



# SEVEN FLOWERS OF GRATITUDE

Top 20 poems of the Brigitte Poirson  
Poetry Contest (BPPC) April/May 2020.



Brigitte Poirson &  
Kukogho Iruesiiri Samson

*Other books in the series:*

Wind of Change (2015)

Loops of Hope (2016)

The Train Stops at Sunset (2017)

Citadel of Words (2018)

Vortices of Verses (2019)

# SEVEN FLOWERS OF GRATITUDE

TOP 20 POEMS OF THE  
BRIGITTE POIRSON POETRY CONTEST (BPPC)  
APRIL/MAY 2020

Edited by  
BRIGITTE POIRSON  
KUKOGHO IRUESIRI SAMSON



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## INTRODUCTION

Nothing new under the sun? On April 30th 1687, a Woman of Letters was admonishing her daughter not to come to Paris. “No one goes out for fear this plague will prey on us... It spreads like fire” she wrote. “The king has locked us all down.” So “we read fables, especially a most topical one, “The Animals Stricken by the Plague”... I am sending you two masks... Everyone wears them in Versailles... It gives us a feeling of cleanliness and prevents contamination.” (*Mme de Sévigné to Mme de Grignan*)

2020 has updated that weird sensation of déjà vu in this depiction of a dire situation. What is new under the fiery Covid sun of today is that the virus has struck and paralyzed the whole world. And technology has brought drastic changes in our lives. No poet could really remain indifferent to such an unprecedented experience. They had to come to terms with the issues and sufferings to be shared in isolation, while exploiting the new possibilities that link us to the world at any given moment. In order to fight the invisible physical attacks, the stifling sense of seclusion, the economic strangulation all countries have been confronted to, when everybody feels strangely propelled to a new dimension of space and time, the greatest weapon is art. And words are best apt to sift hope, empathy and regeneration through the sieve of poetry to make sense of that raw madness. And simply survive.

Congratulations to ALL the contestants once more.

Your pens form the *Guard of Honour* of the world.

Brigitte Poirson  
May 2020

## APRIL/MAY WINNERS

OSADOLOR WILLIAMS OSAYANDE is a Nigerian storyteller, poet and essayist whose literary works seek to humanize through the elevation of consciousness. Osadolor was longlisted for the 2018 Babishai Niwe Poetry Award. His works have appeared on the African Writer, 1888 Center and Origami. He enjoys reading Maya Angelou, Gbenga Adesina, Warsan Shire and Chinua Achebe.



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FORTUNE BEN is a Nigerian poet, calligrapher, singer, and girl child advocate. He was the President of the Press Club in his school. Fortune is a certified instructor with LEDS Writes organization and a member of Kings Homes Charity organization. He lives by the mantra, "a life without vision is a life full of friction".



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OLADIMEDI ADAM ADEDAYO is a Nigerian writer from Okuku, Osun State. Oladimeji was shortlisted for Ken Egbas Poetry Prize in 2018, the Albert Jungers Poetry Prize (AJPP) in 2019, and emerged first-runner-up of the Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest (February/March 2020). He takes special pleasure in the works of writers like Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola, and Lesley Nneka Arimah.





## SEVEN FLOWERS OF GRATITUDE?

OSADOLOR WILLIAMS OSAYANDE, 1<sup>ST</sup> PRIZE WINNER

We throw calabashes on cowries.  
The lungs and the wind have stopped making ungloved love.  
The wind's loins are sorrowed with harrows of crowns,  
And like sour suns in sash, his lovers take him in, horrid.

We throw calabashes on cowries.  
Lungs and graves hold the ends of accordions and push.  
Friends patch friends with charred parches of intimacy,  
Our faces and hands like racing mambas and mongooses.

We throw cowries into a calabash.  
Lungs and graves hold the ends of accordions and pull.  
Everybody's body becomes a war between life and crowns.  
Our faces and hands intimate the spits to oceanic rehash.

We throw cowries into a calabash.  
CNN and NTA peel their tongues to taste baptized news,  
As charred men, women, breathe, live greenly again,  
As hugs twin kisses after Methuselahs of distance's gash.

We make a calabash kiss cowries.  
Our legs walk on tomorrow's head with ginger pride.  
The lungs and the wind are globes of ungloved love.  
Seven flowers of gratitude shower out of our nostrils!

## LETTER TO THE BALL WITH SPIKES

FORTUNE BEN, 2<sup>ND</sup> PRIZE WINNER

Dear Corona virus, I trust thou art pleased  
With thine already caused devastation,  
As thou hast left crumbled and ceased  
The normalcy of all and sundry in every nation.

Thy disastrous outbreak hath two sides.  
So, I write to condemn and commend thee respectively.  
Thou hast taken us on dangerous rides.  
I hope thou will reason with me as I begin purposefully.

Terribly, thy disease hath taken many to hospital.  
Population is decreasing, people are dying  
And thou hast left everyone in a state that is truly critical.  
World economies are crumbling; we feel the end is coming.

Social gatherings are banned, schools are shut down.  
Empty promises, pessimistic thoughts right in front of our eyes,  
Seemingly never-ending lockdown: we stay at home now.  
Hunger maketh fun of us; hardship is on the rise.

Commendably, thine endemic pandemic hath reinvigorated us  
As each thinketh differently positively.  
Many meditate; some pray against the virus.  
Thou hast reshaped our thinking and broadened our horizons  
amazingly.

Sweetheart, thine effect hath brought out talents in people.  
My friends have turned writers and motivational speakers.  
Thou hast honed each person's skill in double.  
We all have learnt the essence of paying our dues, which we now  
do.

Thou art appreciated and blamed for thine impact,

But we desperately yearn for thine absence.

**Christ Over Viruses and Infectious Diseases:** a true fact.

That's why we look to Him to prove the essence of His existence.

## THE DUOPOLY

OLADIMEJI ADAM ADEDAYO, 3<sup>RD</sup> PRIZE WINNER

In the tempestuous temper of our darling fatherland,  
The holy killer, like a serpent's slough, sheds  
The fleshy folds of fat formed from his good old times,  
As his viral lieutenant, like Saturn, runs rings around our orb,  
Like the prophesied arrival of Gog and Magog.

In the tempestuous temper of our darling cradle,  
Stay-home has unclothed into naked house arrest,  
As the pathogenic locusts in our locus of power  
Are the tongues enforcing that which they won't subsidize,  
Are the barricades barring us from building in God's shrines  
While favouring frolic festivities in potbellied shrines of devil.

In the tempestuous temper of our dear motherland,  
Retailers lever their merchandises to higher rungs,  
Amping up the angry appetite of our python of an earth,  
Like a chick flaunting its flesh before a famished falcon.

In the tempestuous temper of our beloved homeland:  
A dark room's ceiling fan groans like a creaking door,  
From holding the weight of a swinging carcass  
Which used to be inhabited by an Okada-man  
Who, yesterday, couldn't repurchase his motorcycle  
From the expropriating custody of our men in black.

But how else does one snuff out these two pestilent pests:  
One, a coroner oppugning us over the death of honesty,  
The other setting our derailed train back to its scriptural track?  
How else, if not for all tongues to chorally crave condonation  
From the broad bringer of this sweeping duopoly  
Of the famed coronavirus and an unsung coroner virus?

## WINNING WARS WITH WORDS

AKOR AGADA NATHANIEL

War is when people die and fortunes fall.  
Covid 19 has cunningly navigated through thick walls,  
Setting nations on fire against nature's angry call.

Corona gave birth to children somewhere in Wuhan,  
But we celebrated a naming ceremony in our clan  
Amidst arrows from fevers on earth's frying pan;

Lost in the midst of restless married seas  
Of roaring waters deaf to our panting pleas,  
Our world went ballistic with this corona breeze.

In this covid wind we saw our ears.  
The twin year plucked fruits full of fears,  
Closing the curtain of hope for helpless tears.

Social distancing melted our bonds like cheese,  
As eyebrows always rise every time a soul sneezes.  
Our personalities became oranges too dry to squeeze.

Misery really fed fat from our famished memories,  
Hissing at the faces of our re-incarnating histories  
Of survival and breath-taking stories of past victories.

We left Wuhan to carry her covid cross,  
Not knowing that corona would come for us  
And make us tales of costly, tragic loss.

See how we became leaves cursing the wind  
Whose intentions were to open our fragile minds  
To the love we carelessly left behind!

A major threat anywhere is a threat everywhere!

Divinity dares humanity to break this brutal spear  
By winning wars with words wherever we are.

## FIERCE BREEZE OF DISEASE

### OGEDENGBE TOLULOPE IMPACT

*(A triple triolet)*

Oh, fierce breeze of disease, please cease!  
Please cease to seize lives in our land!  
Cease now, oh, fierce breeze of disease!  
Oh, fierce breeze of disease, please cease!

Won't you cease to trouble our seas  
With force that sways mast off its stand?  
Oh, fierce breeze of disease, please cease!  
Please cease to seize lives in our land!

Oh, fierce breeze of disease, please cease!  
Please cease to seize lives in our land,  
That our children may smile with ease  
Oh, fierce breeze of disease, please cease!

You have blown off our stand of bliss  
And shattered dreams on our grand strand.  
Oh, fierce breeze of disease, please cease!  
Please cease to seize lives in our land.

Oh, fierce breeze of disease, please cease!  
Please cease to seize lives in our land,  
That we may walk around in peace!  
Oh, fierce breeze of disease, please cease!

Won't you cease to fell men like leaves  
And cover their bodies with sand?  
Oh, fierce breeze of disease, please cease!  
Please cease to seize lives in our land!

## LOCKDOWN

UKPANYANG KINGSLEY AYI

Home is not home without the freedom to leave;  
the lockdown has overstayed its welcome.  
Every day feels like wearing the same old clothes  
worn out by the worries  
of a waning world.

Someone left the air open  
and the virus closed in on us,  
kneading us with the yeast of panic  
as faces become figures whose bodies  
burn like ovens.

Politicians cower in the health rubble they built  
as the people fret with corroded hope.  
Medics wear their lives like masks on their faces  
—disposable and dispensable—,  
charging at death with tools for their own graves,  
while science suffers from prolonged labour without delivery.

Like fish trapped in a glass tank,  
my thoughts bubble out in sighs, when I wonder  
how a country choked by the asthma of corruption  
will survive the smothering pangs of this pandemic...



## THE MIGHTY MOLE

AFOLABI OLUWATOBILOBA JOHN

The mole that terrifies the forest king  
With her many tiny feet round her body,  
Her arsenal of artillery woven in a mass of ball,  
Causes an upheaval all around the globe.

An august visitor, she visits all.  
Both rich and poor tremble at her call,  
For her knock on one's door-girth  
Is an invitation to the earth beneath.

Just yesterday, we holidayed in Rome,  
But today, our home is our dome,  
An asylum to save us from the visitor  
Whose knock sends jitters like a rotor.

In the land of the whites and blacks,  
Everyone marvels at the mighty mole  
Who sends old and young down the pole.

To save the world yesterday,  
Missiles, tanks and guns were weapons.  
Today, masks, gloves and meters away  
Are our resistance to his numerous cons.

When death locks its tiny horn  
And stings in the balloon of lungs,  
Lives slip into the abyss of no return  
And birds bid humans farewell in songs.

A thousand dirges are the world's new pop.  
Yet the world as a whole won't give up,  
For in the unity of our division  
We'll conquer in isolation.

## PROPHYLAXIS

### INALEGWU OMAPADA ALIFA

In nearly every length and breadth of the land,  
as I traverse through every nook and cranny,  
I hear sentimental melodies of gyration  
screaming of prophetic prophylaxis  
and gasping in pneumonic breaths.

With voices full of charisma!  
Voices full of eloquence!!  
Voices full of grace and panache!!!  
I listen to the gulping gullible  
through a season of palliatives and deaths.

The bells are calling us  
to come and be filled with a miraculous extravaganza.  
Come, the poor and rambunctious,  
since you like our hilarious demonstrations  
like sheep without a shepherd  
roaming from street to street in search of a remedy!

ECHOES FROM THE DIARY OF COVID-19

ADEDAMOLA JONES ADEDAYO

Maybe Nature became intoxicated  
With wine from the breweries of sanity,  
Not knowing that some maniacal virus would be implicated  
In the mutinous act of quelling the pride of humanity.

Ever since, our existence has been reshuffled into an interim  
framework,  
In which gregarious roads are sentenced to solitary confinements  
And our stomachs unfriend erstwhile routine rations earned from  
hard work  
To be protégés of a hunger empowered by daily resentments.

The media gradually become civil to melodies  
Of unrest and thefts anchored with strategies  
And rising death counts which stimulate muffled dirges.

Fragile promises of palliatives suffix our patience  
In a time when malnutrition feeds the poor,  
A time when goodwill from some lofty stage befriends an audience  
In paradoxes of giveaways which exempt many more.

Some say science is the genesis of these troubled tasks,  
But lungs bear the consequences of lamentations  
Under strange revelations of gloves and facemasks  
That may or may not be met with ethereal limitations.

Or could this nightmare be God's little way  
Of rediscovering humanity's forsworn pathway,  
A reminder that ahead lies a dream, a fathomable leeway?

## UNACCUSTOMED

### DIVINE INYANG TITUS

Unaccustomed to presence, the inner chambers labor to adjust  
To the weight of many restive bodies in faux sleep.  
Unaccustomed to absence, the streets wear a look  
Of distal surprise mixed with cold, bland scorn.  
Unaccustomed to us, there are not many ways we know  
To stir the feet of a conversation  
When the phone batteries blink the last of their wakefulness.

Unaccustomed, they say they hear the hours yawning  
Like hungry ghosts swallowing time.  
Yet, there are many who do not believe—unaccustomed—  
That it may require more faith than a lamb's  
To fear for lonely deaths lurking in a warm handshake,  
In a place where the music of a missile  
Rings more familiar than a lofty nursery rhyme.

Unaccustomed, the house portals  
Between the auras of home and a rancid zoo!  
Child smells his finger for the millionth time – unaccustomed  
To the sluggish breath of necessary alcohol,  
And the face struggles to unlearn the worship of fingers.

Unaccustomed, agile bodies disapprove  
Of the superior protection of loafing a lung,  
As there is a turmoil waiting always in the common man's maw  
Growing upon the last meal, like a breed of saprophytes.

Unaccustomed too—a ravaging darkness dares--  
That our very skins must learn to feel each other's daunted pulses  
Without the archaic rudiment of touch.

## SEASHORE DIALOGUE

### ABAH, ABAH OYAGABA

SON:

Father! We are here all days, arms folded,  
Our canoe there dried and empty,  
The whirlwind there turning the sea  
up-down, left-right. Why?

FATHER:

Son! We are here all days watching  
The whirlwind there wreaking havoc, roaring.  
Our eyes are blurry, our hearts throbbing.

SON:

Father! Would the wind ascend to heaven  
And descend with sun upon the sea  
To make it dry land and there be no more sea?

FATHER:

Son! The wind may ascend to heaven  
And descend with the sun upon the sea,  
And the sea turns dry land; one knows not.  
Or the sea may ascend to heaven with our wails  
And may descend with Moon upon the sea  
To make the sea still and fresh still; one knows not.

SON:

Father! Will the wind trouble the sea against us?  
Can we swim through to life or be drowned?

FATHER:

Son! Let's feed the mind with manner of hope,  
Hoping that our wails will win the Moon's heart.  
Then the sea will become still and fresh still,  
Then we will fish still.

## TWO THOUSAND AND TWENTY

OLOWO QUDUS OPEYEMI

As the hourglass sand dented inch-by-inch,  
time fled and the year was gravid with many visions,  
until the earth's tongue was impregnated by a plague  
that immured the universe into a dungeon of trepidations.

The new year visions absconded into the solitary sky;  
doctors plodded through cloistered rooms,  
struggling to lull life to the lifeless lives that lived,  
and the world became a paradise of potter's field  
like the haunted home of Hades.

Everywhere was Corona-ted with diadems and sceptres  
of death, and social distancing became a just culture.  
Even sacred sanctuaries became 'verboden'  
and the worshippers' tongues wagged for elixirs.

Mothers quarantined from their offspring  
whose lives later floated off-the-springs.  
Who will now hum hymns to the haunted hearts  
of those hunted humans who hummed for health?

## RADICAL AID

TESLIMAH ATUNRIYIKE EGBERONGBE

When oxygen reaches  
the corners of my pen,  
unhindered by any contagious sense,  
I'll write a letter  
To the not-so-honoured earth,  
  
on behalf of the eerily lost  
at their last impossible breath,  
for germ-filled hugs  
spread in families of that cure-free nurse.

When my feet un-numb,  
and muscles un-lock,  
I'll take a trip to earth—  
lesser than feet of three this time—  
on behalf of hunger-stricken bellies  
and kids of schools caught in the web.

When the sanitizers completely kill the sub-living  
living in the treacherous folds of my fingers' skin,  
I'll do a CPR for passed out earth.  
I'll make my hands help our desperate earth.  
I'll apologise for our careless fumes,

because before epistling future fears,  
someone has to  
dispose her filth-filled mask,  
stop the cough and teach her once again  
to simply breathe.

## WORRISOME WONDER

OYINDAMOLA SAMUEL ADESUNLOYE

I walked into wonder, for silence sniggers.  
The time is dark...  
In this queer time,  
Pale like a bleeding whale,  
I see a strange world  
Where the fish is afraid of water,  
But struts on land like King of the Jungle!  
A strange time, for man and death argue for rite of passage.  
Pain lingers. Science in blisters. Religion in splinters!!!  
Mother Earth begs for reconciliation, but things fall apart.  
A continent between oceans and hills...  
Vast like the Nile, tall like Kilimanjaro  
Relegated to silence!!!  
I walk into darkness; it sneezes and the world shivers.  
Alas! I see a new world, adorned like a concubine  
Trysting with God in the morning and dining with the devil at night!  
I see a strange world, where man impersonates God and wears the  
garment of nature...  
Treading on the land of waters.  
A world where death becomes afraid of death,  
And begs to live.  
A strange world fickle like a chameleon,  
Where the Skunk is not afraid of its smell,  
Nor the Vulture its ugliness.  
A queer world biting more than it can chew!  
Praying to heal. Deserted! Crestfallen! Panicky!  
No spirits, No humans,  
Only silence, proud silence, cruel and timeless...  
I walked into Wonder. Worrisome Wonder. Worrisome Silence!



## UNDER A COMMON SUN

AYOKUNLE SAMUEL BETIKU

Here, even now, this place finds its history held again  
in the claws of a scourge,  
the streets stripped of their feet by the talons of a ghost bird,  
the houses holding in their walls the tense prayers of preys.

An empty street here beckons me to touch its grim silence.  
I touch it and split into a reflection of my shadow.  
Somewhere here, one man's mouth became another man's  
entrance into the grave.

A boy set out to find answers beyond his country's border:  
a question mark smaller than a full stop ended his world.  
A woman sought the day in the hands of a friend,  
but she found the night instead.  
Her daughter now tucks her hands away from daylight  
to derail the night.

I look for a ray.  
The sky unveils a muffled sun, umbra enclosing its mouth.  
I melt into my palms. Reduced to sighs. Reduced to sniffs.

But just when my body quivers to the darts of grief,  
My ears pick a healing sound of hope from the waves of a telly,  
the sound of countries joining forces to end this raging war,  
like rivers breaking borders to douse an inferno.

Here, even now, a vision of this place flashes in the dark:  
A globe glowing its way back into a monochrome  
gleaned from different shades,  
and people of all colours holding hands as they walk  
under a common sun.

## WIELDING WORDS

JOHNSON AGNES

When our voices are not enough  
To minister and doctor our supplications,  
And our griefs are yet to be heard,  
Our smiles become parboiled  
And our joy half spoilt,  
Our laughter half baked,  
Our fears full blown,  
And our tears spring's free flowing,  
Our hands poised to ward off,  
Fight and squash our tiny foe  
Who has no feet but travels fast in a crowd,  
And our feet, firmly rooted,  
Prepared to stomp the tiny enemy  
We can't see but feel deep down our throat,  
I say: we fight!  
Let's wield our pens like swords,  
Drop our words like bombs,  
Align our armies of puns,  
Dig our trenches of rhymes  
And shoot our stanzas of arrows from the bows of our hearts!  
Let's have the war  
Of poetry and the virus.

## HYMNS AND DUAS

### DÀDA ÌBÙKÚNOLÚWA

Belligerent busy bees  
blackjacked into their own boxes...  
The card with the fairest fees  
played for safety between equinoxes...

As shadows of the dead  
walk our runways,  
Odes are being sung at broadways,  
Soliloquies at opera peaks  
And whispers of trumpet keys...

Tremendous tears leave trails of trepidation,  
Not from the weights of those brought down  
by the gravity of the insignificant yet intangible one,  
But from the low voices wirily wished away  
Loudly in hymns like: "we shall overcome"  
Or perfectly mimicked Arabic accents in "dua".

## CANISTER OF TINY MURDEROUS THINGS

### ILEKWACHI MIRACLE PERPETUA

There are letters forming in my voice  
in the silent darkness of my room,  
blank letters  
for the child whose breakfast is brewed  
in the cup of his own tears,  
and seasoned with the stale odour of death  
even his mask cannot shield away.

There are songs I have learnt to sing in sudden vacuum,  
scared verses on muted streets that once brimmed  
of a body of flowing voices and interwoven laughter.

In heightened silence,  
my days stroll by, sliding into fitful nights.  
At night, my lullabies become dangling pendulums  
swinging back and forth, like doctors  
racing from a dying patient to another gasping for breath.

In this festering plague,  
to survive, we have become men tethered to our cocoons,  
caterpillars trapped in the silky shell of contemplative fear.  
The sun rises and sets upon our shrinking bodies,  
starved of fresh oxygen.

Before us, a handshake, a warm salute  
transform into a canister of tiny, murderous things.

Maybe this is war,  
and we are refugees escaping into our prayers.

## NOWHERE ELSE

OLALEYE DOYIN SUNSHINE

Where do we go from here?  
Into some planet or hell?  
Into a cocoon of eggs?  
Or into a large form of shell?

Where?  
Our air became our death  
Ask USA, she will tell  
Our land now screams for help.  
Ask Italy of souls sown into the sandy well

How she felt...  
How she wept...  
How she bled... Ask  
How the earth trembled for ill-health!

Our streets became dens  
Of diseases, of cries, of tears.  
Our homes lost the warmth for rest  
While running from the earth's revenge.

Where else do we go from here?  
We have eaten the virus morsel.  
We are now with sickness fed.  
A tiny thing, we have felt.  
We are now trapped in her cell.

The world is unwell?  
Alone together we can mend  
Lest she bid us farewell,  
Lest we be left with nowhere,

Nowhere else.

## DRUGGED SOULS

### IBRAHIM CLOUDS IBRAHIM

God goes— on a break, and quarantines...  
Fog grows— and Devil takes the blame, like all the time...  
Dog growls— and the cat gets to be fined...  
Drugged souls— for Christ's sake! Spittle the lime!  
Stand still— poke His face, and stir the rage...  
Find steel— yoke His ways, and craft His cage...  
Count till— all the days of the plague. Seize to be...Or  
Bind me— cast the demons off my tongue! I swore.  
Devil knows— free I break, from all the curses you brew...  
Devil knows— spree! I wake from all the discussions you drew...  
Devil knows— trees will shake, for all the courses noble...  
Devil knows— things I make, in fierce honesty, shall last undue.

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading this chapbook.

The monthly [Brigitte Poirson Poetry Contest \(BPPC\)](#) is a writing contest aimed at rewarding the under-appreciated talent of young Nigerian poets. It was instituted in February 2015 in honour of [Brigitte Poirson](#), a French poet, editor, and lecturer, who has over the years worked assiduously to promote and support of African poetry. You too can be a part of the BPPC initiative by [entering your poems for any of the monthly editions](#).

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