

AN APPRAISAL OF THE USE AND PRESENTATION OF ARABIC AND YORUBA PROVERBS IN SELECTED WORKS OF ART

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Abstract

Proverb is a global phenomenon. For its inestimable values, it means many things to different people. The Arabs call it ‘*Misbāhu al-Kalām*’ (the lamp of speech) while the Yoruba refer to it as ‘*Ẹsin ọrọ*’ (the horse of speech). Virtually, all nations around the world have ways and means of preserving their proverbs from one generation to the other. The Arabs and the Yoruba are not exemptions in this regard. This paper examines how Arabic and Yoruba proverbs are being perpetuated for posterity in selected works of art like, prose, poetry and music. This invariably adds to the elegance and the mastery of the users’ language. As regards the use and presentation of Arabic proverbs, the paper draws samples from the work of a Nigerian Arabic writer, Kamāldeen Balógun, as well as various poetical compositions of the Arabs. Furthermore, it draws samples from the work of another Nigerian Yoruba prose writer, Ọládẹjọ Ọkédìjì, and the musical works of a Sákàrà artiste, Sànúsí Àkà. The paper ends with some recommendations.

Keywords: Appraisal, Use, Presentation, Arabic and Yoruba proverbs, Works of arts

Introduction

In all ages across the globe, people perpetuate their proverbs for posterity in both prose and poetry, whether spoken or written. Proverbs sparkled like magnificent jewels in the conversations and writings of wise men. Even, sermons were enriched by them.¹ Perhaps, the motive behind this is to impress rather than to instruct. Nevertheless, this brings about credit to the writers or speakers who used them. D’Isreal has long made reference to a member of the House of Commons, in the era of Elizabeth, around 1601C.E who made a speech entirely composed of the most homely proverbs. The subject of which was a bill against double-payments of book-debts.² According to him, Knavish tradesmen were then in the habit of swelling out

their book-debts with those who took credit, particularly, to their younger customers. He reiterates further that a blunt and true representative of the famous governor of Barataria also followed the trend of this nervous orator, citing the speech with which he delivered himself thus:

It is now my chance to speak something, and that without humming or hawing. I think this law is a good law. Even reckoning makes long friends. As far goes the penny as the penny's master. *Vigilantibus non dormientibus jura subverniunt*. Pay the reckoning over-night, and you shall not be troubled in the morning. If ready money be *mensura publica*, let everyone cut his coat according to his cloth. When his old suit is in the wane, let him stay till that his money brings a new suit in the increase.³

In the same vein, Abrahams and Babcock also observe the tradition of songs couched in proverbs, with particular reference to W.S. Gilbert's poem which reads thus:

Actions speak louder than words ever do;
You can't eat your cake and hold onto it, too.
When the cat is away then the little mice play
When there is a will there is always a way.⁴

Though, they state that this usage runs counter or abrogates the primary rule of proverb use in social discourse which stipulates that they be used only by those who know when and how to employ them appropriately,⁵ but the fact still remains that such or similar usage makes the proverbs endure to this day.

The Use and Presentation of Arabic Proverbs

In prose, the paper takes cognisance of the work of a Nigerian Arabic author, Kamaldeen Balogun. As regards poetry, samples are drawn from different Arab poets whose efforts tend to peg down proverbs for posterity. Balogun's use of proverbs in his work, *Rihlat al-Bahth 'an al-Insān* (An expedition in quest of man), is very apt. He adorns and saturates the language of the play with a number of proverbs, metaphors and idioms which make it an interesting and educative dramatic play. Below are the excerpts from the play:

السائل: إني أوافقك تمام الموافقة أن هذا الموقف حافل بالمجرمين.. وكيف بمن في خارجه؟
المسئول: وهاك بياننا:

أما الفتاة فلم تكن نازلة من السماء بل لها أب وأم.. أليست الشجرة يدل عليها ثمرها؟. والسارق له شريك في الجريمة، فأبواه مثلاً، لم يتعهدها بالتربية السليمة في صغره، ولم يمنعه من مخالطة المجرمين.. فمن شب علي شئى شاب عليه!
فالسارق إذا قد أفسده قومه وحكومته، فهؤلاء جميعاً شركاء في الجريمة. فمعظم النار- كما يقولون- من مستصغر الشرر.

السائل: أشكرك يا سيدي لهذا البيان الشافي.

المسئول: لا شكر علي الواجب.. فإن القرم من الأفييل! فهيا بنا يا بني إلى مكان آخر عسى أن نجد الإنسان، فإن من تأنى نال ما تمنى.⁶

Al-Sā'il (The questioner): Indeed, I agree wholly with you that this park is full of criminals.. Then what about those beyond (the park)?

Al-Mas'ūl (The one being questioned): Have this explanation:

As far as that young lady is concerned, she hasn't fallen from the heaven. She must have parent. Isn't by a fruit the tree is known? As for the thief, he has an accomplice. His parent, for instance, might have not given him good education right from his youth, nor forbade him not to associate with the criminals. **Whoever is brought up with something dies on it** (Old habits die hard). The thief has been spoilt by his people and the government. These are all parties in the crime. **A small spark, they say, makes a great fire.**

Al-Sā'il: Thanks for this comprehensive explanation.

Al-Mas'ūl: Don't mention.. **It is the weanling which becomes a bull!** Let us leave for another place. Perhaps, we may find man (in the real sense of the name); **everything comes to him who waits.**

This excerpt shows the encounter of *Al-Sā'il* and *Al-Mas'ūl* with people in a park. First, with a young lady bread hawker who ought to have been in school at that hour of the day. They interrogated her and she told them her plight. She said she was fondly referred to as government's child on account of her being an abandoned child and that she had started hawking for her benefactor, since the age of five. Following her appeal, they sympathised with her and purchased all her loaves.

The other incident has to do with the case of a day-light robbery: A man was robbed in the full glare of the masses and nobody could come to his aid. The robber carted away all his belongings. He thereafter sought for help but found no helper. A driver whom he approached to take him down to Lagos even added more salt to the injury, saying: a journey to Makkah is obligatory on whoever has the means. Must you go to Lagos without any means? Have you forgotten that a penny finds penny? How would I take you to Lagos for free, when oil and petrol are not given for free of charge?

II.

المسئول: اعمل معروف يا دكتور!

ارحم هذا البائس الفقير!!

وجزاك الله خير الجزاء!!!

الطبيب: أليس الأقربون أولى بالمعروف؟ حدثني بشأن آخر إن لم تجد ما تتفقه على هذا المريض. ولئن مات فإنه لن يكون أول راحل عن الدنيا.. فإن الدراهم بالدراهم تكسب!⁷

Al-Mas'ūl: Oh Doctor! Be upright.

Show kindness to this helpless man!!

In order that Allah may reward you abundantly!!!

Doctor: Isn't a **charity begins at home?** Say something else if you have got nothing to spend on this patient. (At least) if he dies, he won't be the first person to depart this world. **A penny finds penny.**

This excerpt portrays the wickedness of a medical doctor in respect of one of his patients who was a survivor of ghastly motor accident which occurred on river Niger's bridge. He was left in agony, unattended to, mainly because he could neither settle his bills nor purchase the drugs worth of Fifty-Thousand Naira. He (the doctor) remained adamant in spite of the appeals from different quarters.

Proverbs and Arabic Poetry

Discovering proverbs in Arabic poetry requires wisdom, even in instances when the whole segments of the proverbs appear, let alone when a segment or more often than not, a word from within a proverb appears. It then behoves the listener or the reader to purse a while in order to be able to fish out the proverb in such instances. Below are some samples which illustrate this:

I. ألم تر أن حارثة بن بدر ## يصلي وهو أكفر من حمار⁸

Seeth thou not that Hārithah bn Badr;

He observes the five times daily prayers and yet, he shows disbelief more than Himār .

In this poem, the statement, “أكفر من حمار” “disbelief more than Himār” is the proverb. History has it that a man from amidst the ‘Ad’s tribe named Himār bn Muwayli‘ (Himār bn Mālik bn Nasr al-‘Azdī, in the account of al-Sharqī) was a Muslim faithful. He had a valley whose length of distance can take a whole day’s journey and its breath equals four leagues.⁹ There was no place in Arabia, as at then, more fertile than it was. Therein were varieties of fruits. One day, his (Himār’s) children went on hunting expedition and were all struck down by the thunderbolt and they all perished. He thereafter became an infidel. He said:

لا أعبد من فعل هذا بني

I shall no longer worship the one who has done this to my children.

Consequently, he called his tribesmen to disbelief and resorted to killing those who disagreed with him on his mission. The Almighty Allah punished him and ruined his valley. Thus, his case passed into proverb among the Arabs and on this premise based the poet his above quoted poem.

II. جزتنا بنو لحيان أمس بفعالنا ## جزاء سنمار بما كان يفعل¹⁰

Banū Lahyan yesterday rewarded us of our deed;

The reward of Sinimār for what he did.

The proverb here is “جزاء سنمار”. That is, He rewarded me with the reward of Sinimār. In an old Arabic story, Sinimār was a Roman builder who constructed a magnificent tower for King Nu‘mān bn Imru al-Qays in Kufah. When the former completed the building, the latter threw him atop of the building and he fell down and died. Perhaps, he did that so that Sinimār would not build its like for any other person on earth.

The statement thus passed into proverb among the Arabs for whosoever rewards evil for good or being paid bad for his good deed.

Another poet also says on this same proverb:

جزتنا بنو سعد بحسن فعلنا ## جزاء سنمار وما كان ذا ذنب¹¹

Banū Sa‘d rewarded us for our good deeds;

The reward of Sinimār, he (Sinimār) wasn’t a sinner (that is, he never wronged his executor).

A source also reveals that Sinimār was the person who built a magnificent tower for ‘Uhayhah bn Al-Julāh. When he completed it, the latter said to him:

لقد أحكمته

Have you perfected it (the building)?

Sinimār responded, saying:

إني لأعرف فيه حجرا لو نزع لتقوض من عند آخره

Indeed, I have knowledge of a stone in it that when removed, the whole building will collapse.

The former inquired him of the particular stone and he was told. Thus ‘Uhayhah threw Sinimār atop of the tower and he fell and died.

III. ووعدتني حتى حسبتك صادقا ## فجعلت من طمع أجيء وأذهب

فإذا حضرت أنا وأنت بمجلس ## قالوا مسيلمة وهذا أشعب¹²

You gave me thy pledge until I believed that you were telling the truth;
Out of greedy, I was moving forth and backward towards you.

If in any gathering you and I should meet;

People will say here is Musaylimah and this is Ash‘ab.

This poem is a pointer to the following proverbs:

1. أطمع من أشعب¹³

(He is) more greedy than Ash‘ab

2. أكذب من مسيلمة

A greater liar than Musaylimah.

These proverbs relate to Ash‘ab¹⁴ and Musaylimah, the two ancient Arabs (the latter, a false prophet)¹⁵ remarkable for the vices here imputed to them. These personages are noticed in the above quoted beautiful verses.

IV. كانت مواعيد عرقوب لها مثلا ## وما مواعيدها إلا الأباطيل¹⁶

Her kind of promises is the replica of ‘Urqūb’s;

Her promises are nothing but deceptive ones.

The proverb in this poem is “مواعيد عرقوب” ‘Urqūb’s promises, used to exemplify a kind of deceptive promise. The poet, Ka‘b bn Zuhayr, in his erotic prelude celebrated *Bānat Su‘ād* otherwise called *al-Burdah*, composed to eulogise the Holy prophet Muhammad and with which he won the cloak worn by the Holy prophet, draws a comparison between the attitude of Su‘ād, his female lover and that of ‘Urqūb who was widely known for his deceptive promises. The story has it that, ‘Urqūb promised his brother on

several occasions and never fulfilled his promises, even for once, until his attitude turns proverbial among the Arabs. Sources indicate that he deceived his brother in need with all developmental stages of a date palm, but it was all to no avail.

Another poet also puts this proverb on record when he says:

وعدت وكان الخلف منك سجية ## مواعيد عرقوب أخاه بيثرب¹⁷

You promised, however, breaking promise is in your nature;
(Like) ‘Urqūb’s promises for his brother in Yathrib.

This poetic line reveals the geographical location of ‘*Urqūb* in Arabia as *Yathrib* (later named after the Holy Prophet as *Madīnat al-Rasūl* - The city of the Messenger of Allah). It is also opined that the word *Yatrab* could be used instead, to mean, a place near *al-Yamāmah*, also in Arabian Peninsula.

The Use and Presentation of Yoruba Proverbs

Proverbs have been put into various uses in the Yoruba society. They are being used for the purpose of elaborating a point or a theme in conversation; as a source of authority to what is uttered, for the education of the young ones within the society, as a means of persuasion, for enhancing ones image as a good speaker or as a pointer to one’s creative skill in delightful use of words, or to warn someone of impending danger, against arrogance and pride, to counsel one about life generally, to settle disputes amongst warring parties, to summarise a lengthy discussion with wisdom and to flaunt our wealthy cultural heritage etc.¹⁸

Proverbs are often used to communicate complex human emotions and experiences, to hook and emotionalize listeners, to persuade, to offer timely advice and encouragement, or to instil trust.¹⁹ Yoruba proverbs, like those from elsewhere, are, at times, used in social interaction to summon the conscience of the guilty to return and follow the rules of the social order or to affirm to the community that the rules have been followed or in some cases to simply restate the way the world works.²⁰

Ìṣòlá²¹ sees the use of proverbs as a literary device which adds to the elegance of a writer’s language. Mustapha earlier observes the use of proverbs and other aphoristic sayings as veritable tools in the hands of the musician when he wishes to educate and to moralize.²² Such proverbs, according to him, equally serve as an indirect way of making factual statements as well as adding imagery to the lyric of the song.²³ The fact that proverbs enliven and adorn a speech or artistic work is clearly shown in the works of some Yoruba prose writers and some Yoruba musicians. Oládèjò Òkédìjí and Sànúsí Àkà²⁴ suffice here in respective manner. Some of what Ìṣòlá observes of how Òkédìjí manipulates proverbs in his novels are also true of S. Àkà’s in his songs. These include:

- (i) Using proverbs ordinarily.
- (ii) Modifying some well known proverbs.
- (iii) Piling up of related proverbs.
- (iv) Explaining proverbs.²⁵

The bone of contention in this context is how both of them display mastery that amount to ingenuity in their respective works of art.

In Òkédìjì's novel, *Atótó Arére*, related proverbs are piled up to augment meaning. For instance, Àlàbá Labalaba, the hero of the play was soliloquizing and recalling his past activities up to a point when his counterpart, Sámínù met his Waterloo and faced the wrath of law in the full glare of the masses. The narrator encapsulates the incidence thus:

*Bí ó ti ń ronú nípa ikú u Sámínù náà ni ó ń rántí igbésí ayé ara rẹ látèhìn wá. Ó ń soyè sí igbà àtijọ gbogbo, ó ń fi okàn ronú ọ̀nà tí ọ̀un gbà tí ọ̀un fi wáá da báyií. Njẹ ẹni kan kò sọ lẹ̀ẹkan lóríi pápá pé kí àwọn yòókù náà mama retí ikú gbígbóná? Bí irú ọ̀un yìi kọ. **B'Ólórùn bá ti f'ọ̀tá ẹni han ni, ọ̀tá yẹn kò tún lẹ pa ni mó. Ogun àgbótélẹ kò sì yẹ kí ó pa arọ. Kì í ẹ ikú ifipájalẹ ni ọ̀un ó tún kú mó ní toun. Iyẹn ti bó. Ẹni tó jìn sí kòtò ti kọ ará yòókù lógbón. Ogbón ọ̀lọgbón sì ni kì í jẹ kí á pe àgbà ní wèrè. Sàngó sì ti tojú ọ̀un wọ̀lẹ̀ nìyí, èèdì kò sì le dì ọ̀un kí ọ̀un máa bú ọ̀ba kòso lẹ̀kẹ̀é mó. Gbòhgbò ọ̀nà kò ní fọ ọ̀un lépo nígbà tí ọ̀un ti rí bí ó ti fọ epo ẹ̀lómíràn. Lááláé.***²⁶

As he was ruminating over Saminu's death, he was also thinking on the kind of life he was leading from the past. He was recalling the bygone days and as well pondering on what has led him into this (mess). Hasn't someone said on the field that others should be expecting to meet their untimely death? That shall never come to pass for somebody like him. **If God has revealed one's enemy, that enemy cannot kill one anymore. The warning of an impending battle should save the lame from being killed.** (That) he should not die of armed robbery. That is over his dead body. **A person that falls into a deep pit has taught others a lesson, making use of the wisdom of others prevent an elderly person from being considered stupid. That he has already witnessed the action of thunder; it would be stupid of him to underrate the fierceness of the anger of Sango** (the god of thunder among the Yoruba). **A tree stump will not break his pot of oil again, as he has already witnessed how it broke another man's pot of oil.** Never again.

This piece of writing begins with a lengthy explanation which the strings of related proverbs have come to elucidate. The proverbs also complement one another. It is also observed that there is a sentence employed by the writer, in-between the related proverbs, to break the continuity. This, the writer used in order to emphasize the point under

discussion. Besides, he equally modifies the proverbs by interjecting some additional words.

Mention should also be made of how Òkédìjì skilfully explained two Yoruba proverbs in succession in his *Atótó Arére*. These proverbs are:

- i- ***Àlọ ni tahun, àbò ni tàna rẹ***
(Going is for the tortoise, coming is for his in-law).
- ii- ***Olórun ní í jẹrù afehínpínran.***
(Only God can judge the honesty of the person who shares meat with his teeth).

The first proverb was used in reference to Àlàbá who stole by trick. He never gave the woman groundnuts' hawker any money. Yet, he collected the groundnuts worth of two kobo from her and still demanding for the change of eight kobo out of ten kobo, thinking that the woman had been so preoccupied as to recognise those who paid her. Àlàbá was thus mercilessly beaten by this aggressive groundnuts' hawker and her sympathisers. While trying to depict the fact that the kind of torture meted out to Àlàbá was too severe, Bàbá Òdièwù tried to intervene, telling the groundnut hawker that:

*Àgbà náà ní í gbà. Fí ẹ osùn kí o fí kìnra. Fọwọ ranú. Èkelòó kòbò méjì? **Àlọ ni tahun, àbò mà sì ni tàna rẹ o!***²⁷

An elder needs to endure. Be patient. Calm down. How much is two kobo? **Going is for the tortoise while coming is that of his in-law.**

To make this statement homely, the narrator tries to explicate on the proverb thus:

*'Eh. Alábahun ló lọ jí ọ̀wọ̀ àna rẹ̀ wà nínú oko, ni àna rẹ̀ bá ká a mọ̀bẹ̀. Àna ọ̀ ẹ̀ mẹnì, kò ẹ̀ méjì, okùn itàkùn ló wá, tó fí de Alábahun mọ̀ kùkùtẹ̀ nínú oko. Gbogbo èrò àlọ, gbogbo èrò àbò, ẹ̀sín ni wọn n fí Alábahun ẹ̀, bí wọn tí n lọ̀ lónà ọ̀jà láàárọ̀. Yẹ̀yẹ̀ ọ̀jọ̀ náà ọ̀ láàlà. Àmọ̀ nígbà tí ọ̀ díròlẹ̀, tí wọn n dari ọ̀jà bọ̀, tí wọn tún bá Alábahun lóri okùn lára kùkùtẹ̀ nínú oko àna rẹ̀, àna mà ni wọn bèrẹ̀ sí í dá lẹ̀bí o, pé bí èniyàn kì í báá ẹ̀ se ikà, kí èniyàn so èniyàn mọ̀lẹ̀ látàárọ̀, láì ẹ̀ran, láì jẹ, láì mu! Ọ̀tòtò àna rẹ̀ náà nìyí!*²⁸

The tortoise went and stole his in-law's yams in the farm and was caught red handed. The in-law tied the tortoise to a tree stump in the farm. All the passers-by began to molest the tortoise on their ways to the farm on that morning. He was indeed ridiculed and so relegated. But, on their way back home in the evening when they found that the tortoise was still tied to the same tree stump, they shifted the blame to his in-law, saying: if a man was not so wicked, he would not have tied fellow human being since the morning, neither did he provide him food nor drink! Yet, this is his so called in-law.

This proverb calls for moderation and avoidance of excesses in whatever we are doing. Zealous determination may sometimes lead to ridicule and regression.

As for the second proverb, Bàbá Òdièwù then turned to Àlàbá, saying unequivocally:

Ọlórún ní í jẹrù afehínpínran.²⁹

Only God can judge the honesty of the person who shares meat with his teeth.

The narrator also illustrates further saying:

*Eni tó mú báásí ẹran nínú àwo, tó mú un ẹnu, tó diyín mọ ọn, tó gé apá kan sínú ẹnu lóhùn-ún, tó fi iyókù lé èkejù rẹ tí wón jọ n jeun lówó; bí tenu l'ó pọ̀ jù ní o, bí tọwọ̀ ní, Ọlórún ló mọ̀. Bí irọ̀ lo n pa nipa owó tó o ní o fún obìnrin yìí, bí óótọ̀ sì ní, a kò lè sọ.*³⁰

He who picks up a piece of meat in the plate, putting it directly to his mouth, crushing it with his teeth and thereafter cuts part of it to the inner mouth and gives the remaining to his partner with whom he was eating together. Only God is in better position to judge if that which is in his mouth is larger or the one in his hand. We can't say whether you are lying or saying the truth about the money you are claiming to have given this woman.

In the same vein, S. Aka also employed proverbs to exhibit his musical prowess and above all, the brevity which characterizes his music makes him above board among his contemporaries. His following song explains this better:

Ọ̀rọ̀ kínkín tí tó f'Ọ̀lọ̀gbọ̀n o

B'ọ̀rọ̀ bá n pọ̀jù o...

B'ọ̀rọ̀ bá n pọ̀jù, kí í f'ọ̀gbọ̀n yọ

Géngé ẹsin ọ̀rọ̀ orin tiwa

Eni tí kò bá m'ọ̀nà, kò lè bá wa dá pàdẹ̀-ń-pàdẹ̀ o

*Orin tó m'ọ̀gbọ̀n bọ̀ ní n bẹ̀ ní kọ̀rọ̀ ẹnu ti wa.*³¹

A word is enough for the wise

Too many words...

Too many words make no sense

Brevity is the watchword for our song

Whoever is incompetent should not endeavour to rival with us

An intelligent song is situated in our mouth.

Unlike the former song highlighted above, none of the proverbs is here used ordinarily; they are mainly used with slight modifications. He only takes pain to explicate on the first proverb. These proverbs are:

1. *Ọ̀rọ̀ kínkín tí tó f'Ọ̀lọ̀gbọ̀n.*

Ọ̀rọ̀ díẹ̀, ó tó fún Ọ̀lọ̀gbọ̀n, gbólóhùn kan n lẹ̀rọ̀ amòye³²

A word is sufficient for the wise.

2. *Eni tí kò bá m'ọ̀nà, kò lè bá wa dá pàdẹ̀-ń-pàdẹ̀*

Eni tí kò bá mọ ọ̀nà, kì í dá pàdè-ń-pàdè³³

An incompetent person should not endeavour to rival (with others).

S. Aka also used related proverbs to explicate his point of discussion while reacting to the unhealthy rivalry between him and one of his contemporary musicians. He related a fictitious tale of two popular birds, the thrush and the canary, to reflect the plight of his rival and that of his respectively. His use of proverbs in this sense makes his composition an interesting, informative and educative one. It goes thus:

Stanza I:

*Àwòko pẹ̀lú Ìbákà ń sọ
Wí p'áwọ̀n ló l'odù o
Àwòko pẹ̀lú Ìbákà ń sọ
Wí p'áwọ̀n ló l'orin*

Stanza II:

*Wón lu bàtá pẹ̀lú dùndún o, níjọ ojọ pé
Àwòko ń kọ̀rin lọ
Wón l'àgídìgbo pẹ̀lú sàkàrà
Àwòko ń kọ̀rin lọ
Àşé e Ìbákà ò m'owó àgídìgbo o
Làwòko bá gba fòstì³⁴ o
Ìbákà ò m'owó àgídìgbo o
Ọ̀rò ré ẹ̀ bá wa sọ si*

Stanza III:

***Ọ̀ré mi má yò mí bí mo bá subú o
T'eni tó dé la rí t'eni ń bọ́ á ò mọ́
Àşìşẹ̀ kò k'ogbón
Kì í şe p'ómùgò ló mú olówó o
Tó lápò méjì, tó sọ sílè méjì nù
Tó f'ápò méjì sílè, tó ń wá sílè méjì kiri
Mo kóşẹ̀ orin dé bi tó ní kómá³⁵
Mo mọ́ àyínike, mo mọ́ àyínipádà
Àtòtún àtòsì, kò sáyì tá ò lè fì kọ̀rin.***³⁶

Stanza I:

The Thrush and the Canary birds are vying with one another
The Thrush and the Canary birds are vying on musical prowess

Stanza II:

They beat *bàtá*³⁷ and *dùndún* on the D-day
While the Thrush sings along
They beat *àgídìgbo*³⁸ and *sàkàrà*³⁹
The Thrush still sings on
Unknowingly, the Canary didn't know how to beat *àgídìgbo* drum
Thus, the Thrush emerged first (in the contest)

The Canary was unable to beat *àgídìgbo*
Here is the matter before you masses

Stanza III:

My friend, do not mock me, should I fall

It is he whose failure has come that we have witnessed, but he whose failure is on the way, the gravity is not yet known

Nobody is above mistake

It is not stupidity that made a well-to-do person who had four hundred Naira (N400) and lost two Shillings, to keep Four hundred Naira at home and continue to chase two Shillings all about

I am a skilled musician (the master of trade)

I know the nitty-gritty of music

Virtually, there is hardly anything on which we cannot compose music.

At times, S. Aka employs known proverbs to introduce a topic. In such instances, the proverbs precede the explanation given on the topic and may also encapsulate the whole message expressed in the succeeding lengthy explanations. Or better still; the proverbs in use prepare ground for proper discernment of the whole message.

Conclusion

It has been established in the foregoing, how proverbs are being preserved for posterity among different nationalities, using Arabic and Yoruba proverbs as examples. Whether such practice is tenable or not, the end, they say justifies the means, as such usage undoubtedly makes the proverbs endure till date. However, to maintain this tempo, the Nigerian Arabic writers as well as speech-makers should try to emulate Balógun whose use of Arabic proverbs has made his work an interesting and educative one. Likewise, the Yoruba artistes who care to educate or moralise the populace with their artistic productions should borrow a leaf from Òkédìjì and Aka's delightful use of Yoruba proverbs.

Parents should also endeavour to de-activate the 'old school syndromes' in their children and try as much as possible to encourage them to stick to artistic works that promote our cultural values rather than listening to musical works that are alien to our culture. Of what use are the tracks of the late Bob Marley, Michael Jackson and Houston Wilson in the minds of our youths who are ignorant of the wisdom in the songs of our own late Alhaji Síkirù Àyindé Barrister, Sànúsí Àká and Yusuf Ọlátúnjí, among the host of others?

Government should also live up to expectation by promoting artistic works that seek to perpetuate our rich cultural heritage.

End Notes

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League is a measure of distance of variable length, usually about 5km/3mi. However, it is no longer in use.

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Ash'ab's real name is Abū al-'Alā'i Ash'ab bn Jubayr. He was a slave to Abdullah bn al-Zubayr and popularly known in Madinah as Ash'ab, the greed.

He is *Musaylamah al-Kadhāb* of the tribe of Banū Hanif in Yamāmah. His real name is Maslamah. The Muslims bestowed on him this scornful diminutive, Musaylamah. Traditions alleged that Musaylamah had even communicated with Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) asking for recognition as such and offering to share Arabia with him. He was said to have written: “From Maslamah, the Apostle of God, to Muhammad, the apostle of God. Let divide the earth between us, half to you and half to me”. The prophet was said to have replied, “From Muhammad, the Apostle of God to Musaylamah, the liar. The earth is the Lord’s. He causes such of his servants to inherit it as He pleases”. (See Abdul, M.O.A. (1982). *The Historical Origin of Islam (With Three Chapters on West Africa)*. Bk. 5. Lagos: Islamic Publication Bureau).

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Al-Maydānī. A.M. (1955), *Majma‘ul-Amthāl* 2. (Proverb 4070). 311.

See, Babade, T. (2008), *A collection of Yoruba Proverbs with their Translation and Usage in English Language*. 1. Lagos: Yoruba Proverbs Research Project Publications. ix-x.

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Işola, A. (1978), *The writer’s Art in the Modern Yoruba Novel*. Thesis. Dept. of Linguistics and African Languages. University of Ibadan. 219-228. See also Adebowale, O. (1994), *Style in Yoruba Crime-Fiction*. Thesis. Dept. of Linguistics and African Languages. University of Ibadan. 302.

Mustapha, O. (1975), *A Literary Appraisal of Sākàrà: A Yoruba Form of Music. Yoruba Oral Tradition: Selections from the papers presented at the seminar on Yoruba tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance and Drama*. Wande Abimbola (Ed) in *Ife African Languages and Literatures Series*. No.1. Department of African Languages and Literatures. University of Ife. 539.

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Sanusi Aka was one of the pioneers of Sákàrà music in Yorubaland. Others being; Ojo Lawale, Abibi Oluwa, Yusuf Olatunji (Baba l'ẹgba), Saka Layigbade. A sákàrà group is composed of sakara instrument, one or many varieties of the minor dundun drum, a conga and the goje, the one-string kora-like musical instrument. It is a slow-tempo music compared with other Yoruba musical forms. Although, the most popular sakara musician was the late Yusuf Olatunji (Baba l'ẹgba), a prominent Gòjé player, S. Aka was not a man without merit.

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Okediji, O. (1981), *Atótó Arére*. 52-53.

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Olatunbosun, O. (2008), *Egbèta Òwe 'E'*. Ibadan : Afolabi Press Ltd. (Proverb 455). 33.

Adaptation of an English word 'First'

Adaptation of an English word 'Comma' (lit. punctuation mark)

Sanusi, Aka. (1968), *Àwòko Pèlú Ibákà*. Side 1, O.S. 2076. Omóboriowó Sound Studio.

Bàtá is a well decorated traditional drum of many tones. (From: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/sakara>). Retrieved on Sunday, June 26, 2011.

Àgídìgbo is a soft thumb piano. (From: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/sakara>). Retrieved on Sunday, June 26, 2011.

Sákàrà is a musical genre as well as a musical instrument (when goat skin is stretched over a clay ring to form a percussive drum) of the Yoruba.