

# A Literary Discourse Study of *World on the Brinks*, an Anthology of Poems on the COVID- 19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

To properly reflect society, it is important for works of literature in different genres to be up to date on minor or major changes around the world. In the past decade, there is no incident bigger than the coronavirus pandemic that started in December 2019 and continues to strike fear into the hearts of medical practitioners around the globe with its various strains that are still being discovered. As one would expect, numerous works have been written about this pandemic that has not only made its mark in history but has changed our way of life, maybe forever. “World on the Brinks”, an anthology of poems, is one of these works of literature. This paper focuses on this anthology, “World on the Brinks”, to discuss the relevance of literature in the contemporary world with focus on some selected poems. Wolfgang Iser’s Reception Theory is used to analyze the selected poems from the anthology. The qualitative and descriptive method of research has been employed as the methodology for analysis. The findings reveal that literature has important roles to fill in the contemporary society. These roles include, and spread beyond the line of information, communication, representation and the safeguard of history. The paper concludes that more research be conducted into the influence of literature on coronavirus and other contemporary challenges.

**Keywords:** Coronavirus, pandemic, literature, contemporary world, poetry

## Introduction

The lives of men have been subjected to several twists and turns as we all grow in age and experience. These sudden dramatic twists contribute to the golden experience people who are lucky to live till their old age boast of. No twist, however, could be more severe and more shocking than the coronavirus. No one saw it coming but it suddenly changed the world as we knew it, while cutting down the world’s population drastically.

When the world first heard whispers about a certain plague in the city of Wuhan, China, many thought it was another “Chinese disease” that would simply stay within the borders of that country. Its spread was, unfortunately, so rapid that by its first quarter, it already had registered 78,630 cases and 2,747 deaths in China, spread to 46 other countries that reported a total of 3,664 cases by 27th February, 2020. This figure increased dramatically within a year of the virus’s spread. Cherry Demmler-Harrison, et al (2017:615) defined coronavirus as “enveloped viruses with a positive-sense single-stranded RNA genome and a nucleocapsid of helical symmetry.” To further explain how dangerous, the disease is, Woo, Huang, Lau, et al, (2010: 1804) add that, “the genome size of coronaviruses ranges from approximately 26 to 32 kilobases, one of the largest among RNA viruses.”

Irrespective of the definitions given by these scholars to describe the virus years before it became widespread, nothing can bear a better testament to its danger than

the long list of victims that it claimed in its early years. China, for instance, was so overwhelmed by patients that it had to build a hospital dedicated solely to coronavirus victims in record time. As if that was not enough, the Chinese government immediately went into hyper-drive by imposing strict restrictions on its citizens even before the rest of the world figured anything out.

Literature, in the past, used to be the only source of information for citizens in several parts of the world. Magazines, gossip tabloids, articles, letters, and many others are the form of literature used to disperse information. In the uneventful times of the early twentieth century, it still remains the trusted companion of every educated person in the world. No matter in what language it is written, literature has always fulfilled its role as an informer and entertainer in the world. Poetry, prose or drama, whatever genre the literature comes in does not matter as long as it has a sensible message. Prose, for instance, was the primary source of entertainment in the past. The pride of every adult that could read was mostly about who has read the latest novel. Whether an autobiography, a biography or a fiction, everyone tried to own them. The more serious or the professionals read literature about their field of work; science, arts, humanities, social sciences, and others.

In the modern day, literature still fulfils this role. It still serves the function of informing, educating and entertaining, depending on how it is received. During the recent coronavirus pandemic, these roles were needed and literature did not disappoint. As a form of entertainment, some people engaged themselves in personal “book challenges” during the pandemic which enabled them to read many books and this helped them to battle boredom. For avid readers, nothing matters anymore as long as they have a book in their hands. For these people, literature has helped them to conquer the fear others felt during the compulsory lockdown or quarantine.

As a form of information, newspapers, magazines and tabloids were important sources of information during this time. The report of discovered coronavirus cases were always printed as newspaper headlines each day. This kept everyone informed about new government policies, the latest celebrity victim and much other health information.

As a factor in educating people, most professionals indulged in researches, reading up necessary literatures which culminated in new write-ups after the pandemic subsided. Among these are fictional and non-fictional books through which these writers have recorded their feelings and experiences during the pandemic. Such non-fictional and fictional texts about the pandemic that have made the reading list and are available on Amazon include: “Coronavirus: A Book for Children about Covid-19” by Elizabeth Jenner, Kate Wilson, Nia Roberts, Illustrated by Axel Scheller; “Intimations” by Zadie Smith, “Together Apart”, a collection of love stories by Auriane Desombre, Erin Craig, et al; “The Sentence” by Louise Erdrich, among others.

On the Nigerian literary setting, has emerged *The Lockdown*, a novel by Nnamdi Anumihe, “Of Shadows and Rainbows: Musings in Times of Covid” edited by Olu Obafemi and Folu Agoi; “World on the Brinks: An Anthology of Covid-19 Pandemic” edited by Ikechukwu Otuu Egbuta and Nnenna Vivien Chukwu. Thus, in a world ruled by blogs and phones, literature has still kept its space and refused to give in. This is especially important so as to keep the incoming generation updated. With six of the poems contained in the anthology, “World on the Brinks”, the

researcher examines how literature played a prominent role during the coronavirus pandemic.

Numerous scholars from all spheres of disciplines have researched the effects, long and short-term, of coronavirus on human civilization. Not to be left behind, several scholars in the literary field have also conducted research in this area. While such studies are extraordinary as one would expect, there is a huge lacuna one cannot help but notice. This is the situation of people still relying on the mass media or online blogs to gain accurate information on the lives of people during the pandemic. Literary works are supposed to be people's insight into trying times like these. Even international movie industries make their films based on the literature people push out to discuss issues like this. It goes without saying that such a production cannot be done if the material is not first written. It has been three years after the pandemic but literary materials on the life of the people during this period are still scarce. This researcher also finds it quite perplexing that many scholars have not paid sufficient attention to the subject. However, some Nigerian poets realized this, and made a move to compile an anthology of poems about the lives of the citizens of the world during the pandemic.

As such, this paper fills the gap in study as it studies six of the poems in this anthology. The focus of the study dwells on the impact coronavirus had on the lives of citizens of all countries in the world. After all, it is from these real-life experiences that writers and poets draw their muse or inspiration. It is expected of scholars to notice the availability of existing research and conduct more researches beyond that. That is what this study tries to do by reviewing six poems from this anthology.

This research aims to discuss the relevance of literature in the modern world. In life, everyone gets a certain chance to prove their worth to others around them. As an imitation of life, it is only natural that literature does it too. Therefore, this study aims to use the coronavirus pandemic to justify how important literature has proved to be in helping to proffer solutions to contemporary challenges. To achieve this objective, this researcher analyses six poems from the anthology, "World on the Brinks". The other objectives of the paper are; expounding on the role literature played during the pandemic, connecting the voice of the poets in "World on the Brinks" through the use of literature, and educating the audience about how literature can be better prepared to face threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic in the future.

## **Theoretical Review**

### **The Theory of Reception**

Started by Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007), reception theory seeks to change the field of literary criticism. While other theories focus on interpreting the text like the writer would have, the theory of reception wants the reader to instead criticize the work according to what they learned. Therefore, instead of breaking the back of a literary critic for not seeing a literary text the way the writer sees it, the writer should be criticized for not explaining their idea in a way that would make the reader understand them. Also, since humans tend to understand things differently, the theory of reception allows everyone to interpret a text or material according to how it speaks to them. The result of this is diverse views, just as art and the literary world should be.

Diverse views allow for diverse opinions. Just like the analogy of the six blind men and the elephant, diverse views do not make everyone right or wrong. Interpreting a text the way you understand it and sharing it with others who understood a different thing is the essence of discussion and re-learning. Iser, (2000, p. 311) explains the theory of reception in his own words:

Reception theory was a reaction to what appeared to be a stalemate in literary studies. Of paramount concern for this theory was the impact a piece of literature has on its readers and the responses it elicits. Instead of asking what the text means, I asked what it does to its potential readers... Consequently, aesthetic response... is to be conceived in terms of interaction between text and reader... aesthetic response because it stimulates the reader's imagination, which in turn gives life to the intended effects.

This study thus uses the theory of reception to analyse the selected poems from the anthology, "World on the Brinks". Each poem was studied until it was understood according to what the researcher was looking for.

Before choosing the theory of reception to guide in the analysis of the poems in this paper, Iser's position on the subject of every literary work being the intentional work of its author was put in mind. This is important because this paper's main purpose is to argue about the relevance of literature in the contemporary world. Explaining this will be easier as long as the reader keeps in mind that every reader takes different things away from a literary work, just like the paradox of Wole Soyinka's *Death and The King's Horseman*. Even though Soyinka has always insisted that the play is about a man, Elesin Oba, who could not fulfil his duty, many readers and directors still interpret it as an African man who was stopped from doing his duty by a white man. Nevertheless, this theory will be used to examine how these poems were relevant to keeping the memory of the COVID-19 pandemic alive and how they serve as a caution to society over avoidable issues that were encountered during the pandemic.

### **Literature and COVID-19**

Many people all over the world will always put their feet down to tell everyone that cares to listen how they have taught their loved ones to always be confident enough to let their opinion be heard all the time. It is the way the world runs. If you have an opinion, say it. Whether this be a good thing or the opposite is an argument for another day. In essence, making your opinion known is a part of building the world and nothing guarantees that your voice will be heard better than literature. With literature, everyone's opinion is heard and discussed. People might either agree with this opinion or not. On occasions where people do not view a situation similarly, the opinion might generate a lot of debates but that opinion will still be heard.

However, for everyone in the world, literature still retains this freedom. Scholars from several parts of the world have always come together to share their opinion about things they think will change the course of history and human interaction. During these interactions, literary works are written, arguments are made, intellectual discussions are encouraged and people generally learn what they

previous did not know. In this way, there have been several literature works in different libraries all around the world about how literature affected coronavirus and vice versa.

Some scholars focus on how literature affected normalcy. Some of these scholars are Cachón-Zagalaz, Sánchez-Zafra, Gonzalez-Valero, et al (2020) who wrote on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of school children. The study reviews the definition of “normalcy” in the life of an average pre-teen student in the pre pandemic era. This includes the feelings and personal ambition of these children in a world where they did not have to worry whether their friends can infect them with a deadly virus. In this world, their only worry was studying and learning how to read and write. The study then looks into the children’s psychology, emotion and intelligence after they were forced to stay indoors for months during the lockdown. The study concludes with a recommendation to teachers and school management to try their best in ensuring that the students are treated like they were before the virus struck.

In spite of its devastating impacts, coronavirus is not the first pandemic or plague to strike humanity. Many, such as The Plague of Athens (430-420 B.C), the Antonine Plague (165-180 A.D), Plague of Cyprian (251-266 A.D), Plague of Justinian (541-549 A.D), the Black Death (1331-1353), the Third Plague (1855 with recent findings still found in some places), the Spanish flu (1918-1920) and several others. These pandemics have often changed the face of the world’s literature and popular entertainment. For instance, the Egyptian plague mentioned in the biblical book of Exodus inspired Sophocles to reify Oedipus’ kingly traits (Anwar, 2020). Built just like Pharaoh, Sophocles made Oedipus stubborn, headstrong and arrogant during his people’s struggle against the plague sent by God to punish the Egyptians. These traits eventually led to Oedipus’ fall, just like the King he was designed after. Nadia Anwar in her article, “Literature in a Post Covid-19 World”, reflected on these happenings and how they have changed or altered the course of literature over the years while also wondering if coronavirus will do the same to the world of literature.

Some popular work of arts took their plot from the emergence of a pandemic. Literature works such as Boccaccio’s Decameron, Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, Defoe’s A Journal of Plague Year, Camus’s The Plague and many others have taken their plot from pandemics from various times. (Anwar, 2020). Even Dean Kootz in his thriller, The Eyes of Darkness, made a chilling prediction about the discovery of a disease in the Chinese city of Yuhuan. Although the book was released in 1981, one cannot help but notice how similar this town is to Wuhan, the believed ground zero of coronavirus.

Seeing as literature have always been influenced by pandemics, the coronavirus outbreak has inspired writers to create works based on this. Some of these books include Jodi Picoult’s Wish You Were Here, Sarah Hall’s Burntcoat, Weike Wang’s Joan is Okay and “World on the Brinks,” the anthology we will be analysing in this paper.

## **Methodology**

Resources such as online blogs, newspapers and magazines were also consulted during research to maintain a wide knowledge of the topic before disserting it. The poems in this anthology were read and carefully selected to properly reflect the topic



of study. This study uses Enyeribe's *To Heal Our Sick World*, and *Unmask Me*, Odia's *This is 2020*, Egbokare's *The New World*, Enyia's *Who are the Heroes*, and Olukokun's *COVID-19 Can't be Timid*, and *Don't be Stupid*. The poems were selected through random sampling and they stand out to the researcher in the subject of literature and pandemics. Content analysis is the procedure for data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

To better understand how relevant literature was during the coronavirus pandemic, this analysis will be done under three sub-headings – The beginning, Literature as an Agent of Caution and Change, and The Events of the Lockdown. These three analytical parameters reflect the theory of reflection through the provision of a space for people all around the world to process, document and relate their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **The Beginning**

Before tragedy strikes most times, there are numerous signs and signals that the world usually sees. Due to the influence of technology, information is easily disseminated across different countries in the twenty-first century, thereby making the world one tiny village. On the internet, millions of videos, pictures and blog posts surface every day with unbelievable stories from all corners of the world. A new story is usually more incredulous than the previous one. When they were talking about how the internet has become a hub for unrestricted information, both in a good and a bad way, Ward and Vedel, (2006, p.5) opine that:

In the space of little more than a decade, the Internet has moved from the preserve of computer geeks and academics to becoming a global media of central concern for political actors and government policy makers and the public.

Also, Fenchurch (1994, p.36) as quoted by Ward and Vedel, (2006, p.5) see the internet as the

World's only functioning political anarchy but it could soon become a major tool for democracy by allowing anyone anywhere access to information and opinions of anyone else, anywhere else. A morsel is being given to mankind with one instruction: 'Eat Me', so that we may grow.

Considering how often random news gain tract on the internet, it is quite surprising how the world did not pay any heed to COVID-19 before it entered Europe and later, America.

When the virus gained enough traction in the world, China was the first to react notably by immediately enforcing strict quarantine rules, starting with what was believed to be the ground zero of the virus – Wuhan, China. Within two weeks of the virus's recognition, China already had a standing hospital to contain patients and treat reported cases. Medical personnel were made to work overtime in these containment zones and a military shutdown was established. This reaction would have been judged harshly by the outside world but the Chinese faced an

unprecedented death rate so the action was justified. In the Hubei province alone, the mortality rate was close to "...six hundred and seventy-five deaths in every one hundred thousand cases," as per Liu, Zhang, Yan, et al. (2021, p.372).

To capture the shock with which the world received the news of yet another virus, Enyeribe, B.C in one of the poems in this anthology, "To Heal Our Sick World" says

But one dreadful day, we woke up to realise that  
Our world is sick  
From unwashed hands  
Unwashed mouths  
Eating exotic meats...  
Coronavirus inhabiting houses  
With diseased droplets  
Filling out orifices  
And our offices.

Just like the poet in the above poem is shocked about how things people previously took for granted, such as unwashed hands, have so quickly turned deadly against society. As shown in these few lines, literature, in this instance, poetry is used to capture the reaction of people in the modern world. In the future, the coming generation will read a work of art such as this and recognise the feelings that those before them felt during this time. As stated by the poet when she said, "filling out... our offices", this is a reference to how the sudden appearance of coronavirus changed the ethics in everyone's workspace. Suddenly, people were scared of shaking hands with one another. Co-workers could no longer hug or even touch spaces like door knobs without getting scared of the possible virus left there by another person. Workers started to maintain social distancing while using masks to reduce the virus' transmission during conversations. The poet here has succeeded in capturing the reaction of the world to this sudden development when she says, "the world is sick". Truly, the world was sick.

As expected, the reactions of different people and countries varied when the virus became widespread. To show these reactions in a literary way, Enyeribe, continues in the poem;

And angst, anger, accusations and counter-accusations  
Over self-inflicted diseased sores  
Spill out and spread from yonder shores  
To sun drenched sub-Sahara...

Here, the poet deals with the rumour that was spilt at the beginning of the pandemic that China intentionally infected the world with the virus. A lot of conspiracy theories were "leaked" and shared on various platforms on the internet. Americans started the cycle by accusing China of being responsible for the virus. This means that the swift response China gave to the sudden pandemic by providing health care services and enforcing quarantining measures, did not help matters. This made the governments of most Western countries accuse them of making

preparations before the virus even came to worldwide attention. China in a record six days built a 1,000 beds capacity hospital in Wuhan, the city where the outbreak started. This, to these countries, is a sign that China started the virus after preparing for its outbreak. With only three lines, the poet explained this controversy and many others that gained ground during the pandemic. This is also another instance where literature has become more relevant in modern times. The internet's biggest strength is also its greatest weakness – anyone and everyone can make themselves heard. This means even a hateful person from one corner of the world can create and spread false narratives. Literature, however, is different. The literary artist, being a product of his society draws his inspiration from his environment and creates credible works that would boost his reputation. Peddling rumours that turn out to be false is an extremely fast way to lose this credibility.

However, not everyone could say the pandemic period was such a dark time in their life. For some, it was an opportunity they quickly took advantage of. It is believed that the pandemic made more millionaires around the world, more than in the past decade combined (BBC, 2021). This is a result of increased online activities due to the lockdown that followed. Movie streaming companies such as Netflix, Apple and HBO observed an increase in the number of users. This is as a result of the stay-at-home order. The value of crypto currency also surged during this time (BBC, 2021). Several people also used the opportunity to start small businesses like the sale of face masks, hand sanitizers, heart rate monitors, and many more.

In an attempt to capture those who saw the light instead of darkness at the beginning of the outbreak, Enyeribe, in another of her poem, “Unmask Me”, says:

When life gave me a lemon  
I made a tingly glass of lemonade...  
For my refreshing drink  
In the cool shade of the Udara tree...

Here, the poet starts with a view of her life before the pandemic. During this time, she learns how to take advantage of any situation she is confronted with. Her ability to adapt to the situation gives her the reassurance that she could take care of any situation she finds herself in. Progressing, she is rudely jolted to reality when the coronavirus eventually came:

I am told not to make my lemonade  
The way I used to  
Instead I should make coronade  
To cure the novel corona virus...

Coronade is the poet's word for vaccines discovered to aid the body's immunity against the virus. So, the poet is still talking about adapting to a situation just like she is required to do. Although she perceives these as rumours that requires her to protect herself by “... adding bitter herbs (to the coronade)/ and boiling hot water/ to get the right temperature...”, she follows all the guidelines, including the ones that compels her to cover her “orifices” with face masks. Following the guidelines is her way of coping with the virus when it dawns on her. Notwithstanding, she still



complains about all these extra cautions she takes: “how can I enjoy this coronade/ under this scorching heat/ without kith and kin...”

The reason for the poet being without kith and kin is that visits were discouraged during the pandemic. As a way of staying safe, even families could not get in touch with one another. The poet eventually ends with an optimistic view of gradually seeing the end of the pandemic when everything can go back to the way it was.

And I hear oh! So clearly the voice of wisdom  
only a little while and you will be unmasked  
... breathe without ventilators/ and have your sweet lemonade...  
for now enjoy your bitter coronade.

Using “lemonade” as a symbol of normalcy, Enyeribe uses literature to represent the struggle of being alone, the uncertainty the pandemic brought to the world and hope that not very many people shared during the lockdown. Thus, in “To heal our sick world” and “Unmask me”, the poet, chronicles the feelings many had during the pandemic.

### **Events during the Lockdown**

A pandemic lockdown was defined by Carroll and Tuckman (2009) to have a set of rules that can:

... limit movements or activities in a community while allowing most organizations to function normally, or limit movements or activities such that only organizations supplying basic needs and services can function normally.

As most of the world fell into chaos while trying to contain the spread of coronavirus, governments decided that the best alternative would be to shut down everything in the country so that movement can be limited and the spread can be contained. Airports were shut down, buses were stopped from plying the roads, harbours were closed and newly enforced health laws were upheld in most countries. To sum up the closure of all infrastructure, Odia, in his poem, “This is 2020”, which is about the situation of the world’s infrastructure during the coronavirus pandemic says, “Borders closed!/ Airplanes grounded/ Cities drained of people/ This is 2020!”

This has succeeded in communicating to the potential audience how empty the streets were during this compulsory sit-at-home. The poet does not stop here. He continues to paint the picture of chaos that happened during the hustle for hospital bed space in the available hospitals:

Hospitals overwhelmed with patients  
COVID-19 the silent killer...  
Ventilators in short supply  
Death skyrocketed in thousands  
This is 2020!

By painting the picture of dying patients begging for bed spaces and ventilators in the hospitals, Odia succeeded in his aim of creatively showing how bleak things were at this time. Coronavirus took away its patient's ability to properly breathe so they had to be supported with ventilators. Since the world was not prepared for this, a huge scarcity forced people to either improvise or go to the hospital with the hope that with their worsening condition, they will get a bed spaces and proper care.

Unlike Enyeribe who maintains a positive outlook towards the situation in "Unmask Me", Odia ends "This is 2020" on a pessimistic note. After considering how difficult getting healthcare is and how overwhelmed the medical personnel were, he ends by saying, "death will not abate/ and this is 2020".

Furthermore, the events of the lockdown allowed several scholars to properly view the world, better than they did before. Due to the lockdown keeping everyone at home, many were able to notice things that would not be noticed before because of the requirements of their jobs and schedules. One of such scholars is Egbokhare, who is also a poet. In his poem, "The New World", Egbokhare notices the moral decadence in society during the coronavirus lockdown and therefore adds his voice to that of other poets who talked about the pandemic. He says, "When I was a kid/ stealing was reprehensible/ ...now the thief is celebrated for beating the system."

No doubt, Egbokhare is only stating this after the widespread protest against corruption and internet fraud in Nigeria. Stealing has become a national hobby in the country, right from the doors of a politician to the slums of Lagos where internet fraudsters openly ply their trade and the wealth derived from this criminal act is flaunted in flashy lifestyles. Previously, Africans place great importance on an individual's source of wealth but nowadays, more people are focusing on the destination instead of the journey. During the lockdown, these fraudsters were able to increase their trade. This, no doubt, is what motivated the poet to write these lines as a reflection of the modern world.

To further push his point of how low humanity has sunk, the poet mentions laziness, lying, treachery, taking advantage of strangers, gender surgery and sexual immorality among his lists of wrong things that are being condoned. His words lament the situation where things have turned on their head. He says:

In the new world  
roles are reversed  
men have wombs  
women grow phalluses  
children guardian parents  
pet babysit owners  
teachers submit to infantile genius  
masters are servants of the expert crowd  
much as the market is wise without being...

### **Literature as an Agent of Caution and Change**

Just like Egbokhare in his poem, "The New World", literature has always been a guide to the moral consciousness of the community. By pulling what has been and comparing it to what is, literature can show society what should be. Consequently, Egbokhare wonders what has gone wrong with humanity. Some other poets also

addressed their concerns about contemporary society in the anthology, “World on the Brinks.” Two of these poets are Enyia (2020, p. 83) and Olukokun (2020, p.75) who wrote “Who are the Heroes” and “COVID-19 Can’t be Timid”, “Don’t be Stupid” respectively.

In “Who are the Heroes”, Enyia uses the compare and contrast style to state that politicians who steal public funds cannot be described as heroes. Instead, the real heroes are the men and women who showed up for humanity during its trying time. The people who risked their and their family’s lives when saving the lives of others – medical personnel. The poet says:

The heroes are not those  
Who stole our mandate  
The heroes are those  
Whose votes were not counted.

During the pandemic, the government of Nigeria, like other countries, forced its citizens to stay at home for months as a way of reducing the spread of the virus. Unlike other countries, the government did not provide any relief for the citizens who had to put their lives on hold during the order. Citizens of various countries received bailout funds or support funds from their governments to provide for their needs during the lockdown but this did not happen in Nigeria.

After a lot of pressure, the federal government eventually bowed by approving the distribution of palliatives to poor citizens in the country. These palliatives included bags of rice, cartons of noodles, packs of spaghetti and many others. Surprisingly, none of these reached the hands of ordinary citizens, months after the Ministry of Finance claimed to have supplied these materials to the states. Nigerians insisted it was another one of the government’s numerous lies so efforts were made to find these disappeared relief materials.

It was shocking when one day, just months into the lockdown, a warehouse was found in Lagos filled to the brim with these palliatives. Political leaders allegedly accepted these materials but kept them under lock and key, until some of the food began to rot, even as reports of people starving to death trended online. This development led to several break-ins of warehouses in some states in the country where more of these materials were found rotting.

It is quite shameful that political leaders in Nigeria would rather let relief food go to waste rather than distribute it to those they are meant for. It is more shocking because these materials were bought with resources from the common wealth, not individual money. Enyia was referring to this situation when he said:

The heroes are those  
Who are locked down in their house  
Under the scourge of hunger.

When hunger became extreme, people started to break the lockdown rules to work and trade. When the government discovered this, they started a task force to apprehend errant citizens and lock them up in cells, rather than treat the cause of the disobedience. This is why Enyia continues:

The heroes are not the COVID-19 task force  
The heroes are the doctors and nurses  
Battling to save lives...

Enyia eventually succeeds at communicating his point to his audience by ending his poem with:

The heroes are not our representathieves  
The heroes are you and I whose sweats  
Make this country rich.

There is no better example of literature being used to correct a contemporary wrong than this poem.

Not to be left behind, Olukokun emphasized how real the threat of coronavirus is in his poem, "COVID-19 Can't Be Timid, Don't Be Stupid." Even during the strongest wave of the pandemic in North America, Europe and Asia, most Africans still believed the virus to be a white man's virus that cannot survive the heat of Africa. The cases reported by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) were often ridiculed and called lies. To many, it is just another form of Nigeria ripping the United Nations off by collecting the COVID-19 relief fund given to countries with a lot of coronavirus cases. Olukokun says:

Only the fools deliberately deny a clear proof  
Only an idiot and the stupid intentionally goof  
Only a moron calculatedly dares covid nineteen...

By calling them unsavoury names, Olukokun aims at educating people about a current issue. This is another instance of literature displaying its relevance even in contemporary problems.

### Conclusion

Time after time, the world has often reminded us that we are merely visitors to it. Many times, its way of reminding us about this fact could be harsh. Coronavirus (COVID-19) is one of these frightening ways. While it was a dark time in our history, it is also pragmatic if we could look beyond the sacrifices we had to willingly and unwillingly make; the evolution of humans is consistently changing and literature is there to help us document it for future references. Hence, we need to pay more attention to literature since it will continue to be relevant. Nothing can understand the fear, passion and frustration of a living human better than another living human who has been in their shoes before. Works of art preserve these emotions as artistic endeavours for posterity.

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