless pursuit of propagating my indigenous language, I co-founded an online Yoruba literary journal with Oredola Ibrahim. We have a website where we publish work written in Yoruba. Our language is the past, the present and the future.

**OGWIJI:** In his review of your debut chapbook *No home in this Land*, Rahaman Abiola describes you as “a revolutionary necessity” in a time when the acute leadership failure continues to challenge the Nigerian dream. This description seems to put you in the path of the Greats like Soyinka, Achebe, Okara and others whose use their creativity for social good. Does this define who you are? Do you think socially conscious writers are necessary?

**RMG:** I used to write political poems. I hunger for change, but I am aware that writing doesn't change everything. Instead, writing creates a debate. It resists oppression. It gathers songs and chants. It reveals what seems to be blurry. *No home in this land* was included in the box set edited by Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani. In the chapbook, the themes are familiar, and haunting, because there is an absence of peace and the victims of blasts remain scared of a homeland where they grew up before bokoharams started unleashing mayhem. Being a writer living in a country where the radio staggers every day with the news of blasts raging in the air is more than enough to push me into the arms of sorrow. There is this collective sense of grief, this unending realization that no one is safe. In a country like ours, it is okay to write about the turbulence, the aches, the losses. In my work, I seek to document. I believe that the work of a writer transcends being a passionate lover of nature, or being a lover boy counting flowers in a field with his girlfriend.



In my work, I am curious about how the system works, how people are rendered homeless, how the number of the dead is counted, where they are buried, how they are remembered.

It is my task to let people hear their faint voices, their pleas, their dialogues, their frustrations. I have always believed that not everyone will write, and not everyone will think the way I think. There are many untold stories, stories lost to time, stories murdered with their tellers, stories buried in unidentified places. Insofar I still breathe, I want to tell these stories. When tomorrow comes and someone picks up my poems, I want him/her to know about my country, about the past, the experiences of my loved ones, of the dead, of those whose photographs are faded, those whose pockets are filled with letters from missing relatives....

**[THE INTERVIEW CONTINUES ON OUR WEBSITE. PLEASE CLICK HERE.](#)**



# POETRY

# STAYING SAFE AS A LOVE LANGUAGE

Emmanuel Udoma

The world  
stands statue-still,  
and men, locked away in their  
cocoon, have listened to its eloquent  
silence. We have retreated to our fortress against  
this unseen enemy, where we measure laughter in small doses.  
No one would have conceived, handshakes and hugs could be death  
warrants, and war can be fought without weapons. We've  
searched our hearts for smoulder friends left  
behind. We've reignited our passions. We under-  
stand keeping distance whispers: "I love you"  
more than kisses and cuddles, because it  
means staying safe for those we love. Though  
the war wages on, we're hopeful, like dormant  
seeds in the dry season soil awaiting the first rain, these  
dark days will  
be over, and  
our lives restored.

*Emmanuel Udoma is a medical student with an interest in creative writing. Whenever he's not flipping through the pages of medical textbooks, he finds himself introspecting on new ideas for his poems or short stories. He was a joint winner for the 2019 edition of Memoirs of Nigerian University Students (MONUS), and was shortlisted for the Eriata Oribhabor Poetry Prize 2018. He has been published in some literary platforms and anthologies including ANA Review 2018, Mixed History (NSPP 2017), Citadel of Words (BPPC 2018), MONUS Anthology 2.0, Naija book of Diabetes Stories, etc.*



# A GIFT TO ART

---

Reginald C. Ofodile

Homebound, like suspects under house arrest,  
forbidden callers, spending months alone,  
enforced seclusion saps our hope and zest,  
like shackled captives, merely lying prone.

The artists in despair I urge to view  
the current deadlock as a heaven-sent boon,  
as hustle, parties, trysts, we must eschew,  
for focused work, the times are opportune.

We moaned that guests, and calls we had to pay  
derailed our art's ascent to the sublime  
the idyll craved, and missed to our dismay,  
was loneliness to create, so now's the time.

Despite the blights of hunger, debts and fear,  
espy a silver streak in Covid's cloud,  
arresting, lasting items to appear,  
attesting talent troubled but uncowed.

*Reginald Chiedu Ofodile is an award-winning author and international actor. Ofodile has been a very prolific and versatile writer, producing three novels, two books of plays, two poetry collections and a collection of short fiction, as well as essays and criticism. His awards include the Warehouse Theatre International Award in 1997, the BBC African Performance Award, the World Students' Drama Trust's Awards and the 2015 ANA/Abubakar Gimba award for a short story collection. He has also appeared across nations on stage and screen in many productions and coached actors.*

# DAY SIX OF ISOLATION

Chibueze Obunadike

what do we miss most in the quiet?  
the cruel machine of life finally grinding  
to a halt, leaving nothing but the heavy sound  
of exhaust smoke & our tired bones behind.  
what do we miss most in the quiet?  
what do we do now we can finally slow  
down long enough to hear ourselves breathe,  
our thoughts saying all the things they've  
been keeping from us?

i am sitting in the parlour, unwashed hands  
folded in my lap & i can hear everything.  
the neighbours going at it all the way across the yard,  
the newborn on our street crying for the fifteenth  
fucking time today, the fan above me, spinning, oblivious  
to all the things trying to swallow our world whole.

i am tired of waiting around for something to happen,  
say, news of a cure, news of a friend's death,  
news of my mother accidentally getting sneezed  
on in the street or something, our futures wrapped  
up in this knifing silence.

day six & we're still mourning, still hoping,  
fingers clasped & eyes glued to the news, watching  
the numbers rise like smoke from a burning building,  
the whole world set on fire.  
what have we missed most in the quiet?

*Chibueze Obunadike is an undergraduate student at the University of Nigeria and an alumnus of the Singing Bullet Workshop. His works are published in The Best New African Poets 2018 Anthology, Kreative Diadem & CFW Freedom Magazine where it was recently awarded the Collins Eleisoro Literary Prize. His chapbook was published by Poets In Nigeria in 2020.*

# A SMALL WORLD

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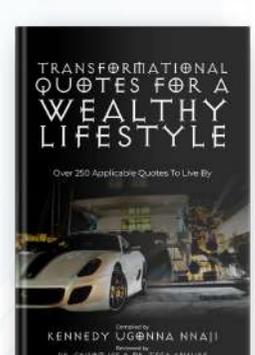
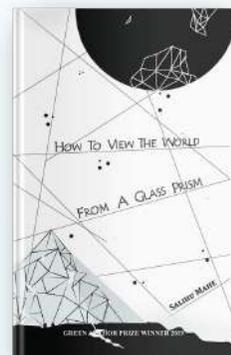
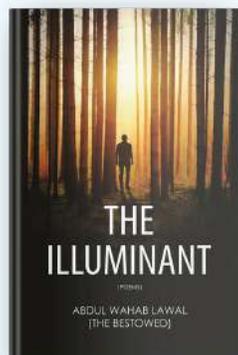
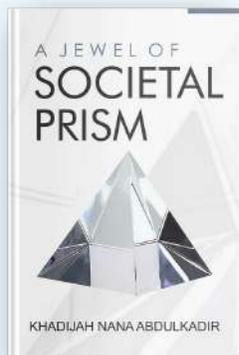
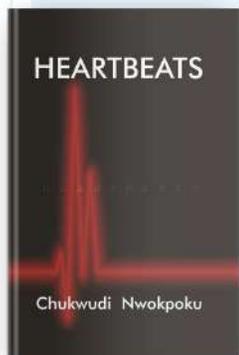
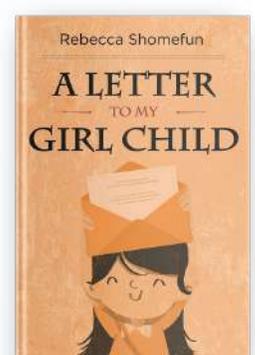
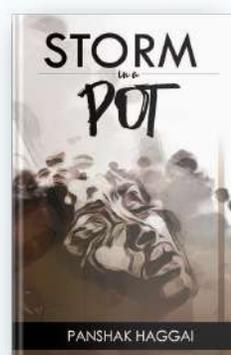
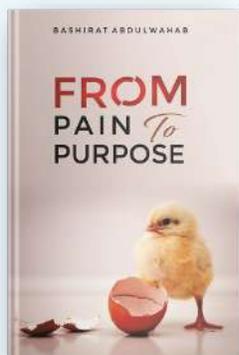
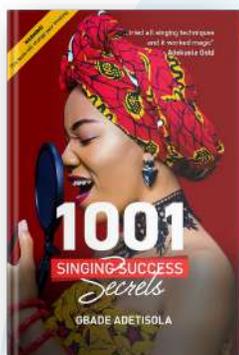
Tajudeen Alaya

It is a small world;  
One door in and one window out  
One hiss in China—a thousand mountains in Italy crumbles  
Like a biscuit in the mouth of Death.  
The World is on its knees  
Pleading forgiveness for sins that had been long forgotten  
Dogs are mourning their masters  
And cats are no longer to be seen in the corridors of their owners.  
Love is no longer physical -  
For there are more deaths in hugs and handshakes.  
Men, now falling like dried leaves  
Singing along songs that are to be sung in unmarked graves  
Who is to be blamed for this unexpected fury—  
For this spell on mankind?  
Banks are now morgues  
Churches are now empty and Adhan is called in silence  
Oh, what grief!  
“Close your door,” they say,  
But which doors are the homeless going to close?

*Tajudeen is a man who believes in the echoes of silence and the peacefulness it creates: A man on one side and the word on the other. He resides and writes from Lagos.*

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# TOMORROW BEGINS TODAY

Olivia Onyekwena

My jeans no longer fit;  
Honestly, that's the least of my worries  
not like I ever really find perfect pairs anyway.

It's the reminder for another zoom meeting  
that keeps me awake at night  
listening to sounds that I can't tell apart.

I love my personal space so all these have all been a blur.  
Having people shove their faces on my screen,  
when an email can also do the trick.

This is our new normal but I cannot say that I will get used to the mask.  
I wonder if the sun ever feels like not shining on some days  
but has to just because it has to.

Somedays I can't tell if I am sad or happy  
but the routines have a way of keeping me in check.  
The rain won't stop falling;  
like mother earth,  
I'm getting rather choked with all the monotony.

There's all that talk of vaccines and trials  
and for the sake of everything right and good,  
I hope the world can heal from this.

Maybe the universe needed a pause;  
a little break from humans and all their activities.  
And we won't need to go back to how things were  
but how we want them to be.

I try not to overthink but I won't lie,  
some days are better than others.

Like today, I'm calm  
there's a smile on my face  
and I can even remember the date.

*Olivia Onyekwena is a freelance writer with a newfound love for poetry.*

# DEBACLE

---

## Nket-Awaji Alpheaus

we will have no mouth  
to mourn what morning brings  
the corona-feasting carrion  
littering our lawns

we will have no seed but scion  
to plant for the season  
our barns be brimmed  
with broken memories of loss

we will bear no tongue  
with which to sling  
supplications skywards  
for god's favoured hand

between reality and fantasy  
we see zilch swimming the sea  
the depth of faith flows  
towards confluence of cognition

we will be drained like delta  
with politricked veracity  
our maudlin moans bile our belly  
like brackish water in fish groin

no tears to shed  
no tea to share  
covid coos like ominous cock  
in the afternoon of life

*Nket-Awaji Alpheaus is a poet, critic and essayist. He is currently studying English and Literary studies at Ignatius Ajuru University. He has featured in Tribute to Kofi Annan anthology, Citadel of Words anthology published by Words Rhyme & Rhythm and Repostes of Locked Down Voices published by the Society of Young Nigerian Writers (SYNW). He is currently working on his collection of poems, Acres of Mind Away from Home.*

# WHICH DAY IS SATURDAY?

## Favour Chukwuemeka

On your bed you lay,  
uneager to figure out the life  
spread out on soaked sheets.

Tons of unfinished courses on your computer;  
files laden with deadlines,  
their presence irking you now.

Quaker Oats does it and buttered bread;  
relieve you of the imprinted sufferings  
which thrive with time.

Yet you won't be one to die before your time,  
after all Abraham's your father  
and Chapter's cook is your mother.

Leftovers can't be that bad;  
not when your mother cooked them  
and your job is to feed.

Flinging good fortune to pigeons  
is bad omen  
means that the C&S didn't wash your head well.

Charisma and your mom's boss will land you a job,  
Why bother you about upcoming todays,  
when every today is always taken care of?

All I hear from you now:  
I don't care which day is a workday  
or Saturday.

*Favour Chukwuemeka is a creative writer and poet who resides in Lagos, Nigeria. With deep origins in Eastern Nigeria, she delights writing untold stories and addressing contemporary issues. Her works have featured in the Mbari Story Place and won the Mesh Africa Essay Competition. When Favour's not writing, she enjoys volunteering.*

# COVID-19

---

Anthony Ogidi

the invisible global ghoul  
ghosting from coast to coast  
hounding down human for food

like a hungry hyena  
lurking around for its prey  
you sprang from an Asian wild  
clawed at the lean-skin economy  
of my beloved country  
locking it down beyond its strength

ripped into bits for a meal  
to be eaten by your cubs  
as hyperinflation  
hunger and abject poverty  
hope-wrenching unemployment  
and bloodthirsty insecurity

as no one knows the trail trodden by you  
so is no one in the know of how to track you down  
and taming is as twice the task of tracking

we all are affected by her demise  
with shivering shocks  
running through the veins  
of our common hope  
and fate is the bitter pill  
we all must swallow with patience  
to ease collective pains

*Anthony Ogidi is a poet, a teacher and art enthusiast. His Poems have featured in several online magazines. He is based in Jos, Plateau State, where he is the coordinator of the Jos Peace Prize for Poetry.*

# THE POTTER'S FIELD

---

## Olowo Qudus

the wind dashed into despair; and the soil mourned.  
hundred-thousands of bodies lay on the belly  
of mother earth/with dirges/pinching their souls

the year was sweet/seraphic/and savoury/with a pandemic,  
an adventure from China created a travelogue  
in the cinema of pain/grieve and threnodies  
even the gods sought resort from the pale palms of their buffs

cemeteries and the soils now quelch, for their bellies are  
overfed with decaying bodies of 'corona'-ted beings

the world is now a potter's field filled with faultless death  
of free men, it now whispers into the wind's weary ears,  
a song of forlornness/death/pain/torment and despair

*Olowo Qudus is a young poet, novelist, playwright, essayist and a spoken word artiste. He is a student of the Federal University of Ilorin (UNILORIN) and a member of the Unilorin Elites writers group. He is the winner of Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest (BPPC) June/July 2020.*

# AFTERMATH OF NOSTALGIA

Olaitan Humble

*the bus is already waiting for me. . .*

on the square notice board hung by the corner of my room, the toy bus. 7pm is when the world gets out of its madness & 7am is when it returns to it gladly, but now a face in a crowd of faces suddenly is robbed of the madness & we suddenly start to seek fingers finding creative edge, making canvases upon canvases, mapping out silhouettes upon silhouettes, first in the kitchen with previously unappealing items; we watch table knives become palette knives & we are just fine. now bowing in obeisance to the worship of gadgets is the early morning devotion as they take us in a new form of guidance round the clock & and over the shore—the shore of meaningless patterns. we, zoom into everything zoom-able as they are a brief consolation of a fulfilling life, make do with the crumbs leftover from our nightmares, for now all we have is a dream-ridden reality, a reality where glows of lambency settle down upon each of our faces like the sunset at winter, & we call it success, how close! we all are happy on our screens, thanks to our protective screen guards & of course, our toothbrushes. now we run on our fingers to snap out of the glosses of this reality. the rebels still hold colors as hostages & books remain the archenemies at hand

& i am unsurprised because this is the aftermath of nostalgia.

*Olaitan Humble is a pacifist who likes to collect quotations and astrophotos. He is the winner of the Ramadan Tercets Maiden Literary Contest, the JustDeen Poetry Contest, the March 2020 edition of Loudthotz Poetry Open Reading and was shortlisted for EW Poetry Prize Award 2020 & SyncityNG Poetry in Times of Corona Prize. Editor at Invincible Quill Magazine, his literary works have been praised for their minimalism, sensory elements and imagery alike.*

# BARRICADES OF BRICKS

Ókólí Stephen Nonso

what can you say to a man suffocating  
behind barricades of bricks?

let's say you've been to a city,  
where damp night air moves around empty streets,

& bodies, caged till their bones bleach white.  
say you've seen an abandoned city, where viruses ruled—

still rules as if humans were dead.  
but we didn't die—we disappeared & made our shadows allies.

yesterday, a man died & was laid with unspoken prayers.  
they say families come together to show love & say goodbye to loved ones,

but silent prayers are the sincerest form of love.  
across the alley, a house stands empty. no sound, not even by dogs.

all you hear is fear knocking on the doors.  
it's July & the streets are filled with rain,

drops echo in long puddles. the days are silent. I talk, no response. maybe we're deaf.  
in my emptiness, months turn into spring & leap away.

from my louvers, I spend cold nights. no words—a loner  
staring at the twilight as despair creeps in.

for twilight is the safest place to hide a man  
suffocating, till earth breathes again

*Ókólí Stephen Nonso is a Nigerian writer whose poems have previously appeared in Feral, Ngiga Review, Praxis Magazine, African writer, Adelaide Literary Magazine New York, and elsewhere. He's a joint winner of the May 2020 Poets in Nigeria (PIN) 10 day poetry challenge. His short story has appeared in Best of African literary magazine. You can follow him on: Twitter @OkoliStephen7 Instagram @Okoliwest90 Facebook Ókólí Stephen.*

# WHAT THE NOSE MASK MEANS IN MY COUNTRY

Akin-Ademola Emmanuel

My grandmother tells me there's no virus prowling here  
She says Ọrúmílà didn't ask her to Shroud her face & seize  
Her breath,  
Nor did Ọbatálá wear one while he sculpted creations  
She says there are only tongues with lies incised in  
Them & there—one of the things that bogged us  
Into mire situations. That every song of poor mothers  
Has two verses—an imprecation for democracy's  
Bearded reptiles & an elegy  
For dying sons & daughters who have taken heavy  
Dosages of hunger.  
Grandmother was taken to the hospital two weeks  
Later & like Solomon Grundy, she died on a Saturday  
& was buried on a Sunday—  
When her face was sullen with grief & as she sneezed  
Profusely,  
The wards didn't allow me close to her, there I became  
The cry of a new born child. I only heard these words  
Of my grandmother who never lied— "I am not positive  
They didn't take care of me so I can be the lie who  
Feeds the belly of the government."  
Then a doctor lured me into a corner with a horror-stricken  
Face & said "Awóbíyí, I couldn't do much because they  
Didn't allow me, your mother only had pneumonia..."

*Akin-Ademola Emmanuel is a Nigeria-born writer who uses literature as a tool to stir souls toward critical issues. His works have appeared in Kalahari Review, Nantygreens, Active Muse, Communicators League and elsewhere.*

# SENIOR MAN

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Oppong Clifford Benjamin

What we see in the light of day  
draws the shapes of our dreams at night  
we are called humans

and when we pray  
we all say  
dear God  
make this dream come through.  
Amen.

When asked, a ghetto boy replied  
my dream is to become a

/senior man/

the one who's being chased from a regular society  
who controls the affairs of the ghetto  
the planter  
the chairman  
the owner of a cartel  
the one whose dreams  
our laws and prayers fight against

We're busy fondling the breast of our phones  
depositing our minds in the abstract  
while avoiding reality's stony face

*Oppong Clifford Benjamin is a civil engineer and award-winning Ghanaian poet. His literary pieces have been published widely across the world. His debut poetry book 'Collecting Stars From A Night's Sky', published by Poetic Justice Books & Arts in Florida, USA won him the 3rd place in the prestigious Prof Atukwei Okai Poetry Prize. Clifford has been invited to read his poems at literary events in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Liberia, Rwanda, USA, Germany, Russia and Norway. He is the founder of Ghana Writes Literary Group, the most vibrant literary company in Ghana.*

# ODE TO FRONT-LINERS

Olaewe David Opeyemi

COVID's fangs stung our kind and released  
a violent venom. Nature burdened you to lead  
in this race war, to stand in front of our race,  
where the battle is fiercest and the greed  
for blood is relentless like a raging inferno.  
The fire is advancing, bodies are burning  
like heaps of cobs caught in harmattan flame.  
And you stood there in your gowns and your masks  
fetching people from the flame as if  
you do not live in houses of flesh, as if  
you do not have people whose hearts skip  
and leap with currents of worries for you.  
You fought like death is nothing  
but a toothless lion in a children cartoon,  
like you're gods whose dwelling  
is beyond the scope of cosmos, like  
mercury is flowing through  
your veins, like your bodies are  
insulated from chars and scales.  
But you only fought, incubating humanity  
in the cocoons of your heart, seeing the  
best out of us, feeding us with morsels of hope,  
Of victory, one day, very soon.

*Olaewe David Opeyemi is a Nigerian medical doctor and writer. He interrogates his life experiences through writing which he also sees as a veritable instrument for personal and social metamorphosis. His works has been published by The Quills, Eboquills, BPPC Anthologies, Selcouth Station, Onehandclapping and elsewhere. He's winner of Dawn of Splendour Poetry Contest (2019, 2020) and Shuzia creative writing contest (2019). He writes from Birnin Kebbi, Northern Nigeria. He is active on Facebook @olaewedavidopeyemi, Twitter @dropey01 and Instagram @opeolaewe.*

# PUBLIC TEARS

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Osho Tunde

*(after first lockdown extension speech by Mr. President)*

They drove past  
The vehicle they drove carted  
Some cartons of smiles—  
Noodles of lockdown  
Slowly they drove past  
Street grew a plethora of faces  
One carton to a familiar face—  
The famous face of corruption  
They drove past me and my brother—  
The x and y in an equation  
Past our cry for survival  
Our hands resting on our waists  
As they drove out of our misty eyes  
Fear of pandemic  
Overtaken by fear of hunger

*Osho Tunde is a Lagos based writer who turns to poetry to break the silence of his body. His haiku recently made the Babishai Niwe Haiku 2020 longlist. He looks forward to having his works on various literary journals and magazines.*

# I AM HANDICAPPED

Mohammed Oluwatimileyin Taoheed

I am handicapped  
In my small slum,  
By a strange squall!  
Which smacks my buttocks;  
As if I were a sprog  
Playing with his mother's spuds.

My pen cannot dance  
On a bunk of papers,  
As it was accustomed to.  
My 'bard-hood' squats in squalor!

We are handicapped  
In our roofed barns,  
By an incorporeal army of weevils  
That slosh our soft chins;  
As if we were bunnies  
Playing with their mother's paws.

Our hoes cannot bite  
Any acres of bushy land,  
Hunters are short of preys  
To feed Ògún, not to say,  
The ajar mouths of their kins.

We slouch slovenly;  
With hands or legs immovable,  
As if we were in a burrow  
Dug by a visiting soldier;  
Corona, it was named.  
Oh, I am handicapped!

*\*OGUN: Is a popular Yoruba god known for his dominance over iron.*

*Mohammed Oluwatimileyin Taoheed is a Nigerian artist, poet, tutor and story writer. His literary works, mostly based on the satirical happenings in his country, have appeared on different platforms. He takes pleasure in the works of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Buchi Emecheta, George Herbert, John Milton, Williams Shakespeare and others. He writes from Offa in Kwara State.*

# THE MINISCULE ACT OF A LOCKDOWN

Olajuwon Joseph Olumide

*Scene: The Lonely Lodge-Compound of A Corper*

The ground is littered with blades of grass: an assortment of lush greenery and the aged brownness. Some birds silently pecking on chips that defile human eye logic. Some birds on the twigs metres away chirping noisily--as if--in the mischief of blowing alarms out of envy against the ones pecking ashore.

The shutter lifts, oblivious of the crooked oak from whose boughs slouched the tired leaves scattered on shore. In between the leaves recuperating on the boughs, serrating the pure backdrop of the firmaments, the gossiping birds hop from one twig to another flailing at the deaf world that won't oblige. But the ashore birds peck on still.

And a god with a quill is wrapping up the moment of a life scoped in a fenced Lodge. Fences encasing this miniscule of a life. And the breeze pats his shirtless epidermis layers wearing the earth colour. The pat, he muses, is an assurance from God above when He says well done; as you capture the moment. Silence predominates. All of this in this orchard still could not float this lonely heart drowning in the nostalgia of home.

*Olajuwon Joseph Olumide is an award-winning Nigerian author, English Language instructor and musician. He holds a degree in Mass Communication and has works published on several platforms including Minute Magazine, PIN Journal, Words Rhymes & Rhythm, Etn 21, African Writers Reviews, and Arts Lounge. Olajuwon, a winner of the Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest in 2015, 2016 and 2018, is the author of Walking the Pathway of Excellence (self-help, 2020) and Beyond our Dreams (poetry, 2020). He lives in Ogun State.*

# THESE SPECKS OF DUST

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Michael Emmanuel

Here & there & everywhere between  
& in the cloud of silence hovering &  
Buzzing & humming & in stares bereft  
& in these specks of dust / these echoes  
of isolation / the  
child booking pages from a text into  
memory & the spinster news-casting  
updates from the health minister & the  
third year biology undergrad distilling  
seconds into online courses / on digital  
marketing / e-commerce & in the solemn  
dinner / cutleries clinging a canticle & the  
beeping interruption of a notification  
/ a colleague at school / slipping  
into marriage & the glowing pre-wedding shots  
/ the barrage of half-hearted congratulations  
From fingers soused in uncertainty / of things  
to come / not marriage / but lockdown  
here & there & everywhere  
hope tucked in the distanced engagements / the  
anniversaries / the successful fundraisings  
/ the crowd of courses / the dullness of indoors  
/ the cracking of dawn / the dimming of dusk  
& this is you shaping your memories into a lockdown.

# POETRY IN TIMES OF CORONA: THE DARKROOM

Olajuwon Joseph Olumide

and the eerie moment creeps in on us  
& dashes at the kernel of our hearts  
a flash of shocking dagger! cosmic outage!  
darkness submerges the metropolis  
the bulbs of science & technocrats burst!  
critical thoughts benumbed  
we grope in the belly of a ball, bump into waterloo  
death figures drown the eyes. conjectures:  
a new cold war of superpowers or theory of conspiracy?  
darkness paralyses activities, lock down!  
social distancing, hand sanitizing, solitary hunger  
but for how long does a mortal keep  
running from the tracking of an oracle?  
perhaps, in the asphyxiation of our know-how  
will there surface a Greater Aid in this darkroom of life?

*Olajuwon Joseph Olumide is an award-winning Nigerian author, English Language instructor and musician. He holds a degree in Mass Communication and has works published on several platforms including Minute Magazine, PIN Journal, Words Rhymes & Rhythm, Etn 21, African Writers Reviews, and Arts Lounge. Olajuwon, a winner of the Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest in 2015, 2016 and 2018, is the author of Walking the Pathway of Excellence (self-help, 2020) and Beyond our Dreams (poetry, 2020). He lives in Ogun State.*

# BELLS OF DESTITUTION

Mozeedat Kehinde Abdulrasak

Swiftly, the early wind got up and struck  
The bells of undisguised destitution  
The same vicious wind blew,  
The dust of reality in our faces  
The once loyal air betrayed  
Withholding an unseen foe

And similar to a witch's malice  
The spell of a virus held our time still  
Like hungry birds, we all began to eat  
From the feast of negative thoughts  
Twinkle! Our faraway audience witnessed  
Giving signs of good times to come

But our heaven seemed to be soaked in irony  
For some recovered not, so went  
In their graves in total isolation  
Blue devils began to dwell in hearts  
Knowing loved ones were not to return  
What shall sleep these hearts to tranquility?

If only the whisper of this sudden breeze  
Would be granted a free field to appease  
And like ice will liberally freeze  
The defining powers of this disease  
Just so this ugly reality can squeeze  
Out of our sphere and bring about ease

Once more, in our sandals of hope  
Our weary feet will stand firm and tall  
Again, the trees and wind will sing,  
Nothing but ecstasy in lyrics of joy  
And in our tired minds we will hear  
These bells of destitution jingle away

*Mozeedat Kehinde Abdulrasak is a budding poet. She takes pleasure in bringing the characters in her mind to life on paper. She is a native of Ilorin, Kwara state, and an undergraduate at Bayero University, Kano. Her goal in the field of writing, is to become a good poet whose works will inspire the world.*

# ELEGY FOR A KILLER- VIRUS LOCKING THE WORLD DOWN

Emmanuel Ojeikhodion

Everything was normal before the world embraced the language of silence. Our lives reduced to fear & our bodies mastered the ritual of distance.

Nobody knew that face masks & sanitizers would join the necessities of living & the air would be a messenger of death blowing a killer-virus to our nostrils

The news from the death tolls dampens my eyes with fear. Each day finds me folding inside my body— distancing from a circuit of communication.

Somewhere around, a sneeze only wreaked out from a man's throat & everyone faded away like smoke.

The world is on a tour of lockdown. We can only hope to unlock our body from her manacles & be free again.

There is a song waiting inside my mouth. Waiting to be sung when the world becomes stable again & everything returns to normalcy.

*Emmanuel Ojeikhodion is a young emerging Nigerian Writer who majors in Poetry and sometimes Essays. His writings explores: broken love, separation, loss, anxiety, identity, grief, domestic violence, abuse & rape. He has a handful of publications forthcoming /published in Capsule Stories, Rigorous, Chachalaca Review, Déraciné Mag, Pangolin Review, Clips and Pages, African Writer, Kalahari Review, Peeking Cat & elsewhere. He was recently a finalist in the Best of Kindness Poetry Contest 2020 (origami poems project). You can reach him on twitter at @hermynuel and facebook at Emmanuel Ojeikhodion.*

# CONVERSATION WITH MY GRANDMOTHER & DEATH SENTENCE

Blessing Omeiza Ojo

My grandmother, who worships her tradition  
like carved wood, scarfed red, stationed  
behind my grandfather's door, asked me what  
it was that cast the frozen spell on mankind.  
I doctored my earbud to take its space aptly—  
nothing should go into me via the needle's eye.

Not air, nor the words of my grandmother.  
She calls this act names that could beat fear  
into me: playing with grey hairs, poking  
the devil in the eyes, walking into the sanctuary  
of God with the devil's paeon and say amen  
to the prayers of the Levites. Amen again.

Like a comic book, I could read every image  
on her face. How she was searching  
for salubrious words free of venom to flog me,  
because she knew words scar my skin better  
than whip. She looked at me and said:  
"Our ancestors have finally visited. And they  
shall take us all with them; we betrayed them first.  
We, as prisoners of the earth, must go into its heart  
and morph." I asked if her ancestors know Wuhan.

Sudden silence. Deep sigh. I asked again  
if they know the origin of man—the man whose name  
they sang into a dirge before his death,  
for claiming the space behind tradition's elbow  
as home; that's where peace lives.  
I have lived like this man all my life.  
So I said to her: an alien came from Wuhan.

I, the son of the soil knows the forest of no return.  
I know the path that leads to the seven rivers.  
I could lead this thing into its doom, you know.  
Every stranger, wherever he is from,  
is entitled to a welcoming party; that we stay  
in our confinement for a while is hospitality.

## DEATH SENTENCE

In a summer of silent war,  
anything with an orifice  
can serve as an oasis  
for the dawn  
running away from the grip  
of a roaring night.

We were outside, going  
to the village square  
when the war began.  
There's a pint of wisdom  
in growing hind legs when  
you cannot go forward.

At home, we realized there was  
something that kills faster  
than a buzz bomb or  
a sightless shrapnel.

We remain in our homes,  
like prisoners in their cells,  
because there's no promise  
of aseptic air,  
no promise of safe strolls,

no promise of a hug;  
to those once lost,  
to those grieving, to those  
trapped in ventilators,  
no promise of a safe return,  
only a death sentence, only death.

*Blessing Omeiza Ojo is a Nigerian poet, novelist and playwright. He is the author of The White Shadow of Illusion , a novel. He has written for Rough Cut Press, Lunaris Review, and others. His awards include the 2019 Korea-Nigeria Poetry Prize (Ambassador Special Prize) and the September 2018 Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest (Second runner up). He works as a creative writing instructor at Jewel Model Secondary School, Abuja, where he has coached winners of national and international writing prizes.*

# NOKIA'S DARK MODE; UPDATED VERSION

Bayowa Ayomides

Oxygen wasn't the only disaster that befell the earth — Canisia Lubrin  
After the ides of March, we didn't beware.  
We waited for a second coming when a plague claimed the earth.  
Rapture broke out from the throats of the unaware.  
Suddenly, the earth's plane crusted an atmosphere of no trustworthy oxygen,  
& parents put on their masks first; children baptized their hands  
with alcohol to feed on their mothers' fear.  
Inri lost members to the new hygiene god in town;  
to 14 days silent prayers cowering their throats.  
...it was sudden and suspicious; the coroners couldn't account.  
We that stayed indoor painted figments of fear over our doorsteps,  
We that went outside wore spacesuits on earth,  
queued upon the tiny threads that connected breath & death,  
also witnessed people flu off the fragile ropes.  
We that didn't have a home fed on our fingernails, behind street curtains.  
Fields couldn't ridge more bodies and funeral workers  
didn't get to embalm fresh corpse; to detect that the scars  
on the bodies of the dead settled for our hearts.  
We garbaged them to knock celestial doors for more rooms themselves-  
because a candle ignited for them could double our wicks' furnace.  
...something was questionable; the white-collar coroners couldn't tell.  
We couldn't coronate the efforts of the masked heroes at hospitals enough-  
how they ran into the familiar wars in victim's throats to extend olive branches,  
also, those with us at home without masks but wore warmth & smiles.  
After valentine came quarantine,  
little children don't reach out their hands for adults'  
the world hibernates under Nokia's dark mode.  
Nature goes nude and wild under no one's voodoo,  
Every beauty posture involving the human face is a crime scene  
longing for count-ups of victims' statistics.  
Shaking, whispering, kissing too are prohibited to lovers,  
'cos self-betrayal and death, now take new forms.

*Bayowa, Ayomide is a Nigerian-Canadian poet, and filmmaker. He studies Theatre Studies and Creative Writing at the University of Toronto, Canada. Bayowa has received several literary accolades for his writings. He is the author of 'Stream of Tongues, Watercourse of Voices.*

# LOCKDOWN

## Taofeeqah Adigun

Ages ago, we craved the vision twenty-twenty.  
It indeed came to send us to the great beyond,  
In numbers more than two thousand and twenty.  
A new year is born and with it, series of pandemics.

Not long after the portal to twenty-nineteen was shut,  
We discovered one of the minions with us.  
I sneezed and no one said 'bless you', it was strange.  
Alas! It's the year mother earth chose to take a break.

When the mighty ones began to bend their knees to death,  
The world stood still and held its breath.  
Mother earth stopped for a sneeze,  
And the whole world went to sleep.

The streets have become empty,  
For staying home is the new staying healthy.  
Everyone thought it was the end of the world but it wasn't,  
For it came like a thief at night, taking both the holy and unholy.

We have become prisoners in our world,  
Searching for hope behind closed doors.  
Handshakes have become dangerous,  
Avoiding people is the new cautious.

We isolate during the day and cluster at night,  
Watching over lives and washing hands every time.  
On and on, the year keeps running.  
And every morning is a wake of new mournings.

No Sundays nor Mondays but the Sun and Moon,  
Tuesdays are toxic as cases grow in twos.  
We ask ourselves what to do on Wednesdays,  
Tolls rise on Thursdays and fears on Fridays.,,

[\*\*CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL POEM.\*\*](#)

*Taofeeqah Adigun, writer, calligrapher and a Mathematics buff, has keen interest in languages, poetry and counselling. She is a 17 year old girl in her first year in the university. She hails from Osun state, Nigeria and lives in Ekiti state, Nigeria. Although a science student, she writes, designs, which includes calligraphy, and keeps journals. She is the last and only female child of her parents.*

# SHOOTING PLAYS

## Tochukwu Precious Eze

father spells his name with his footsteps  
I hear screams from across the house  
e-z-e! e-z-e! 1-2-3! e-z-e!

I named the tv Nkechi, after our neighbor  
who never shuts up. I think they're related—  
they look the same around the stomach

my brother thinks life is a song  
always nodding and moving his legs  
to nothing. if life were a song, we're on a long

pause. my sister thinks life is a play  
crying one second and laughing another  
if life were a play, we aren't shooting anymore

they say some men, hearing the shooting  
had stopped, went out to play  
football, and bullets scored against their bodies

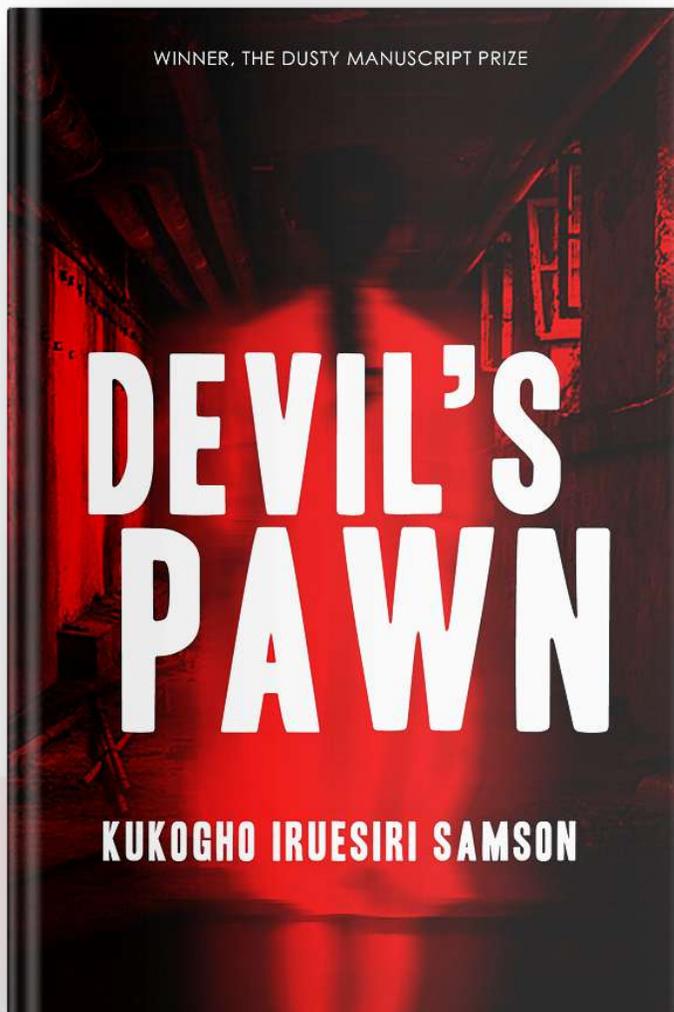
mum likes to pretend like everything is right  
like the song is loud, and the play is on  
like the director just screamed 'action'

and her role is to smile the heavens down  
into closed doors. I think I'd smile with her  
till the day comes when it's safe to play

with leather balls and plastic tins  
and not concede to bullets of steel  
and those of corona

*Tochukwu Precious Eze is a Nigerian creative writer who loves highlife songs and the way his fingers dance on keyboards with soft keys. He writes poems, stories and articles for blogs and magazines. He's the author of Tobé, a collection of poems, and founder & director of Direwords.*

# BOOKSHELF



## SYNOPSIS

When the Black Cats join their capone to “punish” a fellow student, they have no idea the terror they are about to unleash.

When Simon, a student at Buscan University, awakens from a dream covered in blood, he has no idea he has become a puppet in the hands of a vengeful spirit.

When the police are called to investigate heinous murders on a university campus, they have no idea they are up against something more sinister than their eyes can see.

Different worlds collide in this chilling novel that blurs the lines between justice and revenge.



Devil's Pawn, the winner of the Dusty Manuscript Prize 2020 and 1st runner-up of the 2017 ANA Prize for Fiction, has been described as a “page-turner” that is “highly recommended” by award-winning journalist and author Olukorede Yishau.

- GENRE: Urban Fiction
- THEMES: Justice, Politics, Metaphysical, Death
- PAGES: 357
- PRICE: N3,000





ART &  
PHOTO

# NASAL PROTECTION



NOSE PROTECTION: SULOLA IMRAN ABIOLA | 2020

*Sulola Imran Abiola is a Nigerian poet, photographer, public servant and lover of arts. A native of Oyo state, Sulola was born and bred in the bustling city of Lagos state. He writes & clicks the shutters across all themes and hopes his works will journey far and wide someday. He tweets via @official\_sulola.*

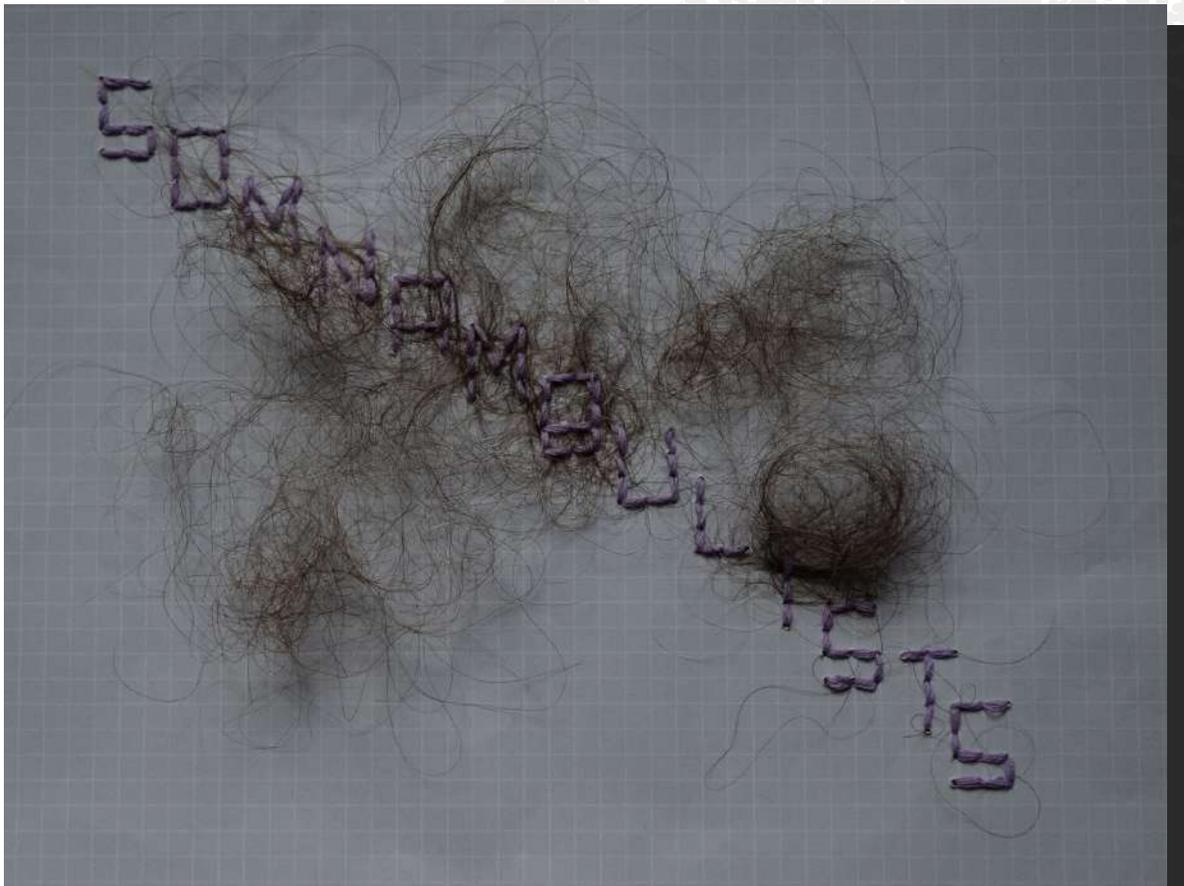
# AFTER BLACKOUT



AFTER BLACKOUT: MARTINS DEEP | 2020

*Martins Deep (he/him) is a Nigerian poet and artist. He is currently a student of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. His works deeply explore the African experience. His creative works have appeared, or are forthcoming on The Roadrunner Review, Covert Literary Magazine, Barren Magazine, The Hellebore, Chestnut Review, Mineral Lit Mag, Agbowó Magazine, Suburban Review, IceFloe Press, Kalahari Review, Typehouse Literary Magazine, IceFloe Press, & elsewhere. He loves jazz, adores Bethel Music and fantasizes reincarnation as an owl. He tweets @martinsdeep1*

# OLYMPIA



OLYMPIA: TERRI WITEK | 2020

# LOCK DOWN



LOCK DOWN: AYOMIKUN OLUWAGBENGA | 2020



# SHORT FICTION

# SIXTY-ONE

## Queen Nneoma Kanu

At midnight, my alarm goes off and I begin the daily ritual of marking off the end of the day on my calendar. Each day is for an atonement. Everything that happens to me is made better at midnight when I grab my pen and cross off 'military time'. The days are trapped inside the squares on the calendar. Underneath each date, I have marked it Day One, Day Two to Day Sixty-One. Tonight, I am making an extra square after Sixty-One.

Day Infinitesimal.

What is Time? Time is a vortex of a haunting past, the remnants of shattering betrayal, a stripping by some majestic imposter syndrome, a persistent appetite to repress the thoughts that pull aside warm blankets and stay with you till dawn. In the endless days that follow, rest becomes a sanctuary; a place to lay still and allow torment joggle between sweaty palms and feverish limbs.

And blurred visions.

My bags are packed and ready to go. It has been eight months and I still live out of my suitcase. Today would have been sixty-one days from the day I started checking off the dead days. The days I dreamt of home, of warm embraces and bright faces. I practice my reaction for when I will see you again. We make plans and build castles and live in them. We possess futures in our whispered conversations, we are excited for tomorrow, for a chance to say what we left unsaid. The past does not matter, we will make do when we lock in embrace.

Ewooooo!

Promises too sweet must come to a halt! A love story must be strengthened with pain. Your voice has become faint and my heartbeat has stopped. The phone is ringing and breaking my thoughts. I have my cup of coffee in one hand and I pick the phone in the other. Both hands require strength and I am willing to give. A cold voice speaks through the wires with a mechanical apology about my canceled flight. That voice can never imagine the journey of my mind's eye. The voice is tired, burdened with the news to shatter a lover's nest, or a longing forgone. The world is in a pandemic and love is a disaster. I accept the news with numb nods, and wrap it around the palm holding the telephone. I am still holding tight even after the static on the other end drops.

I spill coffee on my plaid granddaddy pajamas.

I have fallen apart. I pick myself up when I hear voices approach, walk in my shadow and hear the noisy rambling inside me. But each day, checked off and dead, keeps me burning. I am guilty of leaving without warning, for being numb, frozen and tangled veined. I float away---miles and galaxies and light-years away. Those who love me bury my memory in their hearts. They think about me with a lump in their chests, you know, like the lump of earth on a dug out grave, before the priest says *dust to dust ashes to ashes*. There. Do you know how it feels? This lump of remembrance? It is what brings the tears. Good tears. Bad tears. That lump... it is the essen...

[\*\*CLICK HERE TO FINISH THE STORY\*\*](#)

*Queen Nneoma Kanu holds a B.A and M.A in English Literature from the University of Lagos, Nigeria and is currently a PhD student in Africana Literature at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, USA.*

# CORONA GIRL

Adesina Ajala

The Kaduna Electricity had sunk the entire street into darkness; the street now seemed quieter than it was when there was light. Godiya turned the lantern up and then slid the louvers open to let fresh air. The room was quiet, just the fan squeaking to a halt. Her husband spread his legs apart on a mat woven with jute. Tuwo masara and miyan kuka sat between his legs. Runnels of sweat lined down his face as each bite diminished the mound of tuwo. Godiya fidgeted on the cushion, rolled the edge of her wrapper over protruding tummy and said "Dariya, the doctors have changed my antenatal schedule. My next visit will be one week to my expected date of delivery."

"It's the coronavirus," he growled. "They want to keep safe, I suppose."

"But my next visit is not even that long. It is in two weeks fa. Now, I have three weeks to go. I can't just wait to deliver this baby." She watched him bend and eat and thought he cared less.

The street had grown quieter and darker since Dariya returned from his vulcanizer workshop at Tanki Ruwa Junction. It had been three months since he went to work and had been surviving on the little jobs he did for customers who were already fond of him. They brought tyres down to his house for him to patch or fill with air.

That day, Dariya had stopped at Mama Tabitha's shack close to his house, gulped a sachet gin before he strolled down home. The lockdown was recently relaxed and businesses opened during the day, but not in the night. All vehicular movements were to stop by eight in the evening too. The government said it was a phased relaxation. Schools were still closed. No domestic and international flights without special permit. Churches and mosques can congregate with less than thirty persons.

Dariya had thought of meeting his friend later in the week to hint him about his wife. If his wife falls into labour in the night, he would need his car to convey her to the maternity hospital.

\*\*\*\*

Godiya's estimated due date was quite far off, so they were completely nabbed when, one night, her waters broke. She writhed in bed, clasped the bedspread and yelled until Dariya woke from sleep; his sweet dream broken into smithereens of a scary thing. He fumbled in the darkness and felt the sheets soaked with the warm, slimy liquid.

"Wayo! The baby is coming! The Baby..." he cried. He dashed into the street; it was empty and cold, just the streetlights beaming orange in the distance. He cocked his ear in many directions in the dark for a voice or a footstep, but all that returned to him was bland silence.

His wife's voice echoed in his head as he stood there lonely by the road side. It was as if her whines were happening right inside his head. The echoes haunted him. He ran aimlessly.

A siren whirred from a distance and coloured lights shimmered in the dark. It was a patrol van. He flagged it down...

[\*\*CLICK HERE TO FINISH THE STORY\*\*](#)

*Adesina Ajala is a writer, poet and medical doctor. His prose have appeared in Ngiga Review, Parousia, Nantygreens, Arts-Muse-Fair, MONUS Anthology, Dark Lagos, AFAS Review, Eboquills and elsewhere. He was shortlisted for 2018 League of Wordsmith Contest (Flash Fiction/Short story Category) and was co-winner 2018 TSWF Writers Prize.*

# SUDDEN ENTRAPMENT

Reginald C. Ofodile

Kene's sister Ifeoma, often described him as 'impulsive.'

Kene however had not been hasty over his momentous trip to the part of Nigeria where Bobo resided. He had dithered. His schooldays' friend, Bobo, who sometimes stayed with him in Abuja, had continually urged him to visit. 'The pace of life is different in my town,' Bobo had said. 'I know nice hangouts. Just come and chill there for some time. My doors are open... oh, what's wrong?'

On Bobo's last trip to Abuja with his new wife Mira, the couple had spent a week as Kene's guests. Mira had added her plea to her husband's. 'Our home is there for you. I'll cook, cook, until you belleful! Just come. Maybe you'll even find a wife there...'

'I've a girlfriend,' Kene had reminded her.

'You go dey for girlfriend die?' Bobo had chuckled. 'Anyway, this is not about matchmaking.'

'You want to "retaliate" my hospitality,' jested Kene. 'You don't have to, you know.' All three chuckled at the allusion. It was the famous faux pas of some public figure who said 'retaliate' when what he meant was 'reciprocate.'

Suddenly, at a time of global alarm, Kene found he had before him a week that was free of commitments. He boarded a plane to Bobo's home state. His visit offended rather than gratified Bobo, for Kene checked into a hotel, then phoned the couple to announce his arrival. His action was deliberate. He had reasoned that since Bobo was no longer a bachelor, he should not intrude upon his marital space.

He had learnt that having a husband's friend as a houseguest was irksome to some women.

Kene was also undergoing an inner struggle. It had rumbled fitfully in him for years. His coming to that town strangely expressed both avoidance and embracing of that urge. It was a yearning both adored and abhorred.

He had argued with his girlfriend, Bosede, before travelling. 'You don't want to say what you're going for, suddenly deciding to leave Abuja for a week,' she had grumbled. 'Ok, you feel I'm going to see a woman there,' Kene replied. 'I know no one there except Bobo and his wife, and I'm not even staying with them. I want time alone, to look into myself.'

She was skeptical. 'I see. Just be careful... Don't bring back HIV, I beg you.' Kene sighed, 'So suspicious!'

When Bobo and Mira came to the hotel, Mira wept...

[\*\*CLICK HERE TO FINISH THE STORY\*\*](#)

*Reginald Chiedu Ofodile is an award-winning author and international actor. Ofodile has been a very prolific and versatile writer, producing three novels, two books of plays, two poetry collections and a collection of short fiction, as well as essays and criticism. His awards include the Warehouse Theatre International Award in 1997, the BBC African Performance Award, the World Students' Drama Trust's Awards and the 2015 ANA/Abubakar Gimba award for a short story collection. He has also appeared across nations on stage and screen in many productions and coached actors.*

# THE ESCAPE

Shedrack Opeyemi Akanbi

Kunle is too concerned with reactions on Twitter. He doesn't see the escape.

*FG bans gatherings of over 50 persons, the news says*

Like an epiphany, he catches it. He can ease this pressure. A smirk forms on his face while he pictures a one-day event that will not bear upon his bank account. But this victory that overwhelms him doesn't last. He's the one getting married, but is it truly his wedding?

\*\*\*

By evening Lara stops by his place.

"Miss 'Rona doesn't want us to get married," she says immediately Kunle opens the door.

Kunle keeps a wry smile. He wants to join in her taking the situation lightly but the thought of suggesting what she might not agree to discouraged him. "How was work?"

His eyes don't leave her as she removes her wig and unbuttons her shirt. He tries to speak again but the words wouldn't come. He watches her struggle with her shoes while she explains that the virus has paused her going to work. She will be working from home till normalcy returns.

"We should proceed with the wedding," he says. Lara gives him a stare. He could feel her eyes tickling his cheeks.

"No one is calling the wedding off," she says. "We are only changing dates."

"No, I mean, we should still do it next month." He pauses to survey her reaction, but she sat still as though deaf.

"You know it will be sort of private, and...and it will save cost." His eyes were on the rug now, trying hard to sound convincing.

Silence wraps the room.

Lola's phone rings. "Daddy, we've seen the news," she responds. "Actually, we are not changing the dates."

When the call ends, Kunle hugs her so tight, she struggles to breathe.

\*\*\*

The next morning, Kunle is woken by his mother's call.

"Why do you want to disgrace me, Kunle? What do I tell my friends that have gotten the *aso-ebi*? Or the many associations I belong to! You want me to tell people my only son is having a palour wedding? Kunle, Kunle, s'ongbo mi?"

Kunle lets the phone fall off his ear. He leaves his mother's voice vibrating on the mattress. He goes to the fridge but he doesn't take anything. He rests his head on it instead. He hates that his mother only wants to make an impression with his wedding. He hates that for the first time, he will not listen to her.

Glossary:

*S'ongbomi: Are you hearing me?*

*Shedrack Opeyemi Akanbi is a third year student of History and International Studies at the University of Ilorin. His words have appeared or forthcoming on the Quills, EroGospel, Undivided Magazine, Praxis Magazine, Kalahari Review and elsewhere. Shedrack is a believer in Christ. He tweets @ShedrackAkanbi.*



# ESSAYS & REVIEWS

# THE STATE OF NIGERIAN LITERATURE:

## The Need For Youth Involvement In Managing The Affairs Of The Industry

### Ahmed Maiwada

Over the years, since I got close to this Nigerian ‘industry’ which is responsible for the “management” of literature, I came to observe its several layers—beginning with an idea in a literary-inclined mind and ending in form of a book (physical or otherwise) in the hands of a consumer or reader. The topic above, presents us with the task of identifying the state of this ‘industry’ as well as the involvement of the Nigerian youths in its management, which seems to be lacking.

Let me admit to making many assumptions in my opening paragraph, regarding the meaning of a number of terms appearing in the topic, even when I know that definitions of them might vary from one reader to another. With this in mind, I must proceed in discussing the topic by taking as much time and space as possible, to give my own meaning of terms that might be a subject of diverse definitions, such as ‘literature’, ‘Nigerian literature’, ‘youth’, and the industry’, among others.

Whenever the need to define a literary term arises, I am known to look in the direction of Chris Baldick’s *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, and I shall do just that for an idea of what the term ‘literature’ could mean. Accordingly, it means: “A body of written works related by subject-matter (e.g., the literature of computing), by language or place of origin (e.g. Russian literature), or by prevailing cultural standards of merit.



In this sense, literature is taken to include oral, dramatic, and broadcast compositions that may not have been published in written form but which have been (or deserve to be) preserved.

Since the 19th century, the broader sense of literature as a totality of written or printed works has given way to more exclusive definitions, based on criteria of imaginative, creative, or artistic value, usually related to a work’s absence of factual or practical reference. Even More restrictive has been the academic concentration upon poetry, drama and fiction. Until the mid-20th century, many kinds of ...

[\*\*CLICK HERE TO FINISH THE ESSAY\*\*](#)

*Ahmed Maiwada is an Abuja-based lawyer, writer and current President of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA). He has authored four poetry volumes – Saint of a Woman, Fossils, Eye Rhymes and We’re Fish.*

# HAIKU:

## An Introduction

Taofeek Ayeyemi (Aswagaawy)

There is a popular divine saying that informs the Sufi quest to seek the knowledge and presence of God, it reads: "Know me before you worship me. If you do not know me, how would you worship me (rightly)?" This statement is true to haiku as the art is more than just a poetry form, but a discipline. Today, many do not seek the knowledge of the pristine haiku aesthetics, but are attempting it, thereby churning out mediocre works and parade them as haiku. This article briefly explains the often-misconstrued terminologies of haiku.

To begin with, defining haiku is important, and I will like to examine two definitions for the purpose of clarity.

The first definition is from Wikipedia. In today's world, the first place we get residual knowledge of things is Google and the leading page and source of reference that almost always comes top is Wikipedia. Wikipedia must have therefore rightly influenced the haiku attempt of many and, in the same vein, what they perceive to be a haiku. Wikipedia defines haiku as follows:

"Haiku is a type of short form poetry originally from Japan. Traditional Japanese haiku consist of three phrases that contain a kireji, or "cutting word", 17 on in a 5, 7, 5 pattern, and a kigo, or seasonal reference."

I will now critically analyze this definition and use it as the skeleton for this article.

*"Haiku is a Type of Short Form Poetry Originally from Japan"*

A kireji is a Japanese term that is translated as "cutting word" or, best put "cut marker." In any haiku, there must be a cut (kiru) indicating the point between the two images painted in a haiku. This cut or pause or caesura is indicated by a marker which in English are the ellipsis (. . .) and the em dash (—).

It is called "cutting word" because in Japanese, it is represented with words such as "ya" (や) and "kana" (かな), but the close equivalent in English are the ellipsis and em dash or an implied cut.

It must be noted that a lot of haiku writers do not use the marker to indicate their cut – thus adopting the implied cut, but it is highly encouraged for precision. The ellipsis is for superposition as it shows the continuity from the first image into the second image, or to show their relationship. While the em dash is for juxtaposition as it put side by side two unrelated images to establish ...

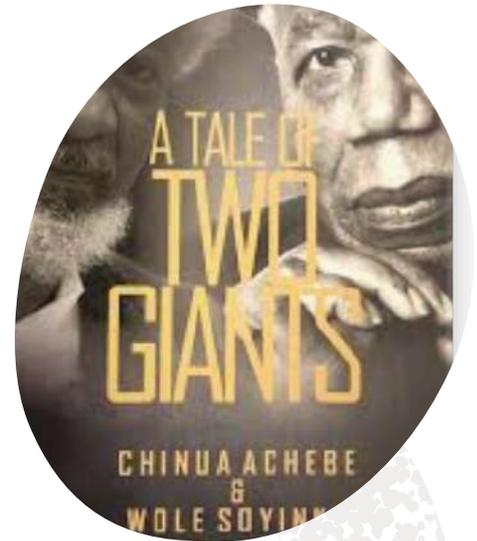
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*Taofeek Ayeyemi is a Nigerian lawyer and writer with a number of poems, haiku and creative nonfictions to his name. As a haijin, his works have appeared in Acorn, Hedgerow, The Mamba, the Quills, Akitsu Quarterly, Haibun Today, contemporary haibun online, Modern Haiku, Human/Kind Journal, Prune Juice, Frogpond, Failed Haiku, Cattails, Eucalypt, Seashores and elsewhere. He won the Outstanding Haiku Prize in 2019 Soka Matsubara International Haiku Contest and Honorable Mention Prize in the 2019 Morioka International Haiku Contest, 2020 Autumn Moon Haiku Journal Best of Issue and The Mainichi Best of 2019.*

# SUBLIME LIVES:

## A Review of Professor Emeka Aniagolu's 'A Tale of Two Giants: Chinua Achebe & Wole Soyinka'

Kirsten C. Okenwa



The first sixteen years of my life was in Kano, Nigeria. Needless to say I appreciate all things Hausa/Arabic. I like to read magazines and non-fiction books in the Arabic script style, from right to left. I will often turn to the epilogue of books or back pages of magazines to start my reading. It was with relish that I dug into Professor Emeka Aniagolu's book, *A Tale of Two Giants: Chinua Achebe & Wole Soyinka*. Reading the epilogue first, as I usually do, I was immediately reassured that the work is typical Aniagolu: forthright, refined, sagacious, authoritative, authentic, precise, bold, unapologetic and witty.

I titled this review: Sublime Lives, borrowing the phrase from the famous poem, A Psalm of Life, by the American Poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

*Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.*

*A Tale of Two Giants* by Professor Emeka Aniagolu is a thorough, stimulating and fascinating comparative study, grounded in historico-socio-political contextual analysis of the careers, creative, autobiographical as well as scholarly and polemical works of Africa's two literary giants: Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. Much has been written on those two literary giants, but some lines from the introduction of Aniagolu's work, explain the primary objective of the comparative study:

*“... critical analyses that go beyond nominal renditions of content analyses to engage dynamic, socio-political, economic and cultural context analysis . . .”* Context analysis being the major work the author engaged in this treatise, rather than relying solely on content analysis of the works of the two literary giants. The work boldly interrogates, analyses and confronts the historical and political contexts of motivation, intentionality and expression, that surround and animate Achebe and Soyinka's works, their personalities and their personal experiences.

*A Tale of Two Giants* is a voluminous work, with 552 pages, divided into thirteen chapters, though each chapter is not numbered but takes on titles. Like episodes in a television series, each chapter title guides the reader, page by brilliant page, into knowledge of the subject. The work is luxuriant in language and content, an opulent literary feast served by Professor Emeka Aniagolu with finesse and excellence. The details and analysis in this book will satisfy even the most fastidious literary critic...

**[CLICK HERE TO FINISH THE REVIEW](#)**

*Kirsten C. Okenwa is a freelance editor, writer, graphics and designer. She often works as an educator, youth advocate in remote parts of the ECOWAS through the NGO, Amber Africa Dev. Foundation. During elections in Nigeria, she works with the European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) in election observations and monitoring. Mostly, she is a successful trader in books, African fashion and crafts.*

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