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LITERATURE AND THE ART OF
SHAVING A MAN'S HEAD IN
HIS ABSENCE

By

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A MAN'S HEAD IN HIS ABSENCE**

*An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at Oduduwa Hall,
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife,
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Homage

Mr. Vice Chancellor,
Eminent Scholars here gathered,
Members of the University Community,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have not come with a clipper, neither am I here with a razor blade to shave anybody's head, present or absent. Rather, I am here before this esteemed gathering with a high sense of fulfillment and gratitude to the Almighty to deliver the 275th Inaugural Lecture of the University. This is the first in the series of Lectures for the 2014/2015 academic session. I feel fulfilled because I have braved all odds to emerge as a strong link in the chain of literary scholarship, creative writing and literary criticism for which the University has earned alluring reputation over the years. As a Professor of Literature in English, I feel privileged to be part of that heritage bequeathed by worthy teachers and mentors such as Oyin Ogunba who delivered his Inaugural Lecture in 1978, Richard Taylor (1978), Wole Soyinka (1980), Benedict Ibitokun (2000), Modupe Kolawole (2003) and Olusegun Adekoya (2008). Literature, as all these scholars have unequivocally established, is a human activity that hinges on concrete and demonstrable possibility of what ordinarily would be thought impossible. Literature subsists on defamiliarisation of that which seems so familiar and rendering as commonplace, what one would consider as weird and strange. The astounding possibilities that define literature are, however, mediated by paradox, a communicative tool to which Adekoya (2008) has devoted much attention in his reflections on literature and its timeless concerns.

Before I begin this evening's session of story-telling, a kind of which an Inaugural Lecture is, permit me, Mr. Vice Chancellor, to pay homage to those that I owe much inspiration in this art of literature where all we live by is word, word and word that flow imperceptibly from rivulets of imagination. This is in tune with what happens in traditional African performance where homage is usually paid to those who have gone before, to guarantee a successful outing.

My homage first goes to Olodumare, the amazing Pillar of Being, cloaked in cloudy garb of self-rejuvenation. He is the primeval force that makes it possible for me to stand before you this evening as a Professor of Literature

in English, the Director of the Institute of Cultural Studies and the Dean-elect, Faculty of Arts.

On October 14, 2015, it will be 30 years ago that I came to this University as a Jambite to study Dramatic Arts. Three decades climbing the slippery hills of academic (like Fagunwa's Oke Hilahilo in Irinkerindo Ninu Igbo Elegbeje); I came across benevolent mentors who richly deserve my homage: Dr. Kemi Atanda-Ilori, my teacher in the Department of Dramatic Arts who remains a kernel of inspiration, Late Professor Wole Ogundele who supervised my Master's thesis in Literature, Late Professor Oyin Ogunba who handed me the stone with which to crack the literary idioms of Shakespeare and Soyinka, Professor Remi Raji-Oyelade, who supervised my doctoral thesis at the University of Ibadan and finally, to my parents, Agbonyin and Adeyoola Adeoti who sent me on the path of learning.

Having washed my hands clean (not out of any fear of Ebola), I can now proceed to dine with the elders. So, let us turn to the lecture.

Literature and the Art of Shaving a Man's Head in His Absence

Expectedly, the topic of the lecture has excited much curiosity in many minds as the thought of shaving a man's head in his absence immediately registers a conclusion of "impossible". After all, we are yet to see thus far, in spite of rapid developments in science and technology, a mechanism that enables someone to neatly detach his head and send it to the barber's salon for a nice shave or cut only to collect it later and fix it back. Not even in these days of electronic wonders that have produced e-mail, e-commerce, e-learning and e-banking have we heard of e-barbing or e-jerry curling.

Nonetheless, as the first commandment in literature would say, "thou shall not consider anything impossible". Indeed, in literary context, nothing is impossible, including the seemingly most impossible. In our discipline, Newton's law on gravitation can be stood upon its head and it will remain standing. This means that when Newton postulates that "a body will always be at a state of rest or in a uniform motion except when acted upon by an external force", for us in literature, it is possible for a body or matter to continue to enjoy the luxury of its state of rest, or continue in a uniform motion even when unsolicited external forces decide to act upon it. Put differently, matter in the universe of literature can lose its state of rest even when no force, intrinsic or extrinsic, is acting upon it. For many of you who are "literal" minded, shaving a man's head in his absence may sound out of the ordinary. But for those of us in literature who are "literary" minded, it is commonplace. That is why a writer would employ foreboding, suspense, irony, metaphor, symbol, surprise, hyperbole and litotes in creating conflict in a literary work and in the resolution of the conflict with the aim of achieving an outcome that is beyond general expectations.

In Literature, the writer is endowed with unseen binoculars in addition to the natural eyes through which s/he sees far into the horizon of the past, the present and the future of the society. The writer sees aberrations of social norms and creatively addresses it. Sometimes in his/her perception of the direction in which the affairs of the state is heading, s/he, in overt or coded tones, offers criticism. But s/he may point out alternatives which may involve reform or revolution, depending on his/her ideological preferences. The writer also possesses inner ears that find audible, the secret and hidden deals transacted in hushed tones at the corridors of power. In line with the social responsibility of the arts, not only does the

artist blow it like a trumpet, loud enough for citizens to hear, s/he may also rally the people round in appropriate idioms and polemics to tackle the problems.

Before I draw the anger of our feminist colleagues, Mr. Vice Chancellor, permit me to reframe the topic a little to the right and a little to the left to make it gender compliant. Consider this: "Literature and the Art of Perming a Woman's Hair in her Absence". However, if "perming" sounds Western, we can replace it with "plaiting".

The idea of the topic came from a Yorùbá adage that says *A Kii f'árí l' éyìn olóri* (We cannot shave a man's head in his absence). This is a statement of fact that expresses clear impossibility. But the more exciting inspiration came from Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola (1937-1998), a businessman/politician. For those who knew him, Chief Abiola was not a politician of many words, but he commanded a rich repertoire of proverbs with which he punctuated at strategic intervals, his public and private conversations. I recall listening to him in this hall in 1991 when he came to deliver extempore, a lecture which lasted for about an hour, on his pet project then, Reparation. The lecture was organised by the OAU Bookshop as part of its Annual Ife Book Fair. In 1993, Abiola contested the Presidential election of June 12, 1993 on the platform of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The results of the election already declared in the 30 states of the Federation showed that he defeated his opponent, Alhaji Bashir Tofa of the National Republican Convention (NRC). Unfortunately, the election was annulled by the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida and the government asked the two parties to prepare for another election. But when it became clear that no election was possible, between the time of the annulment and the stated date of handing over - August 27, 1993, Babangida's regime opted to set up an Interim National Government (ING) headed and dominated by civilians. The Executives of both SDP and NRC were invited by the regime to discuss the modalities for setting up the ING. As the now familiar narrative went, the Chairman of SDP, Chief Anthony Anenih, who is known for fixing big deals led the party to the meeting with the military authorities, not to negotiate for the mandate of its Presidential candidate who won the election, but to work out the ING, an arrangement that would effectively scuttle the success of SDP at the poll. Curiously, Chief Abiola was not part of the deal.

At this crucial juncture in Nigerian history, I was a journalist in Lagos and was a participant-witness in the epic drama of demilitarisation and democratisation. When asked by journalists about his reaction to the ING arrangement, Chief Abiola responded that he was not part of the arrangement by members of the Executive Committee of his party to negotiate away his mandate without his consent. "How can you shave my head in my absence?" he asked. "You cannot shave a man's head in his absence. That will amount to an exercise in futility. You cannot abort a pregnancy when the baby is already born". He added that Nigerians have spoken on June 12 by freely giving him their mandate in the election.

The rest of the narrative, as they say, is now history. But Chief Abiola's aphoristic response struck a lasting chord in me, especially in attempts to come to terms with the predicament of politics and governance in Africa before colonialism, during colonialism and after independence to date. I have come to realise over the years, that politics in Africa is one intriguing arena where a few people with the razor blade of power have been shaving the heads of the majority in their absence.

Whether as monarchs, colonial administrators, their civilian successors or military rulers who have been managing the affairs of the continent for centuries, they appropriate the citizens' right to decide. They decide for them what they think is right and act to implement such decisions, regardless of what the generality of the people feel. This is characteristic of colonial administration in Africa, whether we talk of the settler colonialism of Eastern and Southern or the assimilation policy of French colonies or the indirect rule of British colonies in West and East Africa. Post-independence politics in some nations did not wear a different garb as the political elite inherited without effecting fundamental changes in the colonial structures, hence, authoritarian ethos continued in the tradition of governance. The military regime with its central chain of command where unquestioning obedience to the command of the superior person is the norm, exemplifies the reality of arbitrariness, impunity, foreclosure of consent and outright intolerance of contrary opinions captured in the clause "shaving a man's head in his absence". Thus, reflecting on Chief Abiola's ordeal, not only did Babangida's regime and the Executives of SDP and NRC parties shaved clean in absentia, the head of Chief Abiola and millions of voters who participated in the election, they also went ahead to paint the heads in different colours and strokes. Thus, if I may elaborate further, for a long

time, politics in Africa is largely an exercise in willful imposition of the view of the few over that of the many. In this context, governments are constituted in spite of the people.

I am, therefore, using the art of shaving a man's head in his absence as a metaphoric summation of what transpires in the realm of politics and governance in Africa, in African literature, in creative writing and literary criticism. These are the areas to which I have proudly devoted a huge chunk of my intellectual energy and resources over the years. By the nature of Inaugural Lecture, I am expected to present my modest contributions to scholarship in my chosen discipline and my plan to continue to widen the horizon of knowledge hereafter. I will, therefore, in the remaining parts of this lecture, recount my contributions to knowledge. Let me proceed by going back to the issue of politics that I raised a short while ago.

For the avoidance of doubt, I am not a politician in the vocational sense of it, neither am I a political scientist. But I have an abiding exegetical interest in the study of manifestations of politics as thematic constructs in literary arts. Thus, I am fascinated by works of literature – drama, poetry, prose fiction, including popular literature – that address the mode of politics and governance in Africa and their implications for people's development or lack of it.

By politics, I mean the business of organising human beings into a social unit for the purpose of effective management of their affairs. The definition of politics is as complex as its practice, but it is a salient feature of any state, polity, community or association where people are bound together by a perceived common interest. The ultimate goal of politics is to ensure that the resources, powers and responsibilities in the social entity are effectively distributed to achieve safety, comfort and well-being of the citizens. Politics is also about the aggregation of interests and how to share the ever limited resources of the polity. To this end, persuasion or coercion comes into the framework of the operation of the state.

Because the resources available are never at any point in time adequate to take care of the need and greed of humans, different political systems have been developed in different historical periods. Some systems essentially privilege the minority and invest them with power and control of the state. These include authoritarianism, autocracy, plutocracy, oligarchy, fascism,

totalitarianism, and monarchy. Common to all these is the existence of a unicentric authority exercised by a single person or a few people who personalise the state or who see themselves as the state. That unicentric authority thinks and acts for the polity, while the will of the majority are often subordinated to that of the minority. Land which is a crucial factor of production is vested in the central authority and others derive their access to land as a result of special arrangement which does not usually negotiate away the ownership of land in perpetuity by the sovereign ruler. Many expeditions of Europeans in the 19th and 20th centuries in Africa had as their primary motivation, the control of land and other economic resources of the people (Aneke and Brown, 1966; Ade Ajayi, 2002).

The inherent limitations in the above systems necessitated the development of alternative in democracy which has been widely accepted in modern societies as the best form of government against absolutism and power corruption. There had been different variants of democracy – liberal democracy, socialist democracy, constitutional democracy and consociation democracy among other types. In this political framework, sovereignty is vested, not in a single absolute ruler with divine right or an oligarchy, but in the mass of the people who may exercise power and control through their elected representatives. The march of history has shown that representational democracy is more expedient today than the Athenian democracy which made decision-making “free-for-all” citizens (although it excluded slaves and women). The political philosopher, Jean-Jacque Rousseau, quite clearly established the basis for democracy in his treatise, *The Social Contract* (1762). The social contract is between the citizens and the state. The citizens constitute the government over whom they hold sovereignty. That is, the government derives authority and power from the people and the government is constituted by elected representatives of the people under social contract. The people can extend or terminate the power of the government once it fails to discharge its responsibilities well. The people accept a common authority over them who protect them against their own “brutish nature” and also provide an atmosphere for the realisation of their life goals (Ryan 2012).

However, evidence from African political history shows that for the most part of the last three centuries, different communities that constitute the African continent have been moving from one form of authoritarian rule to another, from the era of slavery to colonial rule and post-independence era.

Even when something close to democratic rule was planted at independence, it sooner slipped into 'autocratic quicksand either as one party rule, one-party dominated multi-party system or outright military rule. In these instances, politics can generally be summed metaphorically as an exercise in *jerry-curling* a woman's hair in her absence.

Let us take the slave trade era for instance. The slave merchants from Portugal, Britain, Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Belgium, Poland and so on never sought the opinions of the slaves they purchased before herding them to Europe, tongue-tied in chains, through the doors dubbed "point of no return" of slave castles in Elmina, Cape coast, Badagry, Goree and so on. What of the African Kings and Chiefs who colluded in the trade? What form of consultation did they have with inhabitants of villages they raided to get slaves, before raiding them? Were the slaves ever part of the negotiation between the European slave merchants and their African agents? Even in the historical processes that led to the abolition of slave trade, the victims were not given any role to play. In any case, how would they charge human beings who were regarded as "beasts of burden" with humane actions like that of abolition of slave trade?

Britain and other European powers abolished trade in human cargos in early 19th century and replaced it with trade in goods such as palm-oil, timber, rubber, ivory, gun, cocoa, coffee, diamond, iron ore, diamond and copal. However, the pursuit of economic interest was swiftly accompanied with political objective of Empire expansion. The economic activities of Royal Niger Company proceeded alongside missionary activities. Interestingly, the 1884 Berlin Conference formally accentuated the acquisition of African territories by the European nations. There had been proclamations of African lands as protectorates of European powers before their Kings were made to sign treaty that would formally transfer the control of the space to the European nations, and give a veneer of legality to the subtly coercive acquisition. Ngugi wa Thiong'o sums up the situation thus:

The Berlin Conference of 1884 literally fragmented and reconstituted Africa into British, French, Portuguese, German, Belgian, and Spanish Africa. Just as the slave plantations were owned by various European powers, so post-Berlin Conference Africa was transformed into a series of colonial plantations owned by many of the same European powers (2009: 3)

After the partitioning, many of the Kings/Chiefs ceded their lands and authority by signing treaties, the implication of which they hardly understood. As Ngugi points out, "not even a single treaty between Europe and Africa exists in any African language" (2009:87). Even when they signed voluntarily, it was a choiceless situation as Kings who resisted or who signed but still asserted their independence were removed. According to Lord Haley, "Europeans did not come into Africa for the sole purpose of helping Africans. Those who came in were primarily interested in African markets and resources; to that end, wars were fought, when hostile Africans barred the way and had to be subdued" (1955: 20). For example, for their anti-colonial resistance, Oba Ovonramwen of Benin was dethroned and sent on exile to Calabar, his palace sacked and looted of artifacts; King Jaja of Opobo was sent on exile in West Indies. Waiyaki wa Hinga was captured, taken away from his area and buried alive at Kibwezi in Kenya. In Eastern Cape of South Africa, the Xhosa King Hintsa was decapitated and his head was taken to the British Museum. Asantehene Yaa Asantewaa also gave the colonialists raw deals in Ghana just like Shaka the King of the Zulu.

As a protectorate, the natives would come under "the gracious favour and protection" of the colonising authority whose head resided thousands of miles away in Europe. The treaties signed, according to Anene, would make the acquired African territory "a glory and advantage to British commerce and the cause of Humanity" (1966: 289). Thus, as it happened all over, flag, the symbol of political domination of the continent by the colonial powers followed trade. Ngugi calls the slave trade and colonialism stages of African history "dismembering Africa" (2009). That dismembering is evident, for instance, dispersals of the Yoruba to Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago and America on the one hand and the "sharing" of the Yoruba people between Britain (Nigeria) and France (Benin Republic). While the former group is regarded as anglophone, the latter is francophone (see Abimbola 2003).

Naturally, colonialism conferred a feeling of superiority on the colonising power while it denied the colonised, the right to self-determinism. It also imposed a condition of inaudibility, silence or voicelessness on the subjects. The important point for us in the foregoing is that Africans whose lands were being partitioned by the Europeans, along with the fate of the living, the dead and generations yet unborn, were neither invited nor participated

in the Berlin Conference. From what I have read of African colonial history so far, I have not come across the names of representatives of the Benin, Bantu, Yorùbá, Itshekiri, Gikuyu, Bunyoro, Acoli, Fulani, Fante, Ewe, Ashanti, Massai and so on whose territories were being appropriated at the Conference. How much input did the blacks make in the designations of locations such as Victoria Island, King Williams Town, Duke Town, Henshaw Town, Port Novo and Port Elizabeth? The story was not different in East Africa. The account of Berthwell Ogot on the development of politics and plural societies in East Africa is worthy of attention:

In 1886, without consulting any African leaders, and in spite of a strong plea by the Sultan¹ for time to consider the question, Britain and Germany each carved out a 'sphere of influence' from the East African mainland, leaving Zanzibar, Pemba, Mafia and a ten-mile strip of land along the coast of Bargash.

The vague boundaries of these 'protectorates' were finally defined in 1890, when as a result of the Anglo-German treaty, the future Uganda, Kenya and Zanzibar, and the future Tangayika and Ruanda-Urundi, were placed in the British and German spheres of influence respectively. Germany, with the help of 'the big stick' succeeded in buying off the Sultan's rights to the ten-mile-wide coastal strip along German East Africa... (488)

In 1894 and 1895, Britain declared a protectorate over Buganda and Kenya respectively just as it had done in the Northern and the Southern areas of what would later be amalgamated to become Nigeria. Martin Meredith aptly sums up this phase of Africa's political history and it is worthy being quoted at length:

During the Scramble for Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, European powers staked claims to virtually the entire continent. At meetings in Berlin, Paris, London and other capitals, European statesmen and diplomats bargained over the separate spheres of interest they intend to establish there.... When marking out the boundaries of their new territories, European negotiators frequently resorted to drawing straight lines on the map, taking little or no account of

the myriad of traditional monarchies, chiefdoms, and other African societies that existed on the ground....in some cases, African societies were rent apart: the Bakongo were partitioned between French Congo, Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola: Somaliland was carved up between Britain, Italy and France. In all, the new boundaries cut through some 190 culture groups. In other cases, Europe's new colonial territories enclosed hundreds of diverse and independent groups, with no common history, culture, language or religion. (1-2)

In Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Angola and Mozambique, settler colonialism gave the minority white population control over lands, making the indigenous population landless in their own respective lands. The problem is still raging on in Zimbabwe today, 35 years after independence.

In another vein, the blacks who constituted the Lagos Constabulary and West African Frontiers Force that evolved into the Nigeria Police Force and Nigerian Army were made to fight wars against fellow Africans. The decision to fight which enemy and where would already have been taken by their white commanders (see Rotimi 2014).

The above accounts clearly underscore the arbitrary nature of colonial rule and its system of governance in the territories. The colonised subjects were never consulted on how they were to be governed in the new arrangement that subordinated the native political structure to foreign powers. Western education and Christianity completed the process of domination as they were both geared towards underscoring the non-being of Africans prior to European contact and colonialism as the entry point of Africa into human "civilization". The product of this as evident in many creative writings from Africa was the creation of alienated Africans with black body and white souls (Okot P'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*; Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards*). This is a characteristic that was passed on to post-colonial era, a reality that informed Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's song on leadership in Africa:

*The government wey we get
Na overseas sense dem dey get
Dem be the master
We be the servant. (Movement of the People, 1991)*

Politics in post-colonial era, ironically dashed expectations in many African nations. Rather than operating a political system that would guarantee economic well being and true liberation from oppression, the ruling elite who took over power from the colonialist used power to suppress opposition, create for themselves and their supporters access to wealth. Thus, even after independence, the generality of the people in many African nations are still marginalised and disadvantaged in terms of political power and its exercise. It was decolonisation devoid of democratisation, a situation that would have expanded the political space for the participation of social forces in the public sphere. That is why within few years of independence, many of the governments constituted at independence began to be consumed in political crisis leading to military take over of government which in operation was like another form of colonialism.

In Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Gambia, Guinea, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) and so on, military interventions were well received initially, but within a short while, it became clear that the military in governance, as Supreme Military Council, Revolutionary Council, Redemption Council, Provisional Ruling Council or Armed Forces Ruling Council, could not solve the socio-economic problems that the civilians were accused of creating: parlous economy, unemployment, human rights violation, decayed infrastructure, poverty, nepotism, corruption and ethno-religious conflicts. Those who were welcomed as messiahs when they came were later, as a result of repression and excesses, were later denounced as vampires and ogres. To paraphrase Walter Bagebot, the cure for admiring military rule is to have a military regime ruling your country. Soyinka remarks that after the 1966 coup in Nigeria, the soldiers “became arrogant overlords, exercised the powers of appropriation, privilege, even of life and death over the rest of the populace” (1988, 290).

As historical records of Idi Amin in Uganda, Samuel Doe in and Charles Taylor in Liberia, Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire, Sani Abacha in Nigeria and Jean-Bedel Bokassa in Central African Republic would show, these leaders

became the state in a rule of whims rather than the rule of law. Popular participation in governance was an incongruity; hence, the political realities that obtained in their regimes would fit perfectly into our metaphorical refrain – “shaving a man's head in his absence”. But in the case of Idi Amin or Abacha, one should be thankful if the head was just shaved and not neatly severed from the neck for an offence like being suspected of disloyalty due to a Freudian slip (see Osofisan 1997 and Mbowa 2003).

Soldiers don't need anybody's vote or consent to rule, other than the consent of their guns and bullets. And when the military organise a transition to civilian rule, from experience in Ghana, Gambia, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Liberia among others, if it is not about self-succession of the ruling Head of State, it is about transferring power to a group of people or political party fashioned in their own images.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, what I have tried to sketch in the above narrative is the character of politics in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa. I have made this detailed backward glance because of the all-encompassing nature of politics in human societies. Politics as a social institution created by humans has the capacity to shape, re-shape or mis-shape the fortune of a people individually or collectively. It also has a way of determining what happens to other sectors including education, arts, food production, sports, economy and religion. The reason for the dominance of politics in my critical engagement of African literature, therefore, is that by the content, context and character of politics, in the community, it touches everyone's life, from the active participant and passive bystanders (*àwọn jẹ́jẹ́ ni mo j'ókò mi*). What happens in the realm of politics in an era impacts on the writer, critic, filmmaker, dancer, audience, publishers, teachers, story tellers and oral performers among other people involved in the enterprise of literature.

On the whole, politics is a common theme in the avalanche of creative works by African writers from colonial era to date. African writers of different ideological, religious, generational and gender affiliations have always put in the front burner of their aesthetics, the issue of politics. But what separates them essentially, is the kind of politics that the writers subscribe to as well as the artistic genre and style employed to put across their different perspectives on politics.

The dominance of politics in literary discourse does not in anyway suggest the absence of other thematic preoccupations. Many writers have written about love and domestic issues with appeal to the old and the young – Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime*, Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Joe de Graft's *Sons and Daughters*, Guillaume Oyono-Mbia's *Three Suitors, One Husband*, Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* and many others. Some writers have used the context of domestic issues to address inter-group relations in the society while some have exposed hypocrisy and charlatanism in the practice of religion in contemporary society as Moliere did with *Tartuffe* in the 17th Century France. These include Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, Sonny Oti's *Evangelist Jeremiaah*, Mongo Beti's *Poor Christ of Bomba* and Kenjo Djoubam's *The Whiteman of God*.

However, over the years, I have developed especial fascination for literary works – drama, poetry, novels, short stories, life narratives, films, and oral performances – that engage politics as thematic pre-occupation. It is this category of literature that has been the focus of my research and it is my central pre-occupation in this lecture. There is an age-long dialectical affinity between politics and poetics. Even in oral culture, the artistes used their arts to comment on affairs in the court, apart from singing in praise of the rulers. In time of social crises, some artistes could enlist in support of the court while some other artistes would pitch their tents with the ordinary people. As observed in Adeoti (2003a:113), the trajectory of a people's socio-political development finds enduring records not only in history and political books, but more importantly, in the gamut of their literary and performing arts. Through literature, a society can, in the words of Ola Rotimi, question “the prevailing credos and practice of authority with a view to opening up its monopolies to the beneficial generality” (1999:20).

In the case of African literature which is our immediate concern, the utilitarian value of literature is undeniable as it more often than not, yields a greater insight into socio-political events. A survey of African literature shows a close link between happenings in the political sphere and the content of literary discourse. As Obafemi succinctly puts it: “colonial hegemony in Africa did not only manifest itself in the political and economic life of the people, it also shaped the direction of African literature in a significant way” (2003:37). African writers have used their arts to respond in kind to their colonisers, sometimes in a manner that does not also reckon with how the targets would feel comfortable or not. Therefore,

African creative writing is another realm in which the art of shaving a man's head in his absence has been going on for a long time now with unquestioned legitimacy. Let us consider some responses to the various phases of political development in Africa, beginning with colonialism, an era in which, we should not forget, Africans were made spectators in their own drama.

Of Absence and Silence in African Literature

Although the representation of the black in European literature had always been stereotypically repulsive – Shakespeare's Othello and Caliban in *Othello* and *The Tempest* respectively, Defoe's Man Friday in *Robinson Crusoe*, several blacks encountered by Mr. Kuntz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Gagool the witch in Sir H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mine*. Conrad and Haggard had painted gloomy pictures of Africa as the jungle to fit the “backward, primitive and crude” image of the continent. But African writers have shown that Europeans did not come to a people without political organisation, judicial system, healing methods, religious worship, artistic and literary forms among other elements of culture. Rather, colonialism came to disrupt the people's flow of life and culture. Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* demonstrate the culpability of European interventions in the tragic fate of the protagonists of these novels – Okonkwo and Ezeulu. But it is not only the protagonists who suffer the consequences of the disruption. It is the whole of Umuofia and Umuaro as well as the race (s) that the inhabitants of the two communities represent. Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* captures the lethal effects of colonial intervention on African culture in the image of a knife used by Europeans to cut the rope that binds the people together. Obierika who visits his friend, Okonkwo, in exile puts it more poignantly:

The White man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (1958, viii)².

In the construction of conflicts in these two novels, Achebe is quite critical of the bind of disempowerment in which Africans found themselves as a

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result of new ways of life foisted on them by colonialism. Thus, Achebe presents his reflections on colonialism in a way that picks holes in the colonialists' claims about altruism and benevolence. The District Commissioner in *Things Fall Apart* and Captain Winterbottom in *Arrow of God* represent colonialists' conceit. Imagine the superciliousness in the title of the book that the District Commissioner is proposing to write to document his experience of "many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa" (147) - *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. The tone of detachment with which Achebe presents this account underscores his displeasure about a group of people who condescendingly, think and decide for others.

Other African writers have portrayed social injustice, corruption, deceit and alienation among other scourge of colonial rule. Ferdinand Oyono in *Old Man and the Medal* exposes using satire, the deceit that underlies the French intervention in the politics, culture and religion of the colonies, specifically Cameroun. The novel was originally written in French under the title: *Le Veux Negre et la Medaille*. Oyono denounces French colonialism through Meka, the protagonist of the novel. Meka demonstrates unflinching loyalty to the church and the French colonial administration. He willingly donates his land to the church while he also donates his two sons to the war that ordinarily was not caused by his people. In this war, his people are conscripted to fight the war of Europeans, enlisting them against enemies that their colonisers create for them. As a reward, he is to be honoured on the Empire day. Meka thinks so highly of the award as he plans elaborately for it and mobilises the community as well as his resources for the great honour. Unfortunately, on the day of the celebration, in place of grand recognition, He is treated with ignominy by the French officials who do not see anything special in his person and achievements. To his utter dismay, he is given a mere medal. As if that is not enough, after waiting so much in the sun, he is denied access to where the whites are celebrating. Instead of friendship and love, Meka is offered hostility, humiliation and rejection. His dignity is battered and bruised while he is beaten and detained. The ordeal of Meka is like an eye opener to the realities of cultural exploitation rather than altruism and benevolence which they advertise as the motive behind colonialism.

The church as represented by Fr. Vander Meyer, is also portrayed as part of the exploitative machinery of the colonial state. For example, the church

discourages the production, sale and consumption of local alcoholic drinks. This is to create more sales opportunity for expensive French alcoholic drinks.

However, the injury of Meka is mild when compared with the experience of Kofi Billy, Silva Tano, Egya Akon and Sister Maanan in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born*. They suffer physical disabilities fighting the "white man's war" and later return to Gold Coast. Depression follows, after they return from the war to meet unemployment and poverty, contrary to what they were promised by the recruiting authorities. This is a war that chose them and not the one they chose to fight. Hence, they are robbed *ab initio* of the power to negotiate, operating from a disadvantaged position of inequality.

In his classic socialist realistic novel, *God's Bit of Wood*, Sembene Ousmane captures the colonial phase of African history. But unlike the critical realistic aesthetics of Armah that produces the helpless Sister Manaan, the Man, the Teacher and other characters, Ousmane creates an elusive but ever present central character, Ibrahim Bakayoko who leads a strike action embarked upon by railway workers to protest against poor and oppressive working conditions. The Railway authorities treat the workers' demand with contempt and would not want to negotiate with them until the biting effects of the general strike force them to yield ground and negotiate with the black workers. Among other goals, Ousmane achieves a demystification of the messianic mission of colonialists showing it as mere expansion of political and economic spheres of influence for the colonialists. The Railway symbolises that expansionism.

In the same vein, Soyinka ridicules the tendency of European colonisers to hastily dismiss as barbaric and "uncivilised", cultural practices of Africans about which they lack deep understanding.

In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka dramatises the tendency of Europeans to think and decide for Africans. Mr Pilkings, the self-opinionated District Commissioner, thinks that he needs to save the life of Elesin Oba, the King's Horseman who is expected to transit to the world beyond along with his principal, the Alaaafin. According to the tradition, in appreciation of the sacrifice that he is going to make at the demise of the

Alaafin, Elesin is given so much to satisfy his human desire in the present world. Elesin's transition is necessary to restore the society back to its equilibrium which the death of the Alaafin has disrupted. It will also ensure stability in the interconnected world of the dead and the unborn which constitute the intangible cosmos of the Yorùbá.

Pilkings attitude to the people and their culture, like those he represents, is condescending. Unfortunately, with his unsolicited but supercilious intervention, he ends up bringing upon the people and their cosmology, incalculable damage. To him, Elesin is about to commit suicide or "ritual death" and he has to be saved from himself at all cost. Joseph explains it from the logic of the culture that Elesin "will not kill anybody and no one will kill him. He will simply die" (167), but Pilkings ignores this. Instead, he orders the arrest and detention of Elesin. He takes these steps without consultation with Elesin and the people for whom he thinks he is acting. In this case, Amusa and Joseph who have converted to Islam and Christianity cannot be said to be the true representatives of the people for whom the cultural practice still holds some significance. As converts, their judgments are already coloured by their new religious beliefs.



What Pilkings does in this case can be described as shaving the head of the Oyo community (represented by Elesin Oba) in its absence. It is not surprising that his intervention proves to be an exercise in futility as it brings to ruin, the honour and glory of the supposed beneficiary of his benevolence. Elesin falls from grace to grass, like Oedipus, Pentheus and Creon among other classical tragic heroes. Iyaloja drives home this bitter truth when she confronts Elesin in his detention cage, with his hands chained and head bowed in shame:

You have betrayed us. We fed you sweetmeats such as we hoped awaited you on the on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world's left-overs. We said you were the hunter who brought the quarry down, to you belonged the vital portions of the game. No, you said, I am the hunter's dog and I

shall eat the entrails of the game and the faeces of the hunter. We said you were the hunter returning home in triumph, a slain buffalo pressing down on his neck; you said wait, I first must turn up this cricket hole with my toes....we said yours was the body of wine whose burden shakes the tapper like a sudden gust of the perch. You said No, I am content to lick the dregs from each calabash when the drinkers are done. We said the dew on earth's surface was for you to wash your feet along the slopes of honour. You said No, I shall step in the vomit of cats and the droppings of mice; I shall fight them for the left-overs of the world. (210-211)

Olunde, his son, takes his place of pride so that honour would not fly away from their house. In anger and frustration, Elesin strangles himself, a disaster that Pilkings watch helplessly and cannot prevent. In deed, in an attempt to prevent one death, he ends up in precipitating two, a direct consequence of the imperialist appropriation of the rights of the natives to think and act even in their own affairs.

The sense of loss and alienation orchestrated by colonialism is depicted by Kofi Awoonor in "The Cathedral". He represents colonial officials and missionaries ironically as "surveyors and builders". They are destructive, since they cut the tree which is a metaphor for the people's cosmology. The tree is presented in positive images and in pleasant tone as it is "shedding incense on the infant corn/its boughs stretched across a heaven/brightened by the last fires of a tribe". The cathedral, a symbol of Westernisation is contrasted with the tree and it embodies doom. The denunciatory tone at the end is significant in this regard as the cathedral becomes "a huge senseless cathedral of doom".

The situation of imposed voicelessness is more severe in Southern Africa, including the frontline states –Mozambique, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia, with the phenomenon of settlers' colonies and the white settlers' domination of economic and political life of the people. In South Africa, specifically, the victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948 ushered in a new dispensation that formalised with laws and policies, separate development for the races. More than in other parts of Africa, the indigenous population suffered much indignation and

degradation upon their own soil. While the apartheid regime lasted in South Africa, until 1994, the people never secured a presence in places where their fates were being decided. This reality received strident protest and condemnation in the works of Lewis Nkosi, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex La Guma, Athol Fugard, Oswald Mtshali, Gibson Kente, Mbogeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa, John Kani and Winston Ntshona among others.

Drama, being a resilient and protean art, is more critical of black's absence or non-being as imposed by apartheid. Through the "cockroach theatre" or "two handers" techniques of presentation, Athol Fugard collaborated with John Kani and Winston Ntshona to produce *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. Barney Simon also collaborated with Mbogeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa in the widely acclaimed anti-apartheid play *Woza Albert!* In *Sizwe Bansi and The Island*, there is a protest against reality that denies black people vitality in their own land. The pass law introduced by the white minority government is the centre of racial segregation. To remind ourselves, blacks were expected to carry pass along everywhere they went, not only for identification but also as a statement of authorisation to be at a particular place at a particular time. A valid pass is still needed to secure jobs as domestic servants, gardeners, factory workers, mine workers and so on. Grown up adults with wives and children were forced to snatch daily survival from the jaws of indignity inherent in hard labour with poor pay.



Gbemisola Adeoti as *Lowa* in *Moremi Ajasoro*

The condition of deprivation painted above is the crux of protest in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. It is presented through the experience of Buntu, Styles and Sizwe. Style's photographic studio is a theatre of dream and reality through

which Fugard presents the disadvantaged position of the blacks and all kinds of survival strategies, from the preposterous to the pathetic, in order to stay afloat the violence and deprivation under which they live. Sizwe has to dissolve his own identity and reconstitute it as Robert Zwelinzima, the found corpse whose valid passbook and work seeker's permit he has to appropriate. With a valid pass under whatever name, he can secure a job in Port Elizabeth, earn some money to send to his wife, Nowetu, in King William's Town and also boost his confidence to live and feel human. This will provide some relief from his hitherto ghostly existence as a Blackman. Sizwe discloses how the blacks were deceived to embrace the pass law when it was first introduced: "They never told us it would be like that when they introduced it. They said: Book of life! Your friend! You'll never get lost!. They told us lies (Fugard, 1991: 33). As he sums it up later, "A black man stay out of trouble? Impossible...Our Skin is trouble" (43). They are being subjected to a policy of apartheid which in holistic sense, affects their lives, but which they never participated in formulating.

However, *Woza Albert!* among other anti-apartheid plays provides a more kaleidoscopic view of the South Africa during apartheid. It was inspired by the life and struggle of Albert Luthuli, the first President of the African National Congress. The producers of the play played on the biblical story of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Like Jesus, Morena, the messianic figure in the play is being expected in South Africa. The heightened atmosphere of suspense is used to present the blacks' conditions of living and working in their own country. But Morena, the saviour archetype, represents different things to different people across social classes.

To the oppressed and deprived blacks like the barber without a shop who attends to the customers in the open, the meat seller in the open market being tormented by flies, the overworked but poorly paid brick factory workers and so on, Morena is a source of hope and succour. He is also perceived as a revolutionary who would lead the oppressed blacks to burn their passes in protest against a system that subsists on racial inequality. The State has a contrary view of Morena which it imposes on the rest of the society. The state dismisses him as a "bloody fucking communist agitator". He is arrested, detained in Maximum Security Prison as a security risk and later bombed by an increasingly schizophrenic regime that is grossly intolerant of opposition.

Through the brick-making factory, the play calls attention to the injustice

inherent in the decision making in the polity. The white bosses decide without consulting the blacks who are to execute the arduous task, how many bricks to be produced in a day. The figure keeps on increasing daily without corresponding rise in the workers wages, yet they must meet the production target.

Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali is more graphic in his lyrical portraiture of the violence and deprivation of the apartheid system, using his experience of the South Western Township (Soweto) – a Bantu (black) people's settlement near Johannesburg. The condition depicted in "Nightfall in Soweto" is a kind of Hobbesian order where life is harsh, brutish and short on account of violence. The tone and the mood as registered in the diction of the poem can be described as being hostile. The poet-persona who represents "every black man" uses his experience of nightfall in the black suburb. Nightfall is a trope depicting the tumultuous condition of living in the country. Using rhetorical question, hyperbole, repetition, apostrophe and personification, the poet-persona expresses anxiety about violence and insecurity that rule the polity under the apartheid political dispensation. Night symbolises that state of violence and insecurity:

Nightfall comes like
a dreaded disease
seeping through the pores
of a health body
and ravaging it beyond repair...
I tremble at his crunching footsteps,
I quake at his deafening knock at the door.
"Open up!" he barks like a rabid dog
thirsty for my blood.
Nighfall! Nightfall!
You are my mortal enemy.
But why were you ever created?
Why can't it be daytime?
Daytime forever more? (257)

But there is a prophetic expression of defeat for the white "usurpers and predators", who have taken over the people's land in "The Birth of Shaka" another poem by Mtshali on colonial encounter.

Unfortunately, as it happens in many African countries, about two decades after independence in South Africa and five decades in some others, the post independence regimes have hardly fulfilled the expectations of the generality of the people in terms of socio-economic development in a truly democratic polity where people's rights and freedom are guaranteed. The recent xenophobic attacks on foreigners, especially on Africans by fellow black Africans is rooted in the reality of deprivation or socio-economic disempowerment being experienced by the blacks decades after apartheid is said to have ended. The victory of the ANC in the multi-party election of 1994 and the attendant political power to date has not translated into economic empowerment for many blacks. They still contend with poor or inadequate housing, unemployment, limited access to education, gender inequality and so on. Oginga Odinga captures the state of "much motion without movement" in the title of his book as "Not yet Uhuru". And quite early, Fatima Dike in her play, *So What's New?*, puts the prospects of independence in perspective. The play is a soul-searching multi-media drama which challenges the rulers and the ruled, the old and the young, white and black, to the need to critically examine the polity against the backdrop of the new freedom in order to see what is actually new in the post-apartheid reality. It provides an assessment of continuity and renewal in the polity through the lives of four female characters: Pat, Dee, Thandi and Mercedes, the girl who represents the younger generation and the future of the society.

These ladies, lacking opportunities for earning a decent living, engage in selling hard drugs, alcohol and sex. Drugs and alcohol, unfortunately contribute to the exacerbation of violence and insecurity in the society just as the AIDS pandemic is sometimes traced to boost in "sex trade". As the play shows, much still needs to be done to bring about those changes that people actually hope for when Mandela and other ANC leaders were set free in 1990 and given mandate to lead the country since 1994.

Sembena Ousmane's *Xala*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*, Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Aminata Sowfall's *The Beggars' Strike* all have in common, the depiction of post-independence politicians as self-centred, autocratic and enemies of the state who masquerade as messiah.

In Ousmane's *Xala*, El-Hadji Abdou Kader Beye represents the political and business class in Senegal. Beye is only acting as front for overseas investors

like Ahab Kioi Wa Kanoru and Samuel Ndigire in Ngugi and Ngugi's *I will Marry When I Want*. Joseph Koomson, one of the beneficiaries of the Socialist order in post-independence Ghana finds a way of subverting the system. He appropriates the benefits of the system for himself through corruption, leaving the masses of the people including the Man, the Teacher, Oyo and her mother to contend with economic hardship in Ghana.

The reality of neo-colonialism being experienced in Africa also reflects in literary arts. After decades of failed dreams and deferred hope of transformation, attention of writers shift and rightly too, from colonialists of imperial centres to internal colonialists of the margins. By the latter, I mean post-independence leaders of African countries. As subsequent textual references will show, the tenor of discourse in this phase of African literature is not so much of "how Europe under-developed Africa" as Walter Rodney is wont to say, or the "West and the rest of us" as Chinweizu posits. Rather, the emphasis is largely on "how Africans under-developed and impoverished their own people". African writers are now more concerned with how African leaders shave the heads of their own people in their absence as reflected through the problems of economic mismanagement, poverty and increasing spate of violence.

Aminata Sowfall's *The Beggars' Strike* portrays the marginalised segment of the society symbolised by the beggars. In a manner that recalls the attitude of colonial officers, the beggars are treated like rags by the post-independence government as represented by Mour Ndiaye, the Minister. The government decides to clear beggars from the city streets in order to boost government revenue through tourism development in the country. When the decision on the matter is to be taken, the beggars who are to be victims of the ejection order are not part of the process. However, by a curious twist of fate, Ndiaye has to court them in his bid to fulfill his ambition of becoming the Vice President of the unnamed African country. His ambition is tied to the magnanimity of the beggars to accept the alms prescribed by his marabous. In his desperation to realise this ambition, Ndiaye tries to bring back to the streets, the beggars whom his officials, on his authority, have driven away from the city centre to the outskirts of the city. The beggars, however, maintain their voices and dignity. Not ready to be treated as sub-human because of their physical disabilities, they refuse to go back to the streets as requested by Ndiaye. Amidst open ridicule of

this man of power by the beggars, all his entreaties and tempting offers are proudly rejected in a striking reversal of roles.

The reversal of roles in *The Beggars' Strike*, apart from its literary and aesthetic import, is ideologically salient. It portrays the novelist as a committed artist who sees the role of literature as a tool for combating all forms of oppression, whether it is of gender or social class.

Ngugi's responses to post-independence disillusionment are more ideologically driven. He contends that Africa can still be "re-membered" through a project of re-building which is a "quest for wholeness, connecting the diverse African peoples together-after they have been dispersed, sundered or dis-membered by European slave traders and colonialist" (2009). In his creative and critical works (*Weep not, Child, The River Between, A Grain of Wheat, Petals of Blood, Devil on the Cross, I Will Marry When I Want, Mother, Sing for Me, Detained, Writers and Politics and Decolonising the Mind*, among others), he portrays Kenya before, during and after British colonialism, while his characters are drawn from the same society. However, their relevance to other African countries is not in doubt.

According to Ngugi, the crisis of nationhood and development facing most African nations after independence are man-made, sometimes self-induced, and not divinely scripted. They are, therefore, surmountable (see Ngugi, 1986, 1993, 2009). While he rejects classical determinism, he advocates a materialist reading of African culture and history with a view to stimulating a strong will towards radical transformation of the postcolonial nation. An alternative society, based on social justice, equitable distribution of resources and equal access to opportunities, where no identity (race, ethnicity, religion, gender, generation) will confer special advantage on its bearer to the exclusion of the 'other' is possible. The ideas and strategies to effect such auspicious transformation are encapsulated in the principles of socialism. According to him, "Black power is impossible outside a socialist context" (1981, 31). Noting that the countries of Europe such as Britain,



Ngugi wa Jhiongo and
Gbemisola Adeoti

France, Spain, Portugal, Germany and Poland also emerged from Roman colonialism with all its agenda of domination to assert their national selfhood, Africa needs not to be eternally encumbered by its past and present.

Ngugi uses his narrative and performative aesthetics to address the subsisting issues of economic exploitation and political marginalisation of the working people by the minority bourgeois elite. For instance, in *Weep not, Child*, he addresses the predicament of Africans under the state of emergency declared in colonial Kenya in 1953 in response to the violent struggle against settler colonialism led by "Mau mau" guerrilla fighters.

A Grain of Wheat deals with socio-political, cultural, racial and gender dimensions of the war of independence, with special attention paid to the conditions of the people after the attainment of independence. In this novel and *Petals of Blood* that comes after it, Ngugi stresses the imperative of consciousness by the masses of their conditions of deprivation. There is therefore, the need to build a mass organisation to redress the prevailing social injustice. The virtues of unity and struggle also canvassed in Ngugi's novels.

The condition of Ilmorog in the universe of *Petals of Blood* is that of neo-colonialism which is a subtle, indirect continuation of governing Africa by the West through the local ruling elite, multi national corporations and international financial institutions like World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The novel depicts the rising of peasants, workers, unemployed citizens, women and other economically and politically marginalised group against their continuous exploitation by politicians and local business elite who are agents of foreign capital. In the march to the city, the great strength inherent in the unity of the oppressed is demonstrated.

The reality of wide disparities in class conditions in Kenya is given a satiric twist in *Devil on the Cross*. Originally written in Gikuyu as "Caिताani Mutharaba-ini", the novel is dedicated to "all Kenyans struggling against the neo-colonial stage of imperialism" (p. 5). Rooted in the indigenous story telling tradition that blends reality with fantasy, the novel uses the framework of an imaginary grand meeting between the Devil and a band of villainous bourgeoisies. Ngugi's deep seated contempt for the ruling

political elite in Kenya (including other African countries) as "local agents of Western imperialism" is evident in the trope of "devil" and "ogre" used to describe members of this class in *Devil on the Cross; I will Marry When I Want, Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow*.

The menace of authoritarian rule on the continent inspires Tewfik-Al-Hakim's *The Sultan's Dilemma*. From time to time, the society is often forced to choose between force and persuasion or between the sword and the law in resolving socio-political crisis. The Sultan puts the conflict in the play sharply:

SULTAN: Then what's to be done? This man puts us in a dilemma, he makes us choose between two alternatives, both of them painful: the law which shows me up as weak and makes a laughing stock of me, or the sword which brands me with brutality and make me loathed. (p. 123)

In the resolution of the conflict, Al-Hakim reveals that the law supersedes the sword in the sense that the sword's victory, if at all it earns any, is only temporary. The triumph of the law is for many seasons. The Cadi, who is the custodian of the law, also reinforces the limits of autocratic rule:

CADI: ...I recognise the undoubted strength possessed by the sword, its swift action and decisive effect. But the sword gives right to the strongest, and who knows who will be the strongest tomorrow? ... As for the law, it protects your rights from every aggression, because it does not recognize the strongest - it recognizes right. (p. 125)

The Sultan chooses the law and leaves out the sword. That choice, though inconvenient, resolves the political crisis in the context of the play in a more enduring manner.

More than any other African writers, however, Soyinka has been most consistent in his concern with the problem of politics and "governance in spite of the people" especially as manifested under military rule in different countries. He sets the tone with *Kongi's Harvest* and continues in the track with *Madmen and Specialists, Opera Wonyosi, A Play of Giants, From Zia with*

Love, The Beatification of Area boy, King Baabu and the latest, *Alapata Apata*. He is enamoured of satire as a literary device to point out the evil effects of absolute rule on the African continent. Satire enables the writer to select his butt, living or dead, and distort the figure in a way that suits his fancy, so long as it ends with a devalued image of the target before the audience. The target has no say in this matter. In most, if not in all cases, the satiric butt hardly enjoys his or her image as presented in the satiric work. Thus, the satirist is naturally disposed to shaving the head of his target in his absence. More on Soyinka's satiric aesthetics shortly.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, what I have attempted above is a very brief survey of creative writing by Africans in their various artistic and ideological responses to the issues of politics and challenges of good governance and development in pre-independence and post-independence era.

As a creative writer too, I have engaged in this art articulating my own reflections on the trends of politics in Africa, especially, Nigeria, my own country. In this task, I have joined established writers whose efforts have been discussed above and other emerging writers of my generation. Over the years, I have explored the genres of short story and poetry to interrogate happenings in the political sphere. Permit me, therefore, to talk a bit about my contributions to contemporary African literature or this art of plaiting a woman's hair in her absence that is called creative writing.

I was born and bred in Iseyin in Oyo State, a town in which culture and tradition find admirable expressions in different voices and decibels at every point in time. While growing up, I had opportunities of experiencing oral arts of my people, from moonlight folk stories about the tortoise to poetic chants of different genres and modes practised by my uncles and their friends - *Ijala/Iremoje, Iyere, Esa, Rara* and so on. Besides, I was fond of watching masquerade performances. Then, when I started schooling and became literate enough to read in primary three, I started reading stories of adventure captured in the novels of Daniel O. Fagunwa. Each encounter of these creative arts always filled me with the desire that one day, I would be able to chant or write like all these people. It was, therefore, natural that I fell in love with literature and the art of writing in secondary school.

When I got to this University, my membership of Ife Literary Series in 1987 helped a lot in setting me on the writing path. The group was made up of

Lecturers and students, undergraduate and postgraduate, who were united by their interests in story-telling, drama performance and poetry. Among us were Kemi Atanda Ilori, Kunle Ajibade, Tejumola Olaniyan, Dele Momodu, Femi Dunmade, Dapo Adeniyi, Femi Olorunso and Biyi Bandele-Thomas. Occasionally, we had contributions from Akinwumi Isola, Biodun Jeyifo, Funso Aiyejina, G. G. Darah and Folabo Ajayi-Soyinka. Apart from performing drama sketches, we used to meet weekly to read from a prepared anthology of short stories and poems written by members. The lively critique of works could only inspire one to improve.

Through my training in drama and literature, I have been exposed to the arts and practice of writing. Besides, when I was working as a Reporter/Researcher with *The News Magazine* in Lagos, I was on the arts and life desk. We called it "Back of the Book". The experience at *The News* not only sharpened my political awareness and critical consciousness, it also nurtured my creative spirit as a writer. Today, apart from my collection of poems, *Naked Soles*, which has gained significant attention in the study of contemporary Nigerian poetry, I have contributed to several anthologies of poetry. I also have a collection of short stories, some of them already published.

Like many other writers in my generation, I have been particularly concerned about the kind of politics and the idea of governance that we have been subjected to in Nigeria and indeed in Africa since independence. I have been disturbed by the endless promises and very limited delivery, from military rule to civilian administration, to the extent that what was promised in 1983 is still being avidly desired in 2015. The difference between civil rule and military dictatorship seems so thin that one wonders why our own idea of democracy seems to be forged in the smithy of autocracy characterised by absolute power and complete dominance of a person or a few over others. I have always believed that to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of politics in Africa, the myths, legends, epics, satires and contemporary imaginative literature of the people deserve serious attention. This is because the literary tradition across the ages has remained a privileged observatory from where we can experience the march of history in various steps and strides (Adeoti 2011a: 111).

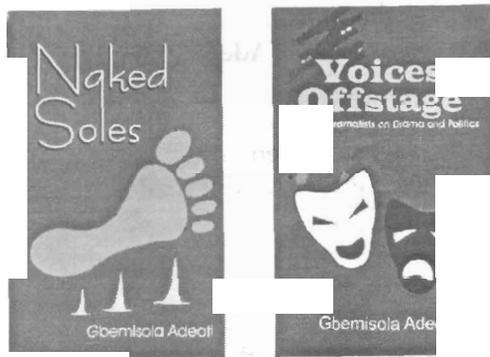
This perception of literature and its social responsibility informed my short story "The Bamboo Flute Story" which I first wrote in 1995 after the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the 8 Ogoni activists by the regime of Late General Sanni Abacha. In the story, I use the veil of satire to represent the terrifying siege laid on Nigeria by Abacha this ruler whom Soyinka once described as "just a superstitious and sadistic being". (1994: 3). While enjoying the license of the writer-satirist, I create the central character, Herbert Chair, in a way that brings him close to his real life model, Abacha, but a safe distance is also maintained to facilitate credible disclaimer or other creative interpretations. "The Bamboo" in the title refers to the item from which the super-realistic flute in the story is made. But it is also an attempt to play on the Yorùbá word for bamboo which is *aparun*. *Aparun* is close in sound to *Iparun* – ruin or total destruction. And truly, Herbert Chair, the terror in the story, just like some other dictators in Africa, eventually comes to ruin in the end, thus, ending the people's days of turmoil.

"The Bamboo Flute Story" explores the moon-light story telling tradition to address a pressing contemporary problem: the evil effects of autocratic rule on the socio-economic, cultural and political lives of the nation. Herbert Chair leads a contingent of soldiers to enforce the dusk-to-dawn curfew imposed on the country in Awiife. The curfew comes about as a result of a *coup d'etat* that claims the life of His Awesome Excellency, the Military Chancellor for Life, of Tulgempu Empire, General Abass Figurebo. But Herbert Chair and his deadly squad uses the curfew as an excuse to loot, extort, kill, maim and rape. The siege lasts until they, in their usual reckless violation of people's rights, greedily devour a pot of poisoned pepper soup. The poisoning is deliberately done by Pelewura, the aggrieved artist, whose work has been destroyed and his wife assaulted by the rampaging soldiers. They all die on the way to their camp on the hill. Though the immediate motivation for the story was the political event of 1995, my experience of the dusk-to-dawn curfew imposed on the nation after the bloody coup of February 13, 1976, as a little boy in Iseyin, was useful in crafting the story. Thus, the past provided an anchor for the present to berth.

I have also found the art of poetry an apt medium to mediate my experience of daily realities and articulate my thoughts on events in the polity. As I stated in a poem "Poetry Divine", poetry can be as complex as the puzzle of creation. In fact, it can be as problematic as "divine arithmetic" and as impenetrable as the pillar of origin. But it can still lend itself to humans

attempt to come to terms with “the nebulous act of wealth sharing and power haggling” which we call politics.

Consequently, in poems contributed to anthologies and literary journals across the world or in *Naked Soles*, I have registered with a clear voice, my presence in the wide arena of contemporary African poetry. To this end, the poems in the second section of *Naked Soles* entitled “Acropolis Watch” encapsulate my appraisal of politics and governance in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular. For instance, “Landslide Times” in a mock-heroic tone spiced with irony, deplores the gale of rigging and manipulation of the electoral process in 2003. Rigging or declaration of falsified election result which does not tally with the wishes of the electorates as expressed in the ballot is a kind of coup carried out by the perpetrators of the act against the electorates and the polity. It is a way of deciding the people’s fate in their absence without seeking their consent or taking them into confidence.



Reflecting on the second coming of military rule in Nigeria between 1983 and 1999, “After the Gun Boom” depicts Abacha as “the new seeker” and “the neo-visionary of shadows”:

who revels in cloning widows,
He drowns the guiltless
he drowns the guilty
in muddled lake of martial justice;
a flow often up the river (2005a: 25).

The introduction of the Structural Adjustment policy by the military regime in 1986 widened the gap between the rich and the poor. This deepened the economic injustice in the society as depicted in "Found But Lost" and "Song of a Famished Goat". "Lala's lonely hut" and "Victoria Island" in Song of a Famished Goat" are symbolic representations of class disparity and social inequality in the country. While the former depicts abject poverty, the latter metaphorises abundant wealth, power and influence.

"Naked Soles", the title poem, exposes the contradictions inherent in a democratic government that is being steered by an authoritarian President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a retired army General and a former military Head of State. His regime gave democracy much to deplore and admire. Nigeria in this era is summed up in a paradox as

"... our new acropolis
where pins with nails
and shattered shells of snails
pile from rooftop to floor". (Adeoti 2005a: 31)

Alas, in civilian or military dispensation, there is much intolerance of opposition. The critic is seen as an enemy of the state and dismissed as an extremist. Therefore, truth is the shortest road to trouble as "Hard lines" puts it:

In our napping homeland
truth is hard on the palate
as lions' fiery tales turn fairy tales
in sporting grips of goats. (Adeoti 2005a: 30)

Generally, in subject and style, I have tried to make poetry appealing to the younger generation of readers in tertiary institutions as well as those in the secondary level of education. My interest is to make them discover the fun and functions of poetry. I also strive to inculcate in them the "Yes, I can" spirit in terms of composition and criticism of creative writing.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, I think I am right in my opinion that I have succeeded in making impact with poetry in this regard. From 2008 to date, my poems have been on the reading list of public examinations in

Literature in English, not only in Nigeria, but also in West Africa. This is a rare exposure that only few writers in my generation have benefitted from. Between 2008 and 2010, my poem, "Naked Soles" was among the recommended poems under the African Poetry section of Literature in English Syllabus for the University Matriculation Examination (UME). From 2011 to 2013, it was retained in the Literature in English syllabus for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) which embraces all Universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Colleges of Education in Nigeria. In 2014 and 2015 UTME, another poem of mine "Hard Lines" made the list of recommended primary texts in African Poetry. As from 2016 to 2020, "Ambush", another poem from my collection is already listed for study among other African Poems in Literature in English harmonised syllabus for secondary school students in the West African School Certificate Examination being organised by West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO). Today, no student admitted to study English Language, Literature in English, Linguistics, Foreign languages, Theatre/Performing Arts, Law, Language Arts in Education and so on in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions and who sat for the UTME and SSCE would not have heard about or read a poem written by Gbemisola Adeoti.



Ola Rotimi and Gbemisola Adeoti

Apart from the above, my poems are being studied under African poetry courses in some Nigerian Universities while they are being analysed from different critical perspectives in undergraduate long essays and postgraduate dissertations (see for instance, Ipijbe 2013).

It gives me considerable pleasure to find my work being studied (as I have read other people's works) along with those of legendary names in African literature such as Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Lenrie Peters Gabriel Okara, Kofi Awoonor, Mazisi Kunene, Okinba Launko, David Rubadiri and so on. I receive calls and e-mails almost daily from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia and Liberia from people seeking more autobiographical information or commenting about my poetics. This is one of them: "It's very interesting treating your poem, "Ambush" with my students Sir. I love those metaphors, the biblical (blue-Peter) allusion, the pun and the diction". O. O.

Creative writing is a troubled art. Not many people are interested in venturing into it. I have, therefore, in my modest way, tried to mentor the next generation of Nigerian writers through my recent involvement in the teaching of Creative writing (LIT 614) in my Department with Professor Segun Adekoya. I also receive regular requests from enthusiastic young writers who would want me to read their manuscripts or write foreword before they are published. I have been delivering lectures at workshops and literary reading events in this University and outside on the art of writing. I am committed to and will continue to nurture a vision of poetry as a tool invented by man to make meaning out of the pain and pleasure of existence.

Expeditions in the Forests of Literary Criticism and Theory

Creative writing and literary criticism are two sides of the same coin. One goes with the other in a naturally complimentary relationship. The quality of a product can affect its consumption while the satisfaction derived from the consumption of the product can affect the production. Consumers' judgment can lead to re-packaging or re-composition. This is true of the relationship between creative writing and literary criticism. While the writer is free to think and write what he/she thinks is right in the most suitable language and style according to his/her judgment, the literary critic who is part of the consuming audience is well positioned, by virtue of his knowledge and experience of literary aesthetics, to dissect the inter-relations of all the constituents of a literary product. The critic not only attempts an interpretation of the work but also a statement of assessment of its quality. According to Cuddon, "literary criticism is devoted to the comparison and analysis, to the interpretation and evaluation of works of

literature" (1998: 196). For a literary work, the act of creation is as significant as the process of reading and appraisal. The latter involves analysis of the formal literary or compositional elements adopted by the writer to portray his perception of the universe⁴.

However, in a bid to organise in a more coherent manner, their reflections and analysis, critics often employ the service of a literary theory – a kind of philosophical summation of ideas and methods embedded in literary creation. That is why literary theory and literary criticism often operate within shouting distance in the abode of creativity. But because of the inherent subjectivity of emotion and responses to life by the author, similar subjectivity drives criticism and application of a particular theory in evaluating a literary piece. Perhaps, this outlook accounts for the multiplicity of critical theories developed since Aristotle wrote his *Poetics* and pronounced on the constituents of mimesis in his response to Plato's unwholesome charges against art and the artist in *The Republic*.

There is no end to literary imagination and as such, no end to critical responses and literary theories. Irele (1988) observes with palpable disquiet, what he calls the "profusion of theories, methods and approaches". In his words:

Literary criticism has been moved beyond, in something of a forced march, into such diverse territories as psychoanalysis, Russian formalism, phenomenology, structuralism and semiotics, and more recently, "deconstruction". There is now such a proliferation of theories and of schools that the discipline can no longer be said to have a fixed centre of canons and procedures. (94)

To this list, one may add Marxism, feminism (in all its polemical mutations, whether radical, liberal or African womanist), post-modernism and post-colonialism. Jeyifo's remark is equally relevant in this regard:

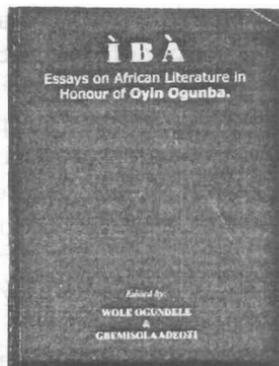
Thus, properly speaking, in engaging literary theory, one should talk of theories and reinforce this pluralized enunciation with the image of a carnivalesque parade: Classical and Post-marxist Marxisms; Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic

schools; old and new historicisms; speech act, reader-response and semiotic textual theories; deconstruction and post-modernisms; French and Anglo-American, Western and non-Western feminisms etc, etc. (1993: 4)

The implication of this subjectivity is that the critic is not a passive consumer of the literary product, but an active partner in the generation of meaning and aesthetic appeal. He is in this regard, creative. The background and the range of experience of the critic come to play in the business of exegesis. Thus, s/he can invest the literary work with more meanings other than what the writer intended in the text. Consequently, the literary critic becomes a part of the creative process. In fact, some critical theories like deconstruction that emphasises the autonomy of the literary work from its producer lend weight to the import of literary criticism.

One thing that is clear from the autonomal notion of criticism is that the critic can arrive at a meaning outside what the author intends and he is at liberty to do so. But the danger here is the possibility of imposition of a meaning on a text by the critic, which may be wide off the mark. There is no harm if the "imposition of meaning" is derived logically from the text and it is pleasantly received by the audience. For example, a critic can read Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *Othello* as texts foregrounding western imperialism in Africa, even though the issue might be so remote in the consideration of the playwright while producing the two plays in the Elizabethan and Jacobean England. It is for the same reason that a Marxist critic can read from class perspective, Soyinka's *Alapata Apata* and a feminist commentator/analyst will dismiss as patriarchal, the artistic vision of Sophocles in *Antigone*. A critic can see in Kako and other hunters, colonialist tendencies in treating their colonies, when they abuse the hospitality of the birds in the town of birds. After the successful completion of the three hazardous assignments given to them by Ogongo (Ostrich), the father of the birds in *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*, a lavish party is organised for the hunter-guests who are from a different clime. Now drunk, Kako "moved close to the king and rapped him on the head saying: "Is n't that some shine you have on your head!" (Soyinka 1968: 92). A critic can also attempt without consulting the author, a valid postcolonial interpretation of the above act of Kako and his fellow hunters, even though the race dimension might not have crossed Fagunwa's mind while composing the novel. Such consultation is often a needless luxury in the

practice of literary criticism. Thus, critics too engage in shaving the writers' heads in their absence, an activity in which I, like those before me, have been participating unperturbed.



Nonetheless, if there is a disconnect between the writer and the critic in the hermeneutic exercise, it can lead to a row between the two parties especially if the writer feels sufficiently aggrieved and would not want to turn the other cheek. There have been several instances of war of words between the writer and the critic in African literary history. For instance, the troika of Chinweizu, Onyechekwa Jemie and Ikechukwu Madubuike tagged "Bolekaja (come let us fight) critics" in an essay - "Prodigals, Come Home"- published in *Okike* No. 4, in their famous book *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature* Vol. 1 and other writings, denounce what they perceive as "Hopkins disease in the poetry of Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo and J. P. Clark. They blame the impenetrability of the poems of these writers on their assimilation of Euro-modernist aesthetics exemplified in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. They believe that African written poetry should borrow from traditional oral poetry that is simple, accessible and deals with the everyday experience of the people. However, Soyinka registers his detestation of these critics and their responses to his works in what he calls "Responses in Kind". One important essay in this regard is "Aesthetic Illusions: Prescriptions for the Suicide of Poetry". Another is "Neo Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition". Soyinka contends that traditional poetry is not as simple and simplistic as the "critical troika" posit. He agrees that traditional poetry can be found in festival songs and ritual performances, but there is more to it than these. In his words:

Traditional poetry is all of this; it is however also to be found in the very *technique* of riddles, in the pharmacology of healers, in the utterance of the possessed medium, in the enigma of diviners, in the liturgy of divine and cultic Mysteries (in addition to the language of their public address systems), in the unique temper of world comprehension that permeates language for the truly immersed - from the Ifa priest to the haggler in the market, inspired perhaps, by economic frustration! The critic who would arrogate to himself the task of formulating an African poetics ...had better understand this from the start or confine himself to extolling the virtues of European Nursery rhymes - a field which appears more suited to the analytical capacity of our critical troika" (314)

Describing their criticism as "seizing the big stick to hit their unfavourable poets over the head", he submits:

The trouble is that, being rather unsure critics and superficial traditionalists, they have wielded that stick with a destructive opportunism rather than with an intelligent concern for poetry. Their case is worse than over-stated; it is mis-stated. And it is not only modern poetry by Africans which has been maligned in the process but the very traditional poetry whose virtues they present as exemplar (1988:316)

Marxist critics also find as limitations the perceived "bourgeois aesthetics" in Soyinka's works. They see his works as lacking in revolutionary imperative and not helping through its presentation of conflicts, the cause of the masses for true political and economic liberation from the "second-rate" capitalist system being operated in African countries. For example, Jeyifo criticises *Opera Wonyosi* as lacking a solid class perspective" (1978: 22). To him, satire as a device employed by Soyinka in the play is wont to cut-off the artist "from the vital, positive points of his society". *Death and the King's Horseman* is also treated to a crisis of ideology by the critics. But Soyinka is unsparing in his hotly-worded responses to critics of Marxist

ideological-theoretical persuasion. These responses are captured in essays such as "Drama and the Idioms of Liberation: Proletarian Illusions", "Who's Afraid of Elesin Oba?", "The Critic and Society: Barthes, Leftocracy and other Mythologies" and "The Autistic Hunt; Or, How to Marximise Mediocrity". (1988a).

Ayi Kwei Armah (1978:11) admits that criticism or the art of interpretation of texts "has never been a simple work" and that is why the critic needs to be cautious and sensitive, not only to his own prejudice, but also to the prejudice of his audience. In an essay, "Larsony Or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction", he takes on Charles Larson, a literary scholar and critic of African Literature, the author of *The Emergence of African Fiction*. In the essay, Armah points out what he considers as fabrication of facts and false claims about his (Armah's) biography which Larson presents as expert opinion in the book. In driving home his denunciation of Larson, Armah suggests with a dose of sarcasm that the style of literary criticism "which consists of the judicious distortion of African truths to fit Western prejudices, the art of using fiction as criticism of fiction; should be called "LARSONY" – a subtle pun on "larceny". What Armah, like Soyinka, is protesting against here is Larson's act of shaving his head in his absence.

I recall another break-down of confidence between the writer and the critic. In this case, I was an eye witness with a high stake as it involved my present (then) boss (critic) and my former teacher (writer). That was the war of reviews between Kunle Ajibade and Adebayo Williams on the former's critique of *The Years of the Locusts* and *The Remains of the Last Emperor*. Ajibade asserts in an essay on cultural economy that "*The Year of the Locusts* does not present a powerful new tale. The story line is so thin that what sustains it is Williams' mature language" (1995a: 11). He further submits that rather than extending the frontiers of Nigerian fiction, what Williams offers in the two works is "the same old story". He provides evidence from the novels to back up this claim of "Nigeria's realities being under-reported". He suspects a kind of ideological ambivalence on the part of Williams to explain this creative option.

However, Williams is displeased with this criticism. In his reply, he accuses Ajibade of conducting his interpretation exercise with "Stalinist fixation". Hear Williams:

I notice however, that Ajibade's profound difficulties with the novel even extend to its generic category. In what is perhaps, a classic example of faulty brand-labelling, he opts to place the novel under the shelf of magical realism as if this will do the magic. But apparently it does n't. (1995: 13)

In a quick counter-response, the critic, Ajibade, dismisses Williams' objections as "coming out of a spirit of pettiness" (1995b: 13).

Such is the uneasy relationship between supposed partners in progress - the writer and the critic - in the business of literature. Nonetheless, as a literary scholar, I straddle the two worlds of creative writing and criticism. As a writer, I am a beneficiary and a victim of critical efforts, made in my absence; at laying bare the perceived subject and style of my literary creations. On the other hand, I have also participated in interpreting literary texts, using internal and external data to generate meaning. I believe that there is a huge wealth of interpretive data in a text, sometimes far beyond what the author imagines at the point of composition. It is the task of the critic to elicit this "unopen" or "unsaid" part to enhance the audience's understanding of the literary creation. This is a common supposition in critical approaches such as Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, postcolonialism and deconstruction.

In my critical analysis, I have employed the genre framework to the study of literary traditions. This hermeneutic approach with its attention to the constituents of a literary work and the classification of likes along with likes enables us to recognise a type or a pattern when we see it. The framework, like others, can expand the scope of possibilities in meaning of a literary text. I have also contributed to the practical criticism of African literature through the framework of psychoanalysis and its relatives: archetypal and genre approaches.

Talking about psychoanalysis, there is much insight into a text that the analyst/critic can derive from (auto) biographical details of the author, although, deconstructionists like Derrida (1980) and Barthes (1988) who argue for the non-existence or death of the author in literary criticism would deny the usefulness of such (auto) biographical details. Psychoanalysis, a technique of handling neurosis, is one of the major

therapeutic methods used by psychoanalysts to explain and find solution to personality dysfunction relating to the sub-conscious. It explores emotional and psychic resources of the personality to explain human behaviour in a particular context. Sigmund Freud, the Austrian Physician who developed the approach believed that unconscious forces act as determinants of personality (Elegbeleye and Adeoti 2005:254). The unconscious according to Freud, refers to “that part of the human personality of which a person is unaware and which is a potential determinant of behaviour”.

The application of psychoanalysis to literary criticism stems from a supposition that powerful forces inherent in the individual, of whom we are not aware, principally trigger behaviour. These forces, according to Felman are shaped by childhood experience and they play important roles in energising and directing individual's everyday behaviour. Our anxieties, fears and unpleasant experience of daily realities are repressed into the unconscious and they find conscious expression in socially acceptable mechanism such as dreams. Creative writing is seen as a form of dream while the writer is a dreamer who channels elements of reality and fantasy into his/her writing. Like a dream that is characterised by an indirect presentation of reality, the literary text also suggests or speaks indirectly through symbols and tropes. A psychoanalytic critic attempts to decipher these symbols and tropes through data gathered on the personality of the author and correlates them with the content of the text. That means the unsaid is used to unravel the said while the said is used to probe the unsaid. A literary work is, therefore, deemed to be an outward manifestation of the unconscious.

Psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework provided the basis for a study of the dominant affective personality of Ola Rotimi as demonstrated through the characterisation of tragic heroes in his plays. The study was conducted with a senior colleague, Professor O. S. Elegbeleye of the Department of Psychology in this University. In that inter-disciplinary research work, we explored the intersections between literature and psychology. It was our submission that Rotimi's plays essentially emphasise the active use of the affective aspect of personality, especially by the tragic heroes and by extension, Ola Rotimi, their creator. Thus, we were able to provide insights into certain behavioural traits of Rotimi through a reading of his pro-

classical plays – *The Gods are not to Blame*, *Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. The essay sheds light on aspects of the playwright's personality that directly or indirectly find expression in the plays. It contends that in his private life, Rotimi is given to affect which is a dominant trait of his personality. The affect is projected into certain tragic heroes – Odewale, Kurunmi and Oba Ovonramwen – with whom he is fascinated. These are strong personalities who dominate the space of their existence and who are resolute in their pursuit of what they adjudge as the right course of action in a given circumstance.

Another study conducted with Elegbeleye, interrogates Soyinka's consistent preference for satire in his plays. First, the essay identifies Soyinka's personality type which easily disposes him to political activism and satire. He falls under the type A personality which makes him to be “competitive, impatient, and control oriented” (Adeoti 2005d). Evidence from his autobiographical writings like *The Man Died*, *Ake*, *Isara* and *Ibadan* show that Soyinka is endowed with prodigious energy and keen perception. He is willfully subversive and hostile to what he considers as falling below the standard norm. That he is control-oriented is attested by his calling as a playwright, artistic director and theatre manager. He constructs the fate of characters in his plays just as he manages men and resources to accomplish his goals. One attribute of a competitive personality like Soyinka is creativity and originality – traits that can be found in characters like Prophet Jeroboam in *The Trials of Brother Jero* and Commodore Hyacinth in *The Scourge of Hyacinth* and *From Zia with Love*.

As a political activist, Soyinka has suffered in real life from the excesses of some political office holders who are later satirised in his plays – General Gowon (*Madmen and Specialists*), General Obasanjo (*Opera Wonyosi*), Generals Buhari and Idiagbon (*From Zia with Love*) and General Sani Abacha (*King Baabu*). But he chooses to deal with stress suffered in real life through the literary mechanisms of satire which in this case has become an Anxiety Reduction Technique (ART). Satire is an instrument over which he has firm control. It is a power space over which his satiric butt cannot contest his dominance. Consequently, he freely distorts, exaggerates, understates, and subverts characters that endanger his well-being and that of the society. Satire affords him the opportunity to reduce that anxiety that their actions would have generated in him and also in a kind of revenge, to have his own back on the targets who are often despots or agents of

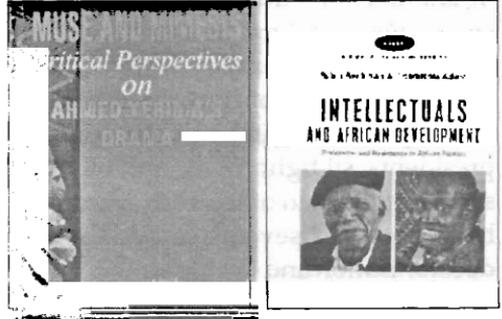
despotism. Satire is, therefore, an acceptable expression of anxiety felt by the satirist at the encounter of a deviation from norm and a means of coping with it. *Madmen and Specialists*, *A Play of Giants* and *The Beatification of Area boy* are used to illustrate the above submission with the aim of enhancing the audience's understanding of Soyinka's personality and dramaturgy.

In another direction, I have paid much critical attention to the political engagement of African literature. The central quest here is how to bring about genuine liberation from colonial and neo-colonial oppression. The project warrants constant attention to decolonisation and demilitarisation of the political system on the continent, a reality that has produced life presidents, sit tight rulers, and willful violators of constitution who would seek third term in office even when the constitution is expressly against it. I have noted in several essays the concerns of African writers for true decolonisation and development. While some writers approach the issue of politics from Marxist perspective with emphasis on class relations in the social formation, some adopt the eclectic aesthetic option, drawing tropes from different spheres of artistic traditions. Some approach the political conundrum from the gender view point, tracing the source of Africa's underdevelopment to unequal relation among the sexes due to socio-cultural factors, a situation that privileges the male and deprives the female. I have made this clear in my several contributions to literary criticism (Adeoti 2002a, Adeoti 2002b, Adeoti 2003a, Adeoti 2003b, Adeoti 2007a Adeoti 2007b, Adeoti 2008, Adeoti 2009a and Adeoti 2010a).

As part of my contributions to dramatic criticism, I have devoted considerable attention to the dramaturgy of Ahmed Yerima, one of the most prolific and visible dramatists to have emerged in the last decade of the 20th century. Yerima was greatly influenced by Soyinka under whom he trained in the arts of drama at the University of Ife. But in my study of his dramatic aesthetics in Adeoti 2002a and 2002b, Adeoti 2007a, 2010b and Adeoti 2011b, I have discovered that the range of Yerima's artistic influence is vast; embracing the local and the foreign, the ancient and the contemporary. His dramaturgy is a composite of theatrical paradigms guided by experimentation and innovation. He is daringly eclectic in his approach to playwriting as he is hardly comfortable with strict conformity to a literary label or an ideological prescription. Essentially, the nature of the Nigerian state in terms of power relations and resources allocation are recurring thematic pre-occupations in his plays from *The Silent Gods* to *The*

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Yerima, like the previous generations of Nigerian playwrights, also probes into the colonial phase of Nigerian history with a view to re-writing colonial accounts as exemplified in *The Trails of Oba Ovonramwen, Attahiru and Ameh Oboni the Great*. He also explores the contradictions inherent in the lives of some contemporary Africans especially in the interactions between indigenous religions and Christianity and Islam. *Muse and Mimesis: Critical Perspectives on Ahmed Yerima's Drama*, a book of essays that I edited in 2007 is the first major scholarly work on the dramatic aesthetics of this playwright who has produced about 40 plays. Professor Dapo Adelugba aptly sums up the contributions of *Muse and Mimesis* to the criticism of contemporary dramatic literature when he remarks in the blurb:

Muse and Mimesis pioneers a new trend in responsible criticism which does not kow tow to generational eulogies or to damning ideological expletives. Gbemisola Adeoti, here, assembles a set

of literary/dramatic essays by worthy peers who attempt, in a methodical manner, 'to identify the character and characteristics of a growing dramatist and theatrician, who can boast of more than twenty charming plays.

The concern with politics and the various aesthetic forms adopted by contemporary Nigerian playwrights to convey it informs my study of adaptation and transposition techniques in the plays of Soyinka, Osofisan and Yerima in a monograph - *Aesthetics of Adaptation in Contemporary Nigerian Drama* (2010c). It is also the overriding concern behind my conversation with eight dramatists; male and female, established and emerging, in *Voices Offstage: Nigerian Dramatists on Drama and Politics* (2010b). The dramatists interviewed include Femi Osofisan, Esiaba Irobi, Tess Onwueme, Ahmed Yerima, Irene Salami, Emmy Idegú, Akinwumi Isola and Niyi Osundare. In her review of these two publications, Jane Plastow of the Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds remarks: "These are two extremely useful contributions to the ever growing publications on Nigerian theatre. Gbemisola Adeoti has a clear, original voice and brings new angles, concerns and playwrights to public attention" (2011, 144).

Aside the genre of drama, I have studied the vision of Renaissance in a new African continent, a 21st century imperative as expressed in the recent novels of Ayi Kwei Armah and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Armah is a Ghanaian writer who now lives in a comfortably visible obscurity of Popenguine in Senegal. In Adeoti 2005c, I observe a transition in the artistic vision of Armah, from the critical realism of *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born*, *Fragments* and *Why are we so Blest?* to the communitarian and pan-African aesthetics of *The Healers* and *Two Thousand Season*. He gives this communitarian aesthetics a deeper Mythopoeic contemporaneity in *Osiris Rising* which he subtitles: "a novel of Africa Past, Present and Future".

Armah is undoubtedly, a pan-African intellectual who is committed to social inquiry. Beyond his diagnosis of Africa's postcolonial



Ayi Kwei Armah

predicaments, he analyses choices open to the continent in order to achieve self-discovery and true liberation from political, economic and cultural domination by the West. In my reading of his novels, I identified the following as factors canvassed by Armah as being crucial to the realisation of Africa's Renaissance: a dialogic engagement between the past and the present; a democratic system of governance to replace dictatorship of any sort; a united Africa that collapses geo-national political structures bequeathed by colonialism; a reformed educational system that centres on Africa in its form and content; a linkage between Africa and its Diaspora; and the creation of an African personality that is not burdened by the past, but confronts the present and future with confidence and self knowledge. From this, it is clear that politically engaged novels of Armah and those of other writers like Ngugi, Sembene Ousmane and so on can generate greater awareness and necessary stimuli for social change. They need to be considered along with other works of social inquiry in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the nature and causes of Africa's developmental challenges. This is important in the contemporary search for alternative direction for emancipation. Armah calls this alternative "Re-making of Africa". This vision of Re-inventing the continent is the crux of my study of Ngugi's recent novels – *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow* in Adeoti 2015. The essay highlights salient ideas about Africa's travails and the prospects for a brighter future for the continent in the unfolding global reality. In his dissection of Africa's developmental challenges, Ngugi recognises the continuous influence of the West on African culture, politics, economy, education and religion. However, he strongly believes that Africa will overcome its encumbrances of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism and take its significant place in the global arena. When this happens, there would have been a departure from Africa's marginality or otherness in which the continent is often constructed in Western epistemology.

Furthermore, in another essay: "The Military in Nigeria's Postcolonial Literature: An Overview", I discuss various responses of writers to the intervention of the military in governance between 1966 and 1999. The military is a major factor in Nigeria's post-independence politics. Its leviathan image in politics is also reflected in its recurrence as a subject in literary arts. Writers portray the military as contributing more to the crisis of leadership in the country rather than being the solution. But from my reading of a plethora of creative works from different generations of

writers, what comes out broadly is a lamentation of conditions of underdevelopment under the military, an institution that credits itself with messianic mission in dislodging the civilian regime.

However, this distasteful image of the military sharply contrasts with what another study on military in literature reveals. In "Narrating the Green Gods: (auto) Biographies of Nigerian Military Rulers", I examine autobiographies, biographies, and memoirs of soldiers who have participated in Nigeria's governance since the first coup of 1966. These self-representations are often motivated by the need to fill perceived gaps in certain documentation of Nigerian history, or provide their own side of national narratives which is believed to be distorted. In view of the involvement of the subject, the military rulers, in the process of production of the life narratives, objectivity is naturally problematic. The task of telling the truth which is the objective of life narratives becomes arduous. My findings reveal that common to these works are traces of adulation, hero-worshipping and self-deification. An example of this brand of life narratives includes Chidi Amuta's *Prince of the Niger*. These works can be helpful in scholarly attempts to probe the nature and character of governance during the military era as they present personalities who have shaped, re-shaped and also mis-shaped the country since 1966.

Nonetheless, readers of soldier's narratives should recognise that in spite of the claims to truthful representation, these live narratives are full of gaps, absences, silence, and omissions. Therefore, a live narrative of a military ruler should not be treated in isolation or as a complete whole. Rather, the essay recommends that it should be read along with other texts with which it shares a generic boundary and with which it is in a dialogic relationship.

Popular Culture and Culture Administration

Culture is a universal idea and practice across societies and ages. It is central to the life of a people. As I have remarked earlier, culture embraces the tangible and intangible pillars upon which the development and overall well-being of a people rest. It also involves "the patterns of inter-personal relations and the mode of human existence in their physical environment" (Adeoti 2014:52). Thus, Culture encapsulate not only politics and methods

of socialisation, but also other things like the educational system, skill acquisition, labour, fashion, mode of leisure, science, technology, religion, language and creative arts – music, dance, poetry, drama, film, painting, sculpture, architectural designs and so on. Edward Hall sums up the prime value of culture when he submits that “there is not an aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture (1981:16). Kofi Awoonor presses this view further: “No national efforts to forge ahead can succeed without close reference to the national culture and history” (2012: xii).

One permanent feature of culture is dynamism; it keeps on adjusting to new developments in its bid not to stagnate. As people interact across geo-social boundaries, cultural contents become modified due to borrowing and assimilation. But changes in culture notwithstanding, the constant element is that every aspect of culture is expected to aid human beings in having a more comfortable and meaningful life in the present and even in the hereafter. Literature, like other arts, enables us through its methods of representation and decoding, to understand the interstices of culture as well as their dynamic operations in a society from time to time.

The bifurcation of societies into political and economic classes of the rich and the poor; the ruler and the ruled, the bourgeois and the proletariat also plays out in the realm of cultural productions. Thus, just as the elite develop taste for certain arts to establish their hegemony and reinforce their control of power, the masses also entertain themselves and create their own arts to express themselves and search for meaning of existence. Such arts are embedded with oppositional discourse, to confront power and, perhaps, demand for social justice. This gives rise to the idea of the high and low art or elite culture and popular culture.

The latter with which we are concerned in this lecture refers to cultural productions of the ordinary people or members of the lower rung of the social ladder. These productions are used to articulate their feelings and desires to step up in the social ladder and have access to those good things of life denied them on account of their social class. They include literature, film, cartoon, graffiti, music, painting, dance and fashion, all of which are integrated into the larger historical, social and political canvass representing the struggles for survival in the modern world. The ordinary people who constitute the producer, the subject and the audience of these

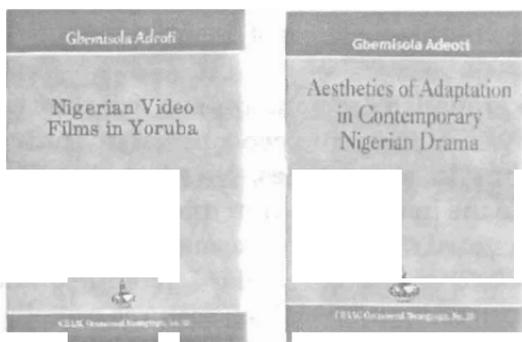
arts find appropriate idioms to depict their class experience. Thus, the popular art forms are usually accessible not only in terms of language and experience depicted but also in terms of financial cost.

My scholarly background in dramatic arts and literature has placed me at a strategic position (disciplinary and geo-cultural) to study African popular culture from within. In recent times, I have widened the scope of my research to include the home video film tradition. I thank Professor Wole Ogundele who provided me appropriate mentorship in this area. For some years now, I have been teaching Popular Literature and the Mass Media (LIT 613) at the Postgraduate level. Film features prominently among the topics in this course, while it also finds suitable references in Contemporary African Drama, that I teach at both Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels (LIT 306 and LIT 612) respectively. Aside from my research findings in this area which I have disseminated through journal articles, essays in books and a monograph, I have been providing mentorship to students who are interested in popular culture. I have successfully supervised and I am still supervising graduates students writing their theses on various aspects of the film tradition in contemporary Africa. For instance, recently, I co-authored an essay on the challenges of language in Nigerian film with Abdullahi Lawal, one of my former MA candidates (Adeoti and Lawal 2014).

Among many problems confronting the video film-maker, that of language of communication seems to be the most gripping and daunting. The language problem assumes a critical dimension due to the multi-lingual nature of the country (with over 250 languages) on the one hand and the ambiguous attraction of English language, the colonial language, on the other. English has been enjoying some prestige especially among the youths who constitute the bulk of the audience of the video film and the elite.

Since its inception in 1988 with Isola Ogunsola's *Ajé ni Ìyá mi*, the home video tradition in Nigeria has been growing in access and acclaim. Its viewership goes beyond boundaries of ethnicity, language, religion, class, gender and age. From our finding, one challenge arising from this popularity is that of language of communication. What language should a film employ in order to reach the widest audience possible, boost its commercial rating and have the desired impact on the audience? What language should the African

film-maker adopt to communicate with its local and international audience?



Admittedly, this is a crucial issue in film production. But because of its artistic, technical and economic implications, it has also become crucial in criticism and theoretical discourse of this brand of popular culture. African writers have been grappling with the same problem for decades, resulting in different options and experimentations⁵.

In our study of *Araromire* and *Irapada* (Adeoti and Lawal 2014), two films by Kunle Afolayan, we analyse various options explored by the film-maker in handling the language issue. He mixes Standard English and Pidgin with indigenous languages. The result is frequent code-mixing and code switching. In the two films, five languages are represented – Yorùbá, English, Hausa, Igbo and Pidgin, but Yorùbá is the dominant language. It is true that the matter of language in African artistic expressions has been there for a long time. However, that Afolayan is raising it afresh and coming up with some unique options in the film medium underscores the importance of the issue and justifies our focus on it in this research.

The concern with communicating across borders through film is also pursued in another article – “Border-neutering Devices in Nigerian Home Video Tradition” (Adeoti 2010d). Here, I examined the communicative devices employed in selected films by Mainframe Film and Television Production (Mainframe) under the leadership of Tunde Kelani. Mainframe films use multi-cultural settings, multi-linguistic situations, transnational characters and motifs. The essay identifies and discusses trans-border communicative devices in *Abeni* Part I and II, *Narrow Path* and *Arugba*. Both *Abeni* and *Narrow Path* were shot in locations in Nigeria and Benin Republic with popular artistes drawn from both countries. English, French and Yorùbá are the languages used in the dialogue.

Arugba addresses a political problem common to many African countries – the menace of authoritarianism which often tends to endanger democracy. As part of its trans-border appeal techniques, the film is set in Ilu Nla in 2008. “Ilu Nla” in Yorùbá means a big town. It can refer to a city, a state, a region, a nation or even the African continent. Ilu Nla actually illustrates all that is right and wrong with politics/governance in post-independence Africa. From the beginning, Ilu Nla is bedeviled with political instability, looting of public treasury, mass poverty, hunger, unemployment, insecurity, inflation and other familiar indicators of crisis of development in a modern state.

The story of politics is blended with love in the film while affirming the import of African tradition in effectively mediating the challenges of modern life. Love as a subject appeals to audience across gender, generational and geo-national margins. The use of music, whether as interlude or as part of the plot, is also identified as one of the trans-border devices. The lyrics of the songs are critical of the despotic establishment headed by Oba Adejare and they reinforce the themes of the film. For instance, *A fi fila p'erin*, a song sourced in Yorùbá proverb, provides a lesson in moderation; a value that is lacking in many African leaders – Idi Amin (Uganda), Mobutu Sese Seko (Zaire), Siad Bare (Somalia), Kamuzu Banda (Malawi), Marcias Nguema (Equatorial Guinea), Bokassa (Central African Republic), Blaise Compaore (Burkina Faso), Yoweri Museveni (Uganda), Laurent Gbagbo (Ivory Coast), and of late Pierre Nkurunziza (Burundi). The significant lesson in the film is that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Excessive love for power courts disgrace. Therefore, the implication for African politics is that power is transient and those who govern recklessly like Oba Adejare, are likely to end disgracefully. I have also explored in greater details, the thematic pre-occupation of this film and its implications for democracy in Nigeria after the return of military rule in 1999 in another essay - “The Sheep and its Old Cloth: A Portrait of Nigeria's Post-Military Democracy in *Arugba*” (Adeoti 2011a). The issue is equally addressed along with other germane ones in a journal article - “Home Video Films and the Democratic Imperative in Contemporary Nigeria” (Adeoti 2009b) and a monograph – *Nigerian Video Films in Yorùbá* (Adeoti 2014c).

The monograph is an introductory study of video films of Yorùbá expression. Using the theoretical framework of genre in its discourse, it provides insights into the historical development of the video film from the indigenous

performance traditions to the travelling theatre groups, the radio and television drama series, photo-play magazines and literary drama. The study identifies its various themes such as love, politics, religion and gender inequality, all of which are guided by people's past and present realities. Language in Yorùbá film is also discussed with attention to the use of symbol, gesture, mimicry, panegyric, invective, proverb, code-mixing and code-switching, street slang and dialect variation. Also highlighted are cinematic techniques such as flashback, allusion, foreshadowing, sound track and décor. Attention is called to some gaps and inadequacies noticed in this genre. They include: repetition of story lines, thin plot that is padded up with prolonged scenes, digression, flashback and long-drawn establishment shots. Other inadequacies noticed are incongruous costuming; English subtitles that poorly represent the spoken Yorùbá, and obsessive recourse to magic, miracle and ritual in a way that cripples independent thoughts and practical actions.

These problems, however, are not insurmountable. As I have argued in an earlier paper (Adeoti 2007b), there is a need for collaboration between experts in Higher Institutions in the areas of literary studies, theatre and media arts as well as practitioners in the industry in order to address the identified problems and also to raise the quality of Nigerian films.

In all these critical reflections, I have explored the affinity between literature and film as modes of cultural productions. Nonetheless, as a scholar who subscribes to functional aesthetics and who also blends theory with practice, apart from my teaching and research, I have made my expertise available in editing and subtitling of some films. One of them is Kola Oyewo's *Ija Akoni*. I have also acted in some successful and well-rated films. Among them are: *Afonja*, *Owo Eje* and *Ofin Ga* by Remdel Optimum Communications Limited and *Omo University* by Muyideen Oladapo. Mr Vice Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen, let us have a piece of the action!

My participation in the production of these and other films was borne out of my desire to drive home the point that the video film tradition stands to be enriched in standard and quality if we have an active collaboration between those of us in the centres of knowledge and practitioners who are right there on the field. I called it "School to Street connection" in Adeoti 2007b. In acting in film and on stage, I have found very useful, my experience in literary and film criticism. I have also enriched my research and knowledge in the course

of interacting with experienced actors and actresses engaged in each project. Femi Osofisan aptly captures this symbiosis when he remarks in his preface to *Nigerian Video Films in Yorùbá*:

...he [Adeoti] is also able to profit from his own personal experience, having been actively involved in the industry himself, principally in the role of actor in some of the films. It is, therefore, to be expected that the study would give us as it does, an intriguing blend of both scholarly detachment and affective engagement of impassive analysis mingled with subjective empathy" (vi).

At this juncture, I wish to dwell a bit on my experience in the administration of cultural studies in the University. By your authority, I became the Acting Director of the Institute of Cultural Studies on 1st of August, 2011. A year later, I was appointed as the substantive Director of the Institute for a period of three years which expires on 31st July 2015.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen, at the end of that term, I do not intend to seek for a third term.

My appointment has given me the opportunity to put into practice some of the ideas canvassed in my research efforts as a literary scholar with deep interest in the interaction between culture and literature. I have always been interested in probing the influence of African culture and tradition on contemporary literary creations. Thus, programmes at the Institute under my leadership are geared toward rekindling interests in African cultural practices among members of the University community and people outside the precinct of the ivory tower. Some of the programmes target our staff and students while some are principally meant for children who represent the future of any culture. In all we do as an Institute, we constantly have at the back of our mind, the need for synergy between the "town" and the "gown" as they say in common parlance. I believe that our poetry, dance, story-telling and performance traditions hold infinite possibilities for the understanding of African past and present. They can also empower us to formulate better responses to the challenges of development, globalisation, modernity and other nagging concepts in contemporary knowledge space. As I have argued in Adeoti 1998, Adeoti 2003b and Adeoti 2014b, there are many cultural practices among various ethnic groups that can be explored towards addressing current riddles of existence in Africa. Much of the problems facing the continent today can be

traced to the disruption in African's march of history by Euro-Asian slave trade and colonialism as well as inappropriate adjustment by the rulers and the ruled after independence. There is, therefore, the need to re-appraise the traditional values and beliefs of various communities.

In "The Tortoise Archetype: A Theory of Satire in Nigerian Drama" (Adeoti 1998), based on my conviction that our critical interpretation of contemporary African literature can be deepened by a knowledge of indigenous lore, I studied the manifestation of the Tortoise as an archetypal figure in Nigeria drama and proposed a theory of satire based on the palpable correlations between the butts of satire in Nigerian drama and the Tortoise, the trickster in Yorùbá folktales. Two paradigms are recognised in this regard. The first is the Instrumentality paradigm where the trickster figure is used as a medium by the playwright to expose the misdeeds of the target. The second is the Intentionality paradigm which is generated from tales in which the trickster becomes a victim of his own ingenious designs.

The submission in the essay mentioned above is that indigenous folklore can provide hermeneutic codes for greater understanding of contemporary literature. It is also the crux of the argument in "Traditional Cleansing Rites and State Reconstruction in Contemporary Nigerian Drama" (Adeoti 2003b). The essay reveals that in the structuring of plot and creation of characters in recent drama, there is a perceived appropriation of the traditional cleansing rites in the context of festivals of renewal during which the community purges itself of individual and collective misdeeds of the outgoing year so as usher the new one in on a clean slate.

The purification practice is basic to many religions in the world as it seeks to re-energise the productive forces in the community towards a better year ahead. This framework is deployed in my reading and interpretation of Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi*, Osofisan's *Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest* and Ahmed Yerima's *The Silent Gods*. These playwrights show their discontent with prolonged military rule, a factor that has been widely cited as impediment to development and good governance. They also indicate a longing for a truly democratic mode of governance. However, a project of democratisation as shown in the plot of each play is incomplete or will be unrealisable without drawing along with it, a project of demilitarisation. As argued in the essay, the polity needs to be freed from authoritarian ethos and this is symbolised in the various acts of cleansing embarked upon by characters in the community of each play.

Recognition of the necessity for an organic link between the past and the present serves as the motivating force behind many of the programmes organised by the Institute of Cultural Studies during my tenure so far, as the Director. In line with the objectives of the Institute, we hosted visiting researchers from African countries, America, United Kingdom and Latvia, who were working on different aspects of culture. We have also organised learned conferences, workshops and seminars on salient cultural issues with particular emphasis on Africa. The Institute as a critical stake holder in the realisation of "cultural excellence", a key element in the mission of the University, remains committed to the promotion of knowledge about culture through research and community services. I am convinced that there was much and there is still much value in African culture that we can draw from in addressing many of the problems facing us as a people in today's world. That is why, in our activities at the Institute, we identify useful cultural sources and resources. But we do not stop at identification. Rather, we interact with them and provide appropriate platforms through our "town and gown" programmes for the University community and the larger world to have access to them with a view to deepening knowledge and sustaining interests in cultural matters. Colonialism and westernisation should not continue to be interpreted as the death knell of Africa and its cultures.

To this end, we explore music, dance, poetry, story-telling, drama, painting, design and other art forms to drive home the need for cultural re-awakening. Under my Directorship, we have resuscitated the seminar series and made it regular. Its orientation is more inter-disciplinary, thus, providing as usual, veritable meeting point between the Humanities and the Sciences. Some of the papers presented have found outlet in *IFE: Journal of the Institute of Cultural Studies* No. 10, while No. 11 is being prepared for publication.

In another significant achievement, the Institute collaborated with the Department of Dramatic Arts to organise the First ever Conference of Nigerian Playwrights from 8th to 10th March, 2013. The Conference was supported by the University. It had in attendance, established and emerging Nigerian playwrights, from J. P. Clark to Rasheed Gbadamosi, Kalu Uka, Femi Osofisan (the Convener), Olu Obafemi, Tunde Fatunde, Ben Tomolaju, Stella Oyedepo, Irene Salami, Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju, Arnold Udoka, Ojo Bakare, Lekan Balogun, Segun Adefila, Segun

Oyekunle and so on. Among the participants were also seasoned literary critics: Biodun Jeyifo, Abiola Irele, Mabel Ewrierhoma, Jare Ajayi, Jahman Anikulapo and others too numerous to recount. The University, with the Playwrights' Confab, has lived up to its rating as a pioneer in arts and culture spheres⁶. The proceedings of the conference are now published along with a Directory of emerging Nigerian playwrights. I co-edited the two publications with Femi Osofisan, the Convener (see Osofisan and Adeoti 2014a and 2014b).

Of equal, if not greater impact, was the Fagunwa Colloquium, which the Institute organised on the 25th of March, 2014. I was the Convener and the Chairman of the Local Organising Committee of the Colloquium. It was aimed at redirecting attention to literatures in indigenous languages, an area in which Fagunwa was a pioneer. It also sought to generate new perspectives from a multi-disciplinary study of Fagunwa's narrative arts. These aims were realised, not only through the dance, drama and poetry performance as well as the scholarly papers presented during the colloquium, but also through the Art Exhibition entitled: "Inside African Forests". The exhibition featured various art works inspired by the forest motif, a recurring ideation in Fagunwa's fiction. Mr. Vice Chancellor, I am delighted to inform this gathering that I have completed the editing of all the papers presented and they constitute chapters in a forthcoming book: *Inside African Forests: New Perspectives on D. O. Fagunwa's Novels*. It is being published by Universal Books, a publishing outfit based in the city of Leeds, United Kingdom.

Still in pursuit of the Institute's objectives, we organised a one-day workshop on the art and production of African talking drum as part of the "catch-them-young" outreach programme on the 5th of February, 2014. Students, male and female, from selected Primary and Secondary Schools (public and private) in Osun State were invited to participate. The workshop was coordinated by Chief 'Yemi Ogunyemi who was then an Artiste-in-Residence in the Institute. It was an exciting experience for the students and their teachers. The students were taken painstakingly through the practical processes of making traditional drums and producing both sound and sense from the drums. It is gratifying to note that by the time the workshop was over, the participating students were able to make melody and meaning from the sound patterns of the talking drum, which ordinarily, is a complex art.

Whether a culture will survive or not depends on the youth population of that culture. By employing this light hearted approach to learning serious issues of culture, we set out to encourage the young participants at the workshop to take more than passing interest in their cultural resources. They should also stop seeing cultural things as being archaic, unsophisticated and inferior. The same message resonates through other programmes such as musical concerts, literary readings and film festivals that the Institute has been organising during my tenure. As we were preparing for one of our musical concerts recently, I got a text message which, somehow, assured me that I was actually making the desired impact in the right direction: "Prof. I have followed events and programmes at ICS since you became the director and I must confess I am highly impressed by the standard and rich culture on display. Keep it up sir. The sky cannot limit you". Pharm Akinbile.



African Talking Drum Workshop

Again Mr. Vice Chancellor, I thank you for the opportunity given me to serve the Institution and humanity in this capacity. I also appreciate my collaborators in the Organising Committees of all these projects.

Memorandum of (Mis) Understanding and the Translator's Art

In spite of difference in language, culture and historical experience, there is in a sense, a common vein running through the heart of world literature. There seems to be a general agreement about the utilitarian value of literature especially in the acculturation and socialisation process. There are certain universal values that are commonly experienced in different

archetypes are facts of life that recur in different forms and situations from culture to culture. They also manifest in the literature of each society through timeless experiences such as : birth, growing up, death, life after death, rejuvenation or redemption, love, fertility, hatred, gender and generational struggles, vice, virtues and so on. It makes for the recurrence of certain character types such as the trickster, the fool, the clown, the miser, the tragic hero, the devil or villain, the jealous lover and the hen-pecked husband among others. The presence of universal truth in literary works to a great extent, accounts for the possibility that a text would have meaning for and relevance to people outside the spatio-temporal borders of its origin. The idea of inevitability of death and the values of heroism encapsulated in *Beowulf*, an anonymous Anglo-Saxon "epic" poem is meaningful to a 21st century African as a result of these cross-cultural values. Literature, therefore, generally strives to speak across the walls of time and beyond borders of culture and space. Adaptation is one of the legitimate means of facilitating a trans-cultural rendering of literary idea. Another method is translation.

I have engaged both practices in my contributions to literary criticism. For instance, *Aesthetics of Adaptation in Contemporary Nigerian Drama* (Adeoti 2010c) examines the place of adaptation in Nigerian literary drama. It is observable that apart from myth, legend, history and contemporary politics, adaptation is another long-standing source of African drama. While paying attention to the general factors behind instances of adaptation, the study uses the works of Soyinka, Osofisan and Yerima for illustration. It is clear that in their works, political and historical concerns inform the choice of texts for adaptation and the mode of transposition. The dramatists through adaptation engage in a critical-soul searching to dilate on Africa's predicament in postcolonial era, but the challenges as evident from the pre-texts are not peculiar to Africa now, but present in various dimensions in human history. Consequently, adaptation facilitates a dialogue across frontiers of culture and history.

However, of much concern at this juncture is the art of translation through which an existing literary work is rendered in another language (which presupposes another culture) with the aim of correctly representing the original text in the new language. Translation, where it is successful, ensures greater access to the work of a writer especially by readers outside

the language and culture of the writer. This age-long practice in literary history has enriched the canons of literature. Many of the great works of literature today come down to us in translation. The Greco-Roman classics of Homer, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes, Seneca, Plautus, Terence and others made their journeys into literature in European languages – French, Spanish, English, German and Italian on the wings of translation. In fact, it is through translation that those of us in the so called “anglophone” countries are able to experience the experience of fellow Africans as documented in “francophone” African literature. Therefore, the translator, like the adapter, constructs bridges across the gulf that separates texts from different linguo-cultural background.

I must confess that I have a special interest in the art of translation; from the nebulous ones rendered on the pulpit to the translated literary work from one language to another. For a while now, apart from attempts at English subtitling of selected Yorùbá films, I have been making efforts to translate into English, Oladejo Okediji's *Aja lo Leru*. Besides, as part of my research, I have undertaken a critical study of the English translations of D. O. Fagunwa's novels in an essay: “Memorandum of (mis)Understanding: Thoughts on Fagunwa's Novels and their Translations” (Adeoti 2013). In these efforts, I have derived a great awareness of the pleasure and torture of translation. Let us take for example, the effort at translating Oladejo Okediji's novel. Okediji is a prominent Yorùbá writer whose novels and plays reflect a deep mastery of the language and culture of his people. His novels including *Agbalagba Akan* and *Atoto Arere*, explore the world of crime and law enforcement complete with elements of suspense and surprise. Unlike the marvellous reality of Fagunwa's fiction, Okediji is interested in presenting the every day experience of living in urban and rural areas in contemporary times. While *Aja lo leru* and *Agbalagba Akan* centre on the exploits of Lapade and his companion, Tafa, in tracking down robbers and kidnapers around the city of Ibadan, *Atoto Arere* presents the story of Alaba, the young protagonists who takes to the ruinous road of stealing and armed robbery from childhood because he lacks parental care. He comes from a broken home. In the end, he dies ingloriously, leaving behind emptiness in spite of all the struggles.

Translating Okediji, however, presents it own peculiar challenges, far from the mysteries of Fagunwa. Truly, there are no gnomes and ghommids in Okediji's novels, but there are also daunting linguistic kernels for the translator to crack, beginning with the proverbial titles. For example, how

best can a translator render *Aja lo leru*, knowing well that the concept and function of *aja* in Yorùbá architecture are quite different from that of rafter in English, the new language and culture that the novel is about to enter through the door of translation? What of *Agbalagba Akan*? Will “a crab-like elder” or “a shameless elder” make any meaning? Will it correctly render Okediji's idea in English? Soyinka translates *Igbo Olodumare* as *In the Forest of Olodumare* while Olu Obafemi renders *Adiitu Olodumare* as *The Mysteries of God*. Both appear faithful enough in rendering Fagunwa's original idea, but how can we translate into English Okediji's title - *Atoto Arere*?

Apart from the titles, Okediji is fond of rolling proverbs upon idioms and epigrams all in sheer delight with language and in an attempt to communicate in the most figurative and humorous manner. He deliberately searches for the most imagistic and effective options in knotting sound to sense. These are some of the preliminary worries that the translator of Okediji has to wrestle with. Literal translation as adopted in many instances by the translators of Fagunwa's novels is not likely to be of much help in this instance. I made this point in Adeoti 2013 already cited above.

In translation, there are three recurring paradigms. The first is the practice of translation by resorting to metaphrases which renders idea in word for word correspondence. The second is the paraphratic paradigm which is a deliberate rendering of the source text in words or ideas that “correspond” or are deemed to be equivalent to the original. The third category fuses the two paradigms and it is evident in the studied English translations of Fagunwa's novels⁷. Kasperek refers to metaphrases option as “formal equivalence” and paraphrases as “dynamic equivalents”. One agrees with Kasperek when he remarks that “competent translation entails the judicious blending of formal and dynamic equivalents” (83).

The translators – Soyinka, Adeniyi and Obafemi – are also creative writers and they are competent speakers of both Yorùbá and English. As writers, they lend the translated version, their own creative resources in order to produce something that would measure up to the original texts in elegance of style and sobriety of subject. In this case, they sometimes create, rather than serve as passive re-transmitters of Fagunwa's idea from Yorùbá to English. Sometimes they embark on literal translations or metaphrases that can be seen as simply shaving Fagunwa's head in his absence. One

common impediment on the path of this option is the natural difference between the language structure, pattern of meaning and the cultural realities of the two languages involved. It is observable that sometimes, literal translation vitiates sense or stands in the way of intelligibility and may not correctly represent Fagunwa to the native speakers or speakers of English who are not conversant with Yorùbá sentence structures and idioms. It can generate humour for those who understand the two languages and who can recognise the inherent incongruity in the literal option. But to a reader who is not bilingual, understanding may be impaired.

There are many instances, but let us consider few examples. Soyinka renders Fagunwa's expression:

"Ngo da ina mo-o lori" (Irunmole, 8) as
"I'll blaze fire-tracks through your skull this instant"
(Daemons, 18).

The above action refers to "shooting" rather than literal fire as implied in the translation. Another example is: "I welcomed them **hands and feet**" (*Daemons*, 31). What the narrator, Iwapele, does is to receive with warmth and affection, her guests who are emissaries of God from heaven. But this expression is a direct transposition of the Yorùbá saying: *mo gba won towotese (Irunmole, 18)*. Other examples that call attention to literal translations and which the non-bilingual should approach with caution are:

"I followed my buttocks to the ground, wallowing in the throes of death"
(Daemons, 25) Mo ba idi lo si ile; mo nje aporo iku (Irunmole, 13)
"I took hold of tears and began to weep them" (Daemons, 39)
mo bere mu ekun: mo nsun (Irunmole, 24)

In his second translation, *In the Forest of Olodumare*, Soyinka continues the experiment when he says: "My **buttocks turned to water** and my trouser band was loosened" (*Forest*, 192) as the rendering of "Idi mi di omi okun sokoto mi si tu (*Igbo*, 141).

Adeniyi who is greatly inspired by Soyinka borrows a leaf from his model, hence, he translates *o je go-ngo gbese (Irinkerindo, 72)* as "he **eats lumps of debt**" (107).

Like Soyinka and Adeniyi, Obafemi also uses metaphrases, but he does so in fewer instances. An example is cited below:

“he was crowned shortly after the king climbed the rafters” (*Mysteries*, 207)

...*lehin ti oba wo aja, were ni nwon fi on je oba* (*Adiitu*, 142).

The use of formal equivalents by translators as seen above presents a risk of limited understanding or mis-understanding, whereas, the essence of the translation art is to achieve a better understanding of the text by a greater number of people. A non-Yorùbá speaker who settles for the surface meaning of such literal expressions may not fully realise their significance and the intent of the author. All these challenges of transference are considered in the essay as pebbles in the grains of hermeneutics as they sometimes mystify further the intriguing diction of Fagunwa. It may lead the reader to confusion rather than mediating between the original text and successive generations of its readers. Let us just imagine the following translations of Yorùbá expressions into English in a play or a novel:

“I greet you with guards with guards, I greet you with soldiers with soldiers”

Mo ki yin teso teso, mo ki yin toloogun toloogun

Gbangba became a leopard, kedere visited him.

Gbanga d' ekun, kedere bee wo

Be eating the life of your head!

Maa j' aye ori e!

The Preacher said: “Come and wear the vehicle of salvation”

Alufaa so pe: “E wa wo oko igbala”

Midnight does not know a Bishop

Oru ko mo eni owo

The government will use stomach to beat stomach with the workers.

Ijoba yoo fi ikun lu ikun pelu awon osise

He hangs an axe across his head

O fi aake k'ori

He threw up spittle and collected it with his face

O tuto soke, o fi oju gbaa

He is using knife of the back to eat my yam.

O n fi obe eyin je mi n'isu

The thief paid homage to the hare when he saw a policeman.

Ole naa juba ehoro nigba ti o ri olopa kan

She told her lover: "my body is on the road"

O so fun ololufe re: "ara mi wa lona"

If it is sweet, it won't be plenty; brief is the soup of a maiden,

Kii dun kopo, soki lobe oge.

Head gear is not as sweet as knowing how to tie it.

Gele o dun bii ka moo we.

How can a native speaker of English or a reader who is not a Yorùbá-English bilingual derive the original or intended meanings in these expressions that are close to the options adopted by Fagunwa's translators? That is why a non-Yorùbá reader or a reader who is not a Yorùbá-English bi-lingual should bear in mind the mines of metaphrases and should reach out for more knowledge of Yorùbá pattern of sentences, Yorùbá worldview as well as knowledge system to fully apprehend the metaphratic ideas. In concluding this section, I wish to say that in the years ahead, I will continue to devote a good part of my scholarly attention to the art of translation, in practice and in theory.

Summary and Conclusion

Mr. Vice Chancellor distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. I have succinctly captured in the foregoing, the trajectory of my career in academics and my contributions through community services, teaching and research in the areas of literary studies. I feel a sense of fulfillment that I have been able to

nurture my interest in literature from my secondary school days at Koso Community Grammar School in Iseyin where I emerged the best graduating student in the Arts in 1983 up till the present day as a Professor of Literature in English with special interests in dramatic literature, poetic traditions, creative writing, popular culture and the public sphere. It is indeed a thing of joy to have reached this height, though the joy would have been fuller and deeper, if my father were to be alive today and in this hall to witness the occasion. **Agbonyin Alamu**, *ibi o ba wa, ile ire o!* My father it was, who sponsored my education even up to the early years of my doctoral studies, in demonstration of his immense love and astounding passion for learning.

In my academic career, I have been able to combine theory with practice and creative writing with criticism. It is in such harmonious fusion that I believe the joys of literature lies. It is also in this ideal that the academy should draw its essence and vitality especially in a developing nation like ours that needs to maximally tap from human resources in its centres of knowledge production in order to solve its myriad of problems. I do uphold the affinity between literature and the tenor of politics in a given society. Literature provides a viable observatory from where we can access and assess the nature of politics and socio-economic development in a state. Hence, while writers generate their ideas from the society, they are expected to be a step ahead of the society as visionaries who should know the right direction for communal revitalisation. Writers point away from a direction where nothing happens toward "the shore of possibilities". They are the ones equipped by inspiration to dig a hole beneath a crocodile infested waters of existence that leads into a sprawling castle on the horizon. Writers are well positioned by their art to be capable of shaving in their absence, the heads of those who shave their own heads in their absence in the polity.

As a scholar of literature, I recline comfortably at the intersections of literature and politics, on the one hand and creative writing and criticism on the other. The important roles that literature plays in the political and cultural life of a people stimulate and sustain my interests in that category of literature that interrogates African politics and governance from pre-colonial times to the contemporary era. I have devoted a significant part of my research to engaging this kind of literature with a view to contributing ideas that can improve the lot of Africans in contemporary global political economy where all things have never been equal.

It is gratifying to note that today, the gale of democratisation that has been blowing across Africa since the last two decades of the 20th century has continued unabated, given the recent political changes in Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Liberia, Ghana, Burkina Faso and what is known as Arab Spring that features regime changes in North Africa, from Egypt to Tunisia and Libya. The ordinary people in these nations are no longer content to have their heads shaved in their absence by the rulers as they recover their voices and demand greater participation in an expanded democratic space. The new unfolding political order entails new challenges to African writers like other citizens. While some of these challenges are not too radically different from those confronted in the early post independence years, some, like the increasing terror of terrorism, are spawned by new developments in the global order. But head or tail, I am persuaded that we, as writers and critics, will not lack appropriate idioms and styles to capture the changing equation of African politics in the 21st century.

In my creative writing, teaching and literary criticism in the years ahead, I will continue to match theory with practice and link the school to the street. I will also continue to mentor younger ones in the field, making them to discover the dignity of physical and mental exertion in the creative process so as to savour the immeasurable sweetness of literary stew. For me, literature is the right road to take and from the recognition through laurels and awards received so far, I know that I am on the exact track. For instance, I have attended International conferences and summer schools in South Africa, Mozambique, Morocco, Senegal, Ghana, Benin Republic and Germany, all of them sponsored by the organisers. In 2007, I was one of the recipients of the Travel Fellowship to Ghana awarded by the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. I also received in 2008, the British Academy Visiting Scholars Fellowship for Early Career Scholars. That Fellowship enabled me to conduct research between August and December 2008 at the Workshop Theatre, School of English, University of Leeds, United Kingdom. I have published the product of that research in a monograph (Adeoti 2010c).

Still in pursuit of the engagement of literature with politics, in 2009, I was one of the pioneer awardees of the Postdoctoral Fellowship of African Humanities Program organised by the American Council of Learned Societies based in New York, United States of America. The award was in

support of my project entitled: "Politics and the Urban Experience in West African Literature". Between December 2009 and March 2010, I was in Residence at the IIAS, Adenta, Accra, Ghana as part of the Fellowship. In 2012, I won the Presidential Fellowship of the African Studies Association (ASA) which facilitated my participation in the Association's Annual Conference held in the city of Philadelphia, USA between November and December 2012. Apart from being a Visiting Senior Lecturer at the Department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, between 2005 and 2007, I have served as External Examiner/External Assessor for several Universities including the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Benue State University, Makurdi, Osun State University, Osogbo, Adeyemi College of Education, Babcock University, Ilisan Remo and American University of Nigeria, Yola among others. In all these, I thank OLODUMARE, the boundless source of infinite knowledge.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, this marks a convenient point to end the story for this evening so that we can begin the next one. I thank you all for your patience and attention. With your presence, you have indeed, given me another subject for another story, another poem, another play and another essay. But never mind. As usual, I will not write them in your presence. Rather, I will wait for that tranquil moment of the muse when you are not there. Whatever I write and whatever meaning you are able to make out of the writing then, will still remain an eternal business of **LITERATURE**.

Notes

1. The Sultan being referred to here was Seyyid Said whose reign echoed in Ebrahim Hussein's historical tragedy, *Kinjeketile*.

2. The aptness of the trope of severance used by Achebe above or dismembering adopted by Ngugi is underscored by the fact that the act of sundering apart to which the continent has no ready remedies has continued till date in various forms: terrorism in Niger, Nigeria, Cameroun, Syria and Sudan, recent xenophobia attacks in South Africa, ethno-religious wars and so on.

3. Fela Anikulapo-Kuti dismissed the August 1983 General Election as "Baba nla nonsense" (Father of all nonsense) or "*Dem all crazy* – Democracy crazy demon, demonstration of craze, Crazy demonstration."

4. Literary criticism is not exclusive to the literate culture. In traditional African performance context for example, the audience constitute the critics and they provide the evaluation in the performance context. The audience's reactions to the performers, whether applause or disapproval take place within the context of performance, unlike criticism in the European tradition.

5. While some writers do not mind the English language (Soyinka, Armah, Clark etc) others would prefer the indigenous languages (Ngugi and Isola) while some would argue for a mixture of both (Rotimi, Percy Mtwa and Mbogeni Ngema). Some have tried the use of Pidgin English (Saro-Wiwa, Aig-Imokhuede and Fatunde) while Gabriel Okara experiments with literal translation of indigenous thoughts into English in *The Voice*.

6. The second edition of the Confab held recently in Ilorin from 6th to 8th March, 2015, hosted by Kwara State University.

7. The translations are Wole Soyinka's *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, an English translation of *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*, Dapo Adeniyi's *Expedition to the Mount of Thought*, (*Irinkerindo Ninu Igbo Elegbeje*), Soyinka's *In the Forest of Olodumare* (*Igbo Olodumare*) and Olu Obafemi's *The Mysteries of God* (*Adiitu Olodumare*).

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