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MINERS

Editor-in-Chief's Comments

This ninth edition of *IBJES* picks up its focus from disciplines as diverse as linguistics, communication studies, education, political science, classical studies and literary studies. These contributions confirm the versatility of English studies broadly housed in *IBJES* as they eminently reflect not only the centrality of linguistic structures and communicative tendencies across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, but also the inter-contextual orientations to networked paradigms and social experiences. The world today has long dispensed with scholars' independent screwing of loosened research materials in the limiting corners of their specialisations, with a vast body of collaborative ground lying wasted or being poorly tapped.

IBJES, as a dynamic outlet for knowledge dispensation, has consistently demonstrated its capacity to accommodate new research trends, across world cultures, that oscillate within all branches of linguistics and literary traditions. The papers in the current volume, from the outstanding contribution by Professor Peter Auer to the excellent article by Dr Sola Olorunyomi, together with the creative masterpiece by Professor Amaka Azuike, are rich and interesting packages of current knowledge which foreground the niche of IBJES in the global scholastic space.

I sincerely appreciate Professor Peter Auer, an *IBJES*' consulting editor, and one of the world front-line names in the code alternation scholarship. All the other authors are also appreciated for lending a hand in the sustenance of the standards of our highly cherished journal. This list covers the staff and students of the Department of English, University of Ibadan, who should have the praise for adding their force to the collective propellation of *IBJES*.

The road to sustained international-level publication is not traversed by charlatants or target-reckoning scholars whose interests terminate at the level of material reward. Rather, it is a route populated by high-spirited, knowledge-indebted and standard-responsive professionals. These colleagues are welcome aboard the flight of *IBJES* at all times.

Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale Professor of Literature and Editor in Chief

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THE DIALECTIC OF ORALITY AND IDEOLOGY IN WOLE SOYINKA'S IDANRE AND OGUN ABIBIMAN

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Abstract

The paper fuses three concerns: the thematic, stylistic and ideological as a strategy of textual engagement. And it commences by arguing against the tendency to consider the oral and written as binary sets, as cultural moments in cartesian divide. It identifies such overlaps through the African experience in orality and writing by reechoing Nsibidi, the Ajami tradition, the Meroe-Kushitic and the Kemetic Medu-Netcher. This habit of reading is then demonstrated, in a broad sense, by examining the dialectic of orality and ideology in two of Wole Soyinka's poems—Idanre and Ogun Abibiman. In specific terms, the conceptual essense of the dialectic here compels a textual examination of both the intricate and interstitial as interconnected in oral literary devices, which are also embedded ideological forms.

Keywords: Dialectic; Orality; Ideology; Wole Soyinka; Idanre and Ogun Abibiman.

1. Background, or A Foundational Rupture:

The artery of Modern African poetry can be safely said to comprise a diversity of literary traditions; yet, an aspect of this mosaic trenchantly

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reechoes an ebullient oral aesthetic impulse, in theme and style. However, in its most exhaustive exploration, it defies the traditional assusmption of the Oxford-Cambridge-London-Ibadan schools of commencing Africa's overall written tradition from about the 19th Century, a curious amnesia which in the words of the scholar Senayon Olaoluwa, plays the epic with African literature. That tradition for me, dates back to the African experience of Ajami literary writing of the era of the great Empires of the Western Sudan and beyond, as well as other earlier forms in the Ethiopic and Coptic Church written (and literary) traditions, or yet those earlierst manifestations in the Meroe-Kushitic and the Kemetic Medu-Netcher (See, Moore: 2010).

2. Introduction

The history of the literary then, as well as its background lettered/unlettered equation, will be more fulfilling to be seen as a crest and trough in access to the magic of writing; indeed, until recently, the entire world history had never had a sustained tradition of mass literacy and the literary derivative in such ascent. It is in this context that one must note that by the overwhelming victory of encoding through the written medium, modern African poetry is faster than ever losing the context of performance, an integral aspect of all literary forms, and faintly becoming an exercise for individual contemplation. Nevertheless, fresh aesthetic properties have been equally ingested into the corpus of the new poetry.

3. An Intersection:

Wole Soyinka's *Idamre* and *Ogun Abibiman* represent a fruitful appreciation of this intersection of the old and the new where the poet plumbs into oral depths in his evocation of a unique time-space, tone and setting, to produce a mythopoesis that is at once distant and familiar. Soyinka's field works between 1960 and 1962 in the study of Yoruba folk drama, seem to have rubbed on his poetry in a very intense way. Hence, we find a poetry that is suffused in chant-like rhythm, praise-name epithets, allusions, proverbs etc. Of this cognitive-aesthetic background, Soyinka says: "Yoruba aesthetic matrix is the fount of my creative inspiration; it influences my critical responses to other cultures and validates selective eclecticism" (Gibbs, 1980:4). Ogunjimi's study of

the poetry draws him to the same conclusion: "This forms the divine source of Soyinka's hermeneutics" (1995:5).

An entry point into the two collections will necessarily take aboard its integral conversation with concepts and discourses such as tradition, intertextuality, and post-colonial textual strategies. Deploying a cognitive-aesthetic approach in the textual analysis of the dense mythopoesis of the two titles (and particularly of *Idanre*), may be quite rewarding, given that the overall tone is deeply steeped in 'mythic imagination'. Walter Ong suggests in this regard that an understanding of "the relations of orality and literacy and the implications of the relations is not a matter of instant psychostory or instant phenomenology" (1982:3).

Idanre is divided into seven sections: 'deluge,... and after, pilgrimage, the beginning, the battle, recessional and, harvest.' On the other hand, *Ogun Abibiman* is divided into three sections: 'Inductions, Retrospect for Marchers and Sigidi." *Idonre* is a mythopoetic journey of essences and beginnings which the poet symbolizes through Yoruba consmogonical narrative of creation and primeval start. This partly explains why Macebuh and Ngara describe him in the following words respectively: "Soyinka is, first and foremost, a mythopoet; his imagination is, in a quite fundamental sense, a mythic imagination" (1981:201), ... "poet of grand conception who employs myth as a poetic device" (1990:94). Yet there is the other conception of myth, in the Fryean sense; that is, myth as the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oral." Frye indeed further suggests that "myth is the archetype, though it might be convenient to say myth only when referring to narrative, and archetype when speaking of significance" (1951:103-4).

Each section of *Idanre* corresponds with the ontological motion and development of this mythic and mytho-historic setting. The clouds "break" at the beginning of the poem and we observe the "descent" of the deities. Ogun's preeminence is registered here on account of his mytho-aesthetic vanguardism; he clears the primordial chaos, and charted a path. In spite of his attempt at self-effacement, citizens of Ire crown him as king, but, shortly afterwards Ogun, in an inevitable hubristic error, decimates his people in war! The persona gradually dissolves into the narrative in the last two sections. But in *Ogun Abibiman*, Ogun's sanity seems restored somewhat. Ogun is here reincarnated and he leads the Black struggle against the odious system

of apartheid, which Soyinka renders in the heroic tradition. The poet merges the mythical with the legendary, when Ogun aligns with Shaka in doing battle against apartheid. The incident, like the setting of *Idanre*, occasionally fuses mythical space with historical space. Even as the poem moves to the end where a clarion call "for celebration" is made, we are moved to a setting beyond the terrestrial, as the narrative transgresses known and recognizable space into the supersensible extraterrestrial. Olatunji names this feature as essential to the sequences of classical "Ifa divination narrrative which tends to overlap between the real world and that of dream and fantasy, a spirit world in which the unexpected, the bizarre and the supernatural happens" (1984:123).

Even a textual reading of *Ese* Ifa poems acquires heightened meaning when we locate its structuring devices of plot, setting, characterization and language in this ambience. This reading finds affirmation with Irele's suggestion that "no other area of Africa is the current along which this elaboration in literature of a continuous stream of collective consciousness from the traditional to the modern is so clearly evident, and so well marked out, as in Yorubaland" (1975:75).

Idanre indeed, commences with an archetypal motif in Yoruba creation mythology. From this primeval chaos, the gods descend, or are made manifest. Perhaps the most crucial element which is wantonly confused in the treatment of Yoruba belief system, is highly buttressed here. The poet reveals the gods, deities and entities as inhering neutral, and diverse energies. The presentation we get here is that their potentials could be binary, but more often —multiple. The magnetic and centrifugal nature of these energies are made to bear in stanzas 8-10 of the second section. The dual experience of the loyal wine girl in the hand of Ogun in so short a period, either in her secular manifestation or in the sacred form —further buttresses the diversity of the Yoruba pantheon and its renderings. The eighth stanza of section IV, describes the same deity as an "Orphan's Shield", yet ringing the same irony of 'savage beauty', with which he is described in Ogun Abibintan.

The exploration of archetypal symbolism is more pronounced in *Idanre*. Atunda, who shattered the god-head into smithereens, is played back in *Idanre*. Ajantala, the prototypal unbound(able) child-energy is also explored as:

[&]quot;...rebel birth

Monster child, wrestling pachyderms of myth ..."

The specific cognitive frame of the poetic narration tends to rupture our conventional compartmentalization of time-space. Reality and concretion are suspended for the greater part of the poem, even when we seem to be on the verge of the experiential of settings and locale as Idanre the knowable abode of contemporary man.

The second movement particularly intensifies this surreal ambience when the poet uses such dictions as 'voyage', 'powers of night,' 'drift away', 'gathering presences.' The experience gradually distances from a tone of the familiar. The incongruity of oral narrative comes to bear heavily on *Idanre* particularly. The stylistic source of this form is in the Yoruba 'alo apamo' (riddle) which is usually rendered in rather cryptic language. This, in fact, perhaps partly explains what has come to be misunderstood as tediousness in Soyinka's writing, and particularly his poetry. The instance of this folk aesthetic transposition is realised by Soyinka in this form of block characterization of the deities. Often, reference to Ogun comes as "the iron one" or, at other times, the "axe-handed one".

Soyinka uses the incident of 'the battle' to depict what constitutes an archetypal motif of lived experience. The quick reversals captured here not only represent moments of hope and disillusionment, but also bear a reference to the irony of social change, of revolutions that, not infrequently, devour their children. Closely aligned with this is the regime of despotism that transgresses a people's humble aspirations. No matter how benevolent, the title poem seems to be warning that self-proclaimed messiahs have, in the last count, recourse only to themselves. Ogun delivers but, ironically too, also devours his own people; and just in a moment of unbridled anger, he slaughters many, even as they yell in appeal:

'Lord of all witches, divine hunter Your men Ogun, Your men! His sword an outer crescent of the sun No eye can follow it, no breath draws In wake of burning vapour. Still they cry Your men Ogun! Your Men!' (1967:74) The Yoruba ritual text and languages of ase (literally, the said comes to pass) is deployed in *Ogun Abibinan* to emphasize the gravity of the theme of racial genocide. Ase embodies both a prediction and a prescription. It is affirmative, declarative and explicit in tone as we shall presently observe. In the context of divination, as we have mentioned elsewhere, its antecedent part is revealed 'cryptically and gradually' (1995:14). This pronouncement is recognised as a post-possession trance phenomenon by Thompson and Drewal (1975:73-74:182-4), respectively. Soyinka in this passage turns the persona into a passive agent of the ritual text, hence he pronounces:

'And though you seize my throne, you will never Rule this land' (11).

The graphic imageries, "ember flares aglow" ... "landmass writhes" are evident instantiations of this poet's sense of that primordial chaos, decibel, echoes, waves, resonances... etc.

Further on, but evidently in a slowered pace, he says: 'Meander how it will, the river Ends in lakes, in seas, in the ocean's Savage waves... '(1976: I).

Andrew Apter, in his discourse of the language of ase as part of the hermeneutics of power in Yoruba society, suggests that ritual language is "deep" and stylized and it possesses ase -"the capacity to invoke powers, appropriate fundamental essences, and influence the future" (1992:1 17). Idanre is more ritualistically sructured than Ogun Abibiman in the sense that the former bears a closer adherence to the mythological narrative of the Yoruba pantheon. Even then however, some literary stylistic devices employed in the latter actually derive largely from the oral structure. The constant refrain, 'Rogbodiyan!' Rogbodiyan!' implying the chaotic, is a transposed function of Ijala (guild hunters) chant.

The hyperbolic quality of Ogun's encomiastic verse here derives from his mythological attributes. In *Ogun Abibiman*, the deity is described in the fearsome lines:

Sola Olorunyomi

'...Ogun, who to right a wrong Emptied reservoirs of blood in heaven Yet raged with thirst (7)

These same qualfiers run back to *Idanre*: 'Where do we seek him, they asked? Where conflict rages, where sweat Is torrents of rain, where clear springs Of blood fill one with longing As the rush of wine (75)

Elsewhere in the same collection, the hyperbolic serves as a vehicle for reinforcing the deity's phallocentric symbol:

'Ogun is the lascivious god who takes Seven gourdlets to war. One for gunpowder, One for charms, two for palmwine and three Air-sealed in polished bronze make Storage for his sperms' (72)

Soyinka's use of proverbs buttresses the diverse figural devices embedded in this form. Proverb in this context embodies a myriad of figuratives such as anecdotes, metaphors and allusions. An appropriate sense of retributive justice is captured in these lines:

We do not burn the woods to trap A squirrel; we do not ask the mountain's Aid, to crack a walnut, (73)

Lekan Oyeleye citing Osundare, notes the polyreferential nature of proverbs, where the latter relates proverbs as a link with "the past, the present and the future in one timeless mutuality" (1990:5), in a manner that this poet has so far handled the subject matter.

Soyinka employs indigenous oral poetic forms, even when interspersed with a universal poetic tradition, and in this sense continental Africa. The title poem *Ogun Abibiman* is in itself a fusion of two African words; Yoruba and Akan. In the glossary to the text, the author explains Abibiman as, "The Black Nation; the land of the Black

Peoples; the Black World; that which pertains to, the matter, the affair of, Black peoples" (1976:23). In other words, if the title were to be cast in English, we would have a reading approximate to 'Ogun of the Black Peoples.' The choice of Abibiman therefore serves as a cultural-syntactic contraction, a derivative verbal economy which brings us to an interesting, even if controversial subject matter of post-colonial literary discourse as, Ascroft et al. (1989:38) are unequivocal in this debate:

The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place.

The authors suggest two immediate means by which this can be done: abrogation and appropriation. By abrogation, they suggest a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetics, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage. Appropriation in this context comes closer to the old Caliban-Prospero logic, by which the language of the Centre is reconstituted by the periphery in other to serve the interest of the latter as Soyinka eminently does.

In terms of literary-ideological polarity, these are indeed welcome beginnings but then there are still problems with this construct. First is the rather misleading term 'post-colonial' which suggests that the periphery has indeed transcended the problems created by colonialism. The facts, however, suggest an intensification of colonialism by other means in the current era of neo-colonialism. If this first perspective is considered somewhat too tendentious in the tradition of political economy, perhaps then the agential impulse could be invoked in the next engagement with the terminology. Second, the scholars of postcoloniality have only a partial, and a grossly limited one at that, knowledge of the entire narrative of the African experience of colonial moments, especially as pertains to emerging scholarship on the pre-Columbus era. But even with the current state of the post Berlin Conference Africa, there is yet to be an adequate engagement of volition in literary production. Volition is primary to the post-colonial textual strategy. For instance, a good number of literary practitioners relate to their literary styles in a rather pragmatic way, thereby foreclosing this possibility. In this circumstance, isn't the post-colonial textual strategy an

arbitrary attempt to foist canon on all such regional texts, and all moments of this aftermath?

In unraveling this complex matrix as regards Soyinka, perhaps the more profitable approach would be to delineate the different phases of his literary career. His early quarrels with the negtitudiests suggest a writer unbothered about 'signifying difference', to coopt a post-structuralist phrase. This may however be misleading to the extent that Soyinka's generalised reference to the Negritude imagery bears reference to the need to 'show' in essence rather than merely 'proclaim' the African/Black aesthetics, as a better means of self-representation. At best though, Soyinka was quite self-contradictory at this point of his career because his resort to the likes of Shaka and Ogun, and a couple of other such references in his literary career smacks of no less than the self-same strategic essentialism he was so worried about. And this, no doubt, has been fully demonstrated in both *Idanre* and *Ogun Abibiman*.

But beyond his creative practice, Soyinka has articulated this vision theoretically in the seminal article, 'The Fourth Stage.' "But Obatala the sculptural god is not the artist of Apollonian illusion but of inner essence", he asserts (1976: 141). Further on, he tries to grapple with conceptual indigenous tragic epistemology whereby: "Acting is therefore a contradiction of the tragic spirit, yet it is also its natural complement" (1976:146). There is a sense, therefore, in which fidelity to art and deep cultural appreciation lead every creative enterprise to proper self-representation. Beyond this, the ideologically informed writer in fact contests dominance and signifies Otherness. Soyinka's allusions in these poems perform that same role of registering cultural distance. Perhaps the most tendentious and revolutionary effort in this bid is in *Idanre* where the poet alludes to the shattering of the god-head.

All hail Saint Atunda, First revolutionary Grand iconoclast at genesis - and the rest in logic Zeus, Osiris, Jahweh, Christ in trifoliate Pact with creation, and the wisdom of Orunmila, If a Divining eyes, multiform.(83)

4. Conclusion

In all of this, conceptual intertextuality rings through the entire works. And beyond the mere influence of tradition, as suggested by T.S. Eliot, texts have for so long been seen to refer to other texts (or to themselves as texts!, not necessarily as an external reality), in a good number of African literature BCE, a phenomenon that current scholarship has come to label a postmodernist preoccupation. These intertextual relationships could include: anagram, allusion, adaptation, translation, parody, pastiche, and imitation among others. The intertextual is equally a timeless mutuality with literary tradition in essence, never minding the heightened attention called to it since Eliot. This is indeed the forte of oral literature, which dredges and explores this form of plucking into earlier aesthetic codes in order to make new statements. Soyinka locates the discursive sites of some of his passages in *Ogum Abibiman* in an antecedent *Idanre*!

Felt the rain of sand as nerve-ends
On my hairless head, and knew this tread
Of wooded rockhills, shredded mists of Idanre
The heart of furnaces, ...(10)

This poet's canvas is indeed wide, and wildly expansive. For instance, if *Idanre* is considered as more immediate to the poet's experience, another allusion to W.H. Yeats, cannot be so claimed. ...the prophet's voice possesses you—

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world et cetera (21)

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