

## **Nigerian Literature In English: The Journey So Far?**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Literature is a major art form through which people can exhibit their culture. Generally, prior to 1800, literature in the European languages meant any writing or book knowledge (Culler 21). In the modern Western sense, it means an imaginative writing; indeed, it can be said to be language decontextualized, a speech act or textual event that elicits certain kinds of attention (Culler 25, 27). It is a product of conventions and a vehicle of ideology.*

*Nigerian Literature in English (NLE) has witnessed an impressive expansion in the more than five decades of its existence. When one considers the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Professor Wole Soyinka in 1986, one sees that it is evident of the extent to which this genre of literature has become globally accepted in spite of the fact that it is less than one century ago since this genre of literature came to be.*

*This paper therefore uses a historicist approach to examine the genre known as Nigerian Literature in English. This is done largely through a study of selected literary texts and by noting how history has helped in fashioning out this genre of literature. The paper notes the sociological and cultural tilt involved in the emergence of the genre, acknowledging the works of the founding fathers, and all those, who like Demola Dasylva, have paid the price in the process of its critical advancement. The paper opines however that there is still much to be done before NLE can truly be said to be a global genre; it concludes that new genres and styles should be encouraged to bloom, while an enabling environment be created for up and budding writers both in terms of patronage and readership. Likewise, in the area of publishing, publishers and literary writers and critic should be encouraged to not only cross-fertilize, but engage in positive and active symbiotic relationship in order to advance the global target of NLE.*

**Keywords**—*Nigerian Literature; Oral literature; Playwrights; Poets; generation; Apostles; trail-blazers; Historicist; Nationalist; Emergent writers*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Literature, literally translated, means ‘acquaintance with letters’ (from the Latin word *littera* = letters); it is the art of written works, usually creative in nature, that employs imagination to birth it; as a matter of fact, it is created or recreated from imagination (Chiegeonu 1).

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### **II. NIGERIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH?**

It may seem strange to the cursory reader that the literature of the Nigerian people is regarded as being English; why, one may ask, is it not written in the native language of such the Nigerian people? Could it be that these people do not have their own language and thus have to go a-borrowing? Or is it that their own language is so inadequate that it cannot serve as an appropriate tool for communication? What in essence can be regarded as NLE?

Nigerian Literature would essentially be any Nigerian literary work of imagination which is written by Nigerians for Nigerians; it discusses issues that are Nigerian and shares the same sensibilities, consciousness, world-view and other aspects of the Nigerian cultural experience. In a nut-shell, the writer must share values and experiences of the people of Nigeria for the writing to be classified as being Nigerian (Ojaide 318). For this genre of Literature to be regarded as being English, even though it is Nigerian, would imply that the language (or the medium of communication) is that of the English Language though the milieu is Nigerian.

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(323) that African literary writings reflects the period of history and the stage of development in which the people find themselves, then one could say that this statement is very true of NLE (which is indeed African literary writings). Its origins as a discipline is largely due to a period in the history of Nigeria when she was occupied by the colonial powers who deemed it fit to institutionalize their language and culture by super-imposing these on the natives of an entity they decided to call Nigeria.

Of a truth, Nigerian Literature does reflect various stages of the development in which the Nigerian peoples have found themselves; this is probably as a result of the fact that in most cases literary writers are products of the society they write about; hence, the society nurtures and nourishes the writer. Since writer and society operate a symbiotic relationship, one automatically rubs off on the other. Therefore, this genre of literature manifests the struggle of a people whose country is still undergoing a painful transformation from colonisation, through independence to internal wars, coups, counter-coups, and political strife.

For the records, it would do well to state that Nigerian literature had existed long before colonisation; this is a fact because Nigeria has a rich literary culture; however, it must be noted that the emphasis of the subject matter of this essay is on Nigerian Literature written in the English Language. In this wise, emphasis will be more on the written than on the oral type of Literature. This will not however undermine the appearance and use of orature in written literary works, or indeed relevant references to oral literature as the occasion requires.

Finally, it is worthy to note that in modern times, literature has become one of Africa's major contributions to the intellectual world. Oral or written, African Literature (and particularly Nigerian), has gained recognition world-wide (Ojaide 317).

### **III. BEGINNINGS OF NIGERIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH**

The Nigerian writer, being a product of cultural hybrids (Gbileeka iii), is first and foremost a member of a community in which the oral tradition is a way of life; however, his degree of integration of traditional verbal sources depends on his nearness to such a source, his stylistic engagement, setting and the ideological pattern in his work (Nwachukwu-Agbada 68). Furthermore, seeing that he is a member of the Nigerian society, his material is sourced from this society; this therefore implies that his social life will determine his literary creation. Goldman (40) posits that philosophical thought and literary creation are not entirely divorced from economic and social life because literature and philosophy are on different planes the expression of a vision of the world, and that visions of the world are not individual but social. This therefore means that the environment one lives in will affect ones ways of thinking and reacting to situations: however, this will be reflected in diverse forms. It could take the form of revolt, adaptation, or even a synthesis of ideas of his environment and that found elsewhere (Goldman 70).

As earlier implied, the Nigerian, as is applicable to Africans generally, is a child of two worlds: by reason of the twin engines of colonialism and formal education he has been indoctrinated into the European social and economical class. This contact, due to an accident of history, exposed him to foreign ideas, cultural values, philosophy and taste. The end product of this exposure was that colonial Nigerians imbibed a lot from the West (Gbileeka 48). No doubt, during this period, the "educated African looked up to the 'whiteman' as the model of civilization and the standard bearer of modern existence (Gbileeka 49). To his 'colonized mind', English literature then would be the standard accepted for any type of literature to be acknowledged as being of eternal value.

At this point of study, it must be noted that English Literature was used as one of the weapons of colonizing and "civilizing" the "untutored" African. The notion was that the occupants of "the dark continent" were dark mentally, spiritually, culturally and otherwise; they thus needed the "finesse" of the European culture to elevate them from the level of "beasts" to that of "human beings"! Thus, colonial literature was important to the imperialists as a tool by which they could expedite the process of civilising and humanising Africans (Gbileeka 50). With this fact at the back of one's mind, one can then visualize the conditions that gave birth to both the Nigerian nation, and in its wake, Nigerian Literature.

As stated above, several factors account for the birth of NLE, history being one of them. One will recount that after the Second World War (1939-1945), there was in Africa a cry by the then colonies to be independent of their colonial masters. This cry for independence gave birth to Nationalism. The Nationalists in Nigeria include Nnamdi Azikiwe, Herbert Macaulay, Dennis Osadebey, Obafemi Awolowo and the like. These men felt the need for a rejuvenation and a redefinition of cultural and ethical values of the peoples of the soon-to-be nation. One major way was to encourage the publication of literary works. In this wise, Azikiwe encouraged the publication of literary works in his Daily newspaper, the West African Pilot; this he did by carving out a corner in this paper for budding writers to publish literary works. This literary activity gave rise to the popular Onitsa Market Literature: this refers to a number of pamphlets, books and publications in the 1950s and 1960s.

Another factor that contributed to the rise of NLE, was the flourishing of a literary culture in the premier University – University College, Ibadan founded in 1948 as an external College of the University of

London. This event marked the beginning of a new cultural attitude in colonial Nigeria (Dasyuva 113). In this environment, fertile minds found avenues to develop their literary skills. This exercise birthed the first generation of Nigerian literary writers, critics and Theatre artist, such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ola Rotimi, Christopher Okigbo and a host of others.

From the fore-going, one observes that the beginnings of Nigerian Literature were not spontaneous; rather, various historical facts culminated to its build-up. No doubt, the invasion of the colonies by the colonial masters, and their aversion for the African culture, brought about a situation whereby the Africans were made to believe that anything brought by the Europeans was superior to those that were not 'Europeanized'. This misguided preference made anything home-spawned to be regarded as inferior; in the wake of nationalism, the people were made to see that black was beautiful, and hence encouraged to shun 'colonial mentality' and embrace the totality of their culture.

Considering the above facts, it would not be out of place to note that the birth of a national awareness among the Nigerian peoples and the birth of NLE cannot be divorced from each other. Suffice it to say that the Nationalists themselves saw literature – both as literary and performance levels – as an invaluable weapon to enlighten the people and stir in them a nationalist re-awakening. One is reminded of the great Theatre practitioner, Hubert Ogunde (1916-1990) whose plays like *Hunger and Strike* and *Bread and Bullets* were instrumental to re-orientating the Nigerian peoples as to the need to be a nation.

However since the focus of this work is more on Nigerian Literature, particularly after its contact with the English language, it will briefly examine writings of Nigerians who use the English Language to communicate their works to readers; this investigation will commence with Amos Tutuola's (1920-1997) *The Palmwine Drinkard* (1952). To do justice to this brief examination, this work will examine this genre of literature under three broad headings with the hope that it will capture the genre and the milieu of each literary type as follows: Literary Path-Finders, Literary Trail-Blazers, Radical Experimentalists and the Contemporaries.

#### **IV. LITERARY PATH-FINDERS: THE APOSTLES**

From the foregoing, it is obvious that what has now become Nigerian Literature was born and nursed in a hostile environment and is still a continuation of a protest against the doctrinal colonial literary heritage bequeathed on Nigerians by the whites after the abolition of slave trade (Gbileeka 50).

Yet, right from the outset, it has borne the stamp of a writing that is largely infused with both the influence of the colonial intruders and the original inhabitants. In this wise, earlier writings tried to re-establish the past by incorporating the oral traditions through a resort of local ethnic beliefs and philosophy. A typical example is Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952). In this novel - as in the play *The Palmwine Drinkard* (1972)- written by Kola Ogunmola fashioned against what Dasyuva, quoting Ogundeji (1987, 1988, 2003), calls 'Ogunde tradition' characterized by long musical opening glees, stock cultural dances, acrobatic displays and direct audience intrusion/participation (112) - the world of folklore and mythology is fully reflected. In this novel, the world of the living and the dead are so fused together that the dividing line between them is not easily discernible. The world of the novel is one in which events occur without necessarily being supported by the laws of causality and action. In the real world, these things are not possible; however, in the oral tradition, this portrayal is credible and believable by the people.

It is surprising to note that proponents of the colonial literature found Tutuola's work as illogical and improbable. This however would smack of the 'Victorian smug hypocrisy' if we consider such tales as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1816), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) or George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945). Like Tutuola's work, they belong to the world of fantasy where animals can talk and behave like humans; or, as in the case of Frankenstein, where men behave as beasts.

What these early writers of Nigerian literature in English did was to merely do what the traditional story-teller would do; merely refurbishing old tales and embellishing texts from his 'replete imagination by employing well-known motifs and narrative techniques' (Obiechina 85 – 86), albeit in the language of the colonial master. One may wish to criticize Tutuola's use of the English Language in the novel and qualify the writer as an illiterate; however, one must note that what seems to be 'bad English' could serve as a veritable data for the sociolinguistic feature known as linguistic interference. Since this type of a study is not the intent of this paper, suffice it to say that Tutuola's novel, however, is apostolic as it marks the beginning of Nigerian Literature in English.

Though earlier critics place emphasis on its lack of finesse in both the so-called 'Queens English' and the contents of the novel, its 'planting' triggered off the genre now regarded as NLE. It must be noted that hitherto, stories were oral in nature; Tutuola's 'apostolic' work no doubt documents these folk tales, garnishing them in the true spirit of an African raconteur. His seminal work no doubt proves Nigerian literature is a fusion of foreign and local elements in terms of characterization, structure, theme, and ideology. Indeed, as Clark (65 – 66) comments, Nigerian writing is writing with its heart right at home here in Nigeria and its head deep in America and England.

Thus works like Kola Ogunmola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* (1969) – the drama version of Tutuola's novel – and Duro Ladipo's play *Oba Koso* (1963) which translated literally means the 'The King did not hang', were writings which combined materials from the Nigerian oral traditions and history as well as western operatic forms. A close observation of these earlier forms of Nigerian drama will reveal that it is a genre that has derived its materials richly from cultural and verbal elements (Nwachukwu-Agbada 76) long before it became popular as a literary genre.

Viewing Ogunmola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*, one sees the story as allegory. Lanke represents the Nigerian man in quest of his true self, his alter ego. This has been cruelly snatched away from him by accident. This accident could be of historical making in the hand of the imperialists who carved out of the Niger the geographical entity now known as Nigeria. It could also be a self-made accident in the hands of the neo-colonialists who have betrayed the nationalists' desire for self rule and a new national identity. Whichever way it is viewed, Lanke is prepared to sacrifice all to rescue and restore this alter ego. In spite of the hardship encountered to achieve this aim, Lanke's expedition is fruitless – both in the dream (as the egg gets broken) and in reality (for he has only been dreaming) – it can at best be seen as a farce, a pitiable mirage! One wonders whether the playwright's thoughts are not lingering on post-independence disillusionment, bearing in mind the freshness of the ravages of the Nigerian civil war. Already the desires of the nationalist are presented in a crumbled heap at the feet of the nationalists leaving bitterness in their mouths. Like Lenrie Peters' 'We have Come Home'; one asks what one has gained in the just ending civil war? Whatever way one views these works, it would not be wrong to underscore the fact that from the apostles, NLE has gathered momentum; it has started the journey slowly, albeit steadily to crystallizing what will in the 1980s be regarded globally as NLE.

## V. THE TRAIL-BLAZERS: THE FIRST GENERATION WRITERS

With the publication of Tutuola's novel, a landmark had been scored for Nigerian Literature. The catalyst to this growth was the establishment of the University College, Ibadan (UCI) in 1948. The UCI was the answer to nationalist clamour for a university within the shores of Nigeria. Hitherto, Nigerians had to travel to the UK for graduate and post-graduate studies. Needless to say, that the fledging university – an affiliate of the University of London – was moulded along western models. UCI then produced the first Nigerian writers in the English Language: Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ola Rotimi, J.P. Clark (now Bekederemo-Clark), Christopher Okigbo, T.M. Aluko and a host of others. These writers, using the skill of the new language they had acquired, generated writings which addressed their own peculiar society. True, their writings were built on the patterns of the western ones, but they no doubt used their writings to bring home the point that Nigerians had a veritable way of life before the colonial masters eroded their culture. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a quintessential example. This literary masterpiece that first brought Nigerian writers to the lime-light was a riposte to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which Achebe considered as racist. Achebe's treaty was to prove to the westerners that the Nigerian people had a set of values, which was embedded in their culture, long before their arrival on Nigerian shores; also, his seminal novel proved that Nigerians – nay Africans – had a history. Another literary trail-blazer is Wole Soyinka; also of the UCI stock, he brought African literature from obscurity to global lime-light when in 1986 he won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Soyinka is one of the foremost writers in Nigeria; he is a novelist, a playwright, a social critic and many more, who has also been involved in the shaping of the Nigerian nation before independence. His play *Childe Internationale* (1987) is a social satire on the Nigerians of the early sixties who took so much delight in having links with the UK as possible. This class of people saw western education as the ideal and left no stone unturned to make sure that if they did not have this education, their offspring would. Such is the case of Politician and his daughter Titi. It is however in the character Wife that the reader is shown the absurdness of the 'been-to' mentality. Because she has had a little contact with London (symbolic of westernization), she no longer knows how to pronounce words in Yoruba; to her, garri, a popular Nigerian staple food made from cassava, is 'gerri'. Local diets hold no allure for her, only 'potato and misi grili'; finally the reader observes the disdain she holds towards her culture. That she is nameless in the script identifies her as a prototype; she is a symbol of the contempt the emerging Nigerians of the early stages of the post-independence era held for traditional values, and their craze to be more westernized than the westerners.

The writings of the first generation writers as earlier stated can be aptly described as the beginning of Nigerian Literature in English. These writings bore the stamp of the liberated spirit of the Nigerian masses from colonial bondage. Aside from replying wrong colonial notions about Nigerians, some writers strove to stamp a Nigerian identity on the new genre of literature. Thus, Nigerian issues such as the gains of the post-independent nation were a major preoccupation of the writers. This can be clearly seen in Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966). In this novel, Achebe turns prophet, and foresees the lot of a political system that allows illiterates to take over the reins of authority. Chief Nanga MP, Honourable Minister for Culture, is corrupt through and

through; rising from the position of Primary School teacher to back-bencher, and finally to the seat of power, he uses his power to increase his own pocket.

Nanga is a picture of the type of politician Nigeria does not need; he is a prototype of all the leaders she prays not to have. As of the time Achebe wrote this novel, the political terrain had not deteriorated to its present state; in this light one can see the writer as a prophet, able to see into the future and see events long before it takes place.

Even in the genre of poetry, the story is no less different. Merging western forms with domesticated contents, poets like J. P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka and a host of others birthed what is now rightly called Nigerian poetry using the English Language. Like the other two genres discussed, the first generation poets, used their skills in the new language to engage issues that were purely Nigerian in content, geared at expressing the nationalistic spirit of the era. A look at Wole Soyinka's poem 'Abiku' found in Senanu and Vincent (1976), will illustrate the ethos of the age. The poem exposes the skill of the poet at using western poetic devices to enunciate the metaphysical world-view of the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, especially the myth of the cycle of human existence consisting of the unborn, the living, the living-dead (spirits, ghommids, ancestral sprits ) and the dead. Abiku, which literally means 'Born to Die' belongs to the spirit-realm of the living dead and oscillates between the unborn, the living and the living dead. No doubt, Abiku then is a symbolic representation of the belief of the first generation writers in the futility of human existence. In the poem, the spirit-child makes boast of its supremacy over the so-called powers that be; he gloats: In vain your bangles cast/Charmed circles at my feet/I am Abiku, calling/For the first and repeated time!

Like the colonial masters, who the poets seem to liken to Abiku's parents, their 'charmed circles' (the chains of slavery and colonialism?) cannot abort Abiku's reincarnation; liberty will surely come with nationalism when the cycle is complete. In Abiku's 'repeated' returns, one observes a cockroach-like resilience to every to any form of death meted against it. This is recognisable in the various protests - and struggles that liberated Africa from the 'charmed circle' of slavery and dehumanisation and brought such nations as Nigeria the liberty she now boasts of both as a human and literary race.

From the fore-going one can see first generation writers as vanguards in the field of Nigerian literature. Their writings, as earlier observed, are built on western models; however, the major criticism levelled against them, especially by the second generation writers, is that they are too pessimistic about the future of Nigeria. For them, it seems all must end on a tragic note. True, the first Nigerian Republic-ended on a note of betrayal, but that did not mean that there was no hope for a brighter future.

Another characteristic of these trail-blazers of Nigerian literature was the portrayal of heroes as messiahs in their works; to them, the salvation of the nation is resident in the hands of a single person. This person then could mar or make the nation. One observes that even in reality, especially after the First Republic (1963-1966), the destiny of the young Nigeria laid not in the hands of either a civilian president, or a military despot, but in the collective goodwill of the Nigerian peoples. This realization, and global developments, ushered in a new dispensation for Nigerian writers and helped forge a new category of Nigerian writers.

## **VI. THE EXPERIMENTALISTS: THE 2<sup>ND</sup> GENERATION WRITERS**

The group of writers that emerged after the first generation of writers were called the second generation writers. These writers were born out of a disillusionment of the gains of Nigerian independence. For them, the First Republic had failed in its bit to rid the Nigerian populace of the shackles of colonialism; in its stead was the new monster, neo-colonialism. The old masters had not left; they had only metamorphosed into black-white masters.

In the global terrain Africans were declaring the beauty her Africanness as supported by a new ideology known as negritude championed by Leopold Senghor and other renowned African writers; likewise, the Marxist, Leninist, and the feminist tendencies were having their impact on the then Nigerian youths. Similarly, on the Nigerian terrain, the impact of the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 left its mark on the young minds of these writers, now known as the second generation of Nigerian writers. These writers protested against what they regarded as the pessimism of their precursors, as well as their thesis that Nigeria's governance was the sole preoccupation of an individual. For them, Nigeria's salvation was (and is still is) the collective effort of all and sundry; this is irrespective of age, gender, class, religion and ethnic leanings.

These writers include Femi Osofisan, Olu Obafemi, Niyi Osundare, Bode Sowande, Festus Iyayi, Kole Omotosho and a host of others. According to Dasyilva, Osofisan in drama plays a pioneering role in evolving a unique dramatic form (164). Generally, the writings of these literary artists departed radically from those of the first generation writers both in form and content. Hitherto, the composers of literary art leaned heavily on western models; this new generation consisted of writers who were prepared to experiment with old forms to produce new and novel forms. Thus, these writers borrowed largely from the folkloric traditions and history of their people and converted them into writings that would address the Nigerian situation; these situations range

from political instability, civil strife, and ethnicity. Using their writings as effective weapons, these writers sought to achieve social change through a collective effort.

Indeed, from this generation of writers, emerged women writers who hitherto had been mere observers on the literary sphere. Women like Zulu Sofola (1935-1995) – first Nigerian woman playwright – Mabel Segun and a host of others emerged on the literary scene. Notably, the male writers of the second generation were female-friendly, portraying women as capable as men in the development of the emerging Nigerian society. The subject matter of the writers represented under this generation was varied – from armed robbery as in Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1976) to courtship and marriage as in Olu Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender* (1993). Using such 'mundane' materials, these writers postulate ideological view-points taking a Marxist stance. The plays of this generation can be classed as total theatre as they use song, dance, music, costume and a host of theatrical techniques to drive home their dramatic vision.

A critical reading of Olu Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender*, reveals that the playwright attacks corruption in society; Otunla and Abeke must get married, but they must do this without soiling their hands in the corruption of the past. So, while they embrace the traditional values that accompany courtship, their wedding must be bereft of the trappings that make a man embezzle funds so as to impress society. They realize that after the wedding is the marriage; for it to stand the test of time, it must not be built on falsehood.

Okpewho's *The Last Duty* (1976), on the other hand, explores the incidence of the Nigerian civil war. In it he reveals (relives?) its horrors and examines the by-product of man's inhumanity to man. Like the playwright Osofisan, Okpewho is woman-friendly in this novel; however, his portrayal of the major female character, Aku, does not depart from that of the first-generation writers: this is so because at the end of the novel, we see her as a 'fallen' woman.

Niyi Osundare and Okimba Lanko (Femi Osofisan) clearly represent this new genre of poet writers. Using local flavour to embellish their socialist concerns, these poets experiment freely with traditional modes to pass across their messages of hope to a new generation. Like the poets of the Romantic period, they bring the village hearth into their poems to drive home their poetic vision. In Osundare's *Village Voices* (1984), he demonstrates his love for the performance of his poems to the accompaniment of traditional instruments by using folkloric materials to weave poems which appeal to man's sense of justice as in his poem 'The Land of Unease'. Using the symbol of eating and sharing of Yam (the king of all food among the Ekitis and Ijesas of Western Nigeria), the poet ponders on the issue of social segregation and why there should be any such stratification in society. Definitely, the socialist is at work in this poem as the writer wonders 'why have a few chosen to be thumbs/and the many others *omodindinrin*/cling precariously/To the periphery of the palm?' (Osundare 46). This social injustice, represented by the inequality of the sharing of the yam (national cake?), is the bone of contention in the poem. One observes, on a deeper level, agitations against ethnicity and all forms of segregation in the society being addressed in the poem. The use of Yoruba words like '*Esimuda*', and '*omodindinrin*' are Osundarean characteristics in his bid to add local flavour to his poems. In *Minted Coins* (1987) by Okimba Launko, the style is not too different. Take the poem 'The Departed' for instance. The poem begins 'Ojoo maa ro/ojo maa ro/itura lo je' (Launko 43). These lines are written in the Yoruba language and can be transliterated as 'Rain pour continuously/rain pour continuously/you are a soothing balm'. The lines are actually the words of a Yoruba nursery rhyme chanted by children when the rainy season commences after the heat and drought of the dry season. However, the poet gives a dramatic twist to the poem; rather than the joy the recycle brings, there is the nostalgia that some close ones have been lost in the process of the season, and therefore will not feel the soothing balms of the rain – the gains of the year's harvest. These departed 'the young plants' with their 'tentative fingers' cannot feel them because 'they are no longer here'. One wonders whether these 'some' died, or they betrayed the cause; we are not told. However, one thing is sure, nature, as symbolized by the rain, will continue to be constant in falling in due season.

Generally, these writers discussed in this section, also known as the 'emergents' (Oni and Ododo, eds. 77), can be seen as writers who view 'literature as a social force' and as an 'ideological weapon' (Obafemi 120). They put a lot of energy into their works, believing that the writer can be the catalyst of social change in any given society; their clarion call is to all and sundry, no one is too small; none is too big either to contribute to the Nigerian dream.

## VII. THE CONTEMPORARIES: THE THIRD GENERATION?

Questions have been asked here and there whether there is a third-generation of Nigerian writers; it seems however that the third generation of writers is yet to emerge. This opinion is aired considering the fact that there has been no distinct new genre on the Nigerian literary horizon. However, one can see that contemporary issues have affected the turnout of themes and subject matters evident on the literary scene. Writers since the nineties have tried various ways of incorporating the styles of the first and second generation writers and experimenting with them. A typical example is Olugbenga Hansen-Ayoola's *Groans* (2003); the writer uses the prose genre to argue a dialectic issue – should the social status that a human being is born into

determine his destiny in life? Because Olaore is born a slave, he must die because he has fallen in love with the Princess, Enitan. Like Olaore, we ask: is a slave not born the same way a free-born is born? Hansen-Ayoola uses a traditional setting to argue a contemporary issue; this he does using traditional icons, proverbs, and imagery. Social injustice is a bane eroding the Nigerian society and pulling down her much-deserved development; by drawing our attention to it, we are encouraged to nip this social malaise in the bud.

Another contemporary writer is Bunmi Julius-Adeoye, whose prose collection of stories titled *Temisan* (2007) deals with the present predicament of the female gender. No doubt one sees the feminist in her as each story reveals the fact that in spite of the traditional Yoruba world-view of women or the girl-child, she can make a difference in her society without devaluing herself.

Particularly relevant to this phase is the emergence of female poets like Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Bose Ayeni-Tsevide. In Adimora-Akachi's *Waiting for Dawn* (2010), several poems examine a myriad of issues which are not just feminist inclined. This is justified in her Preface; she claims:

This collection is a poetic response to the parlous conditions in which we continually find ourselves in our country as well as the inequities of the so-called globalized world. (Adimora-Akachi Preface)

Thus, the poem touches humanity, not just women issues. Take 'Another Miscarriage' (Adimora-Ezeigbo 20), for instance. Here, the poet speaks as a nationalist mourning the political loss of lives augured by the unwarranted killing and destruction of properties during the April 2007 national elections. In this poem, the persona is sexless: a voice mourning the loss of a nation. No doubt, female voices have come of age and have come to stay! Maybe in the poem 'Part Two' women are saying:

I am the sum total  
Of the pain of my people  
The anguish stomached  
In the womb of a nation

The poems I write  
Are pain killers  
I take them in doses  
And overdose  
Numbing the pain  
That may never go away (Ayeni-Tsevide 73).

This pain definitely will give birth to gain no matter how temporarily this succour may be. The joy of relief itself is a right step in the right direction. Whatever one feels, one notices among the contemporary writers tolerance and sensitivity towards gender. Gone are the centuries when women's writing was done by proxy; women are largely seen as being involved both as writers as well as contributors to the Nigerian well-being on the contemporary scene.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought in a lot of hopes and aspirations on a global pedestal. With this century has come technological advancement in all spheres of learning; alongside this is the 'miracle' called the internet – the world at our finger-tips! The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a land-mark for Nigeria (as was for so many African nations); what with independence, blotched political regimes, civil wars and strives and military dispensations. The past fifty (50) years have been anything but smooth for Nigerians. To crown it all, on December 25, 2009, a British-Nigerian, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, attempted to bomb an American airliner; his attempt marked Nigeria's ignominious labelling by America as a 'terrorist nation'!

The question, one wonders, is what prospect does Nigerian Literature hold for the future, particularly as from the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From the foregoing, it must have been observed that literature has played a huge role in the emergence of the Nigerian nation; writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Femi Osofisan, Olu Obafemi, Niyi Osundare, to name a few, have made Nigerian Literature to be reckoned with, both at home and abroad. Like Dasyva (1997), one agrees that these writers constantly draw materials and inspiration from the - rich African philosophical hermeneutics and loric tradition (60). Thus, one prospect of Nigerian literature in this millennium would be serving as a source of global re-information of her social-cultural values. It is a known fact that there are many misconceptions of the Nigerian peoples as can be seen in the Abdulmutallab issue. Good literature can redirect this negativity and project a good image of Nigerians. Within the Nigerian shores, literature that delves and dwells on how best to set the nation on a right footing, would be an encouraging catalyst in gearing all and sundry towards the business of effective nation-building. Finally, one sees Nigerian Literature rising above the challenges of bad reading culture, inadequate patronage,

lack of publishers and publishing houses; coupled with this is the fact that new writers and writings, particular in gender and children writings, must emerge to enable Nigeria acquire an enviable position in a globally emerging techno-literary world.

No doubt, Nigerian writers have remained close to their cultural heritage. Their employment of oral tradition is clear testimony of cultural nationalism. In using oral traditions, they demonstrate fraternal links with the oral artist whose medium of composition is the mother-tongue. Those who doubt the authenticity of the Nigerian writer because they write in a foreign tongue should equally note the immersion in oral source in spite of their creative use of such data, therefore showing that Nigerian writers employ oral tradition both as a way of extending tradition and as a technique of integrating chosen form, style and medium for greater artistic effects (Nwachukwu-Agbada 88). The least one can do for such writers is to acknowledge their worth, read and appreciate their works, and be a partaker of the realisation of their literary vision and the development of the nation Nigeria which they so dearly cherish.

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