

The Relevance of Ideology in the Aesthetic Development of Contemporary Nigerian Literature beyond Soyinka

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ABSTRACT : *Discourse in aesthetics and ideology has been approached from several perspectives that have yielded diverse postulations on the relevance of and ideological content in aesthetic considerations of artistic creations. Some scholars have argued that once ideology becomes the fundamental consideration in artistic production, then aesthetical considerations are automatically subsumed while the artistic object itself receives only superficial attention. Opponents of this school have, instead, posited that since art is environmentally based and must reflect the experiences of the producers, it cannot but also imbibe the ideological standpoint of the community that produces it. Art is thus seen as the life blood of a community which encapsulates their world view, ethical and moral standards. Art becomes the means by which the ideology of the community is expressed. Therefore, the aesthetics of artistic production becomes a basic consideration in defining what art is relevant as an appropriate representation of communal or national values. In traditional societies, in particular, aesthetic considerations are paramount and are considered as intellectual processes for the benefit and expression of individual or collective consciousness of the community. Perhaps one should accept Jean-Vilar's postulation that theatre in particular and literature generally should be thought of as a "secular religion". It is with these postulations in mind that one wishes to attempt an assessment of the Nigerian literary and dramatic landscape with a view to explicate the place of ideology in contemporary Nigerian literature. The aim here is to bring out the extent to which ideology has influenced the consciousness of local composers of artistic works and to see if these artistic works have necessarily subsumed aesthetical under ideological considerations. Also, mention is made of few artistic works in the attempt to find out the extent to which personal or communal ideologies have influenced the Nigerian writer.*

KEYWORDS: *Aesthetics, Ideology, Consciousness, Nigerian Literature, National Values*

I. INTRODUCTION:

In 1995, Harold Bloom in his *The Western Canon* asserted, rather sarcastically, that the reign of aesthetic value is in terminal decline, while the reign of political and moral values has begun in earnest and is now effectively triumphant... art and literature have been brought fully within the sphere of influence of all those ubiquitous ideologues who know what is good for us, who are remorseless in imposing their vision of good on us. We are, destroying... all intellectual and aesthetic standards in the humanities and social sciences, in the name of social justice [while] the grand old idea of aesthetic, artistic, or literary worth has given way to the triumphalist new idea of moral and political worthiness. In 2010, Thomas Duddy described Bloom's position as "impure aesthetics," in an article published in "Think Journal" of winter 2010 in which he asserts that despite the fact that Bloom believes himself to be providing a purely aesthetic, non-ideological conception of literature, it is surprisingly easy to show that his conception is an aesthetically impure one. Duddy goes further to argue that implicit in Bloom's advocacy for aesthetic superiority in artistic production, is in fact, Bloom's own ideological bent in support of liberal humanism which seeks the liberation of the human mind from subjugation to identified ideological or philosophical canons or postulations. Bloom's and Duddy's positions re-echo the age old question of what should be or is the proper and acceptable relationship between literature and Politics or ideology which has long occupied academic minds in protracted discourse yet remains unresolved. From the 17th century age of Dryden and Pope, Scholars have been engaged in Scholastic postulations in several disciplines of art, humanities and social sciences. The argument can, however, be broadly summarized into two tenuous positions namely

- a) The proponents or defenders of the old concept of art for art's sake or the purity of art and
- b) The opponents of this concept who argue instead for committed art that serves specific functions in society.

The proponents of the art for art sake concept are aptly represented in Harold Bloom's assertion that the age old canon be not adulterated by ideological considerations. They question the relevance of an ideological content as opposed to an aesthetic in the consideration of literary works. They contend that ideology will subsume the artistic or aesthetic worth of literary works in favour of moral or ideological considerations.

In Bloom's view,

ideology and literary excellence do not seem to be compatible bedmates since the ideologue is often blinded to artistic excellence due to his political or moral inclination. Ideologues do not give literature its full and proper view since artistic oratoriness becomes, to the ideologue, an ideological rather than an aesthetic consideration. To the ideologue, the aestheticians' response to literary artifacts on the basis of artistic excellence and value are considered unethical, anti-social and irresponsible judgments. Foremost in the minds of the aestheticians' appreciation of an artistic object, however, is that the judgment is a purely individual response as opposed to a societal or ideological response to an artistic work. To the proponents of the purity of art, therefore, artistic creations should and do exist in their own rights and should be judged independently of functional or utilitarian considerations. Bloom and others, therefore, hold that "to read ideologically is not to read at all. The greater one's ability to conceive of artistic excellence in a work, the greater is the irrelevance of an ideological consideration of that work since a work of art, say a poem or a piece of drama cannot and should not be read primarily as a social document. It fails to be art if so read and remains a social diary or administrative record." Ideologues, they further assert are bound to impose restrictions on artistic excellence by limiting the writers' artistic versatility in favour of ideological concerns. For this reason, James Farrel, 1942, corroborates Bloom and argues that proletarian literature necessarily becomes a weapon in the class struggle and the handmaiden of politics and the docile servant of an ideology. The writer accepting this conception and attempting to make it operative in the actual construction of novels, would have to see politics first and then life, and he would have to deduce life from political programs.

In defense of the role of the writer in society, Farrel finally posits that

He who would put literature in uniform is afraid of literature. The demand that literature conform comes from fear, not from confidence, and not from faith... what I do stress, however, is that literature must solve its own problems and that it cannot be turned into the handmaiden of politics and the looking-glass of ideologies. The justification of literature must be made in terms of the real functions which it performs and not by seeking to make it perform functions for which it is unfitted. In opposition to the purity of art is the counter argument proffered by the exponents of ideological commitment in artistic production. In their view, art does not and cannot exist in isolation of human society and societal needs or demands. The argument is foisted on the premise that Art generally and literature in particular are social phenomena and the true artist, who will be relevant to his milieu, must portray, not only the realities of human life but also defend ways of thinking, ideas and beliefs as well as the philosophical background that characterizes his society and serves to identify the uniqueness of his environment in universal humanity. For this reason, Thomas Duddy is quick to point out that Bloom's critics

- Will turn the tables on him and argue that he too reads in the service of an unacknowledged ideology – that very ideology that values the human self and seeks to preserve it from subsumption in larger social forces.

The criticism leveled against Bloom and other advocates of the purity of art is that their postulation lacks credulity because implicit in their position is an ideological bent in favour of liberal humanism which eulogizes the humanistic discipline of art. These advocates of art for art sake it is argued do not endorse pure formal aesthetic values that are integral to the ideology of liberal humanism but are, in fact, instead ideologically seeking the liberation of the human personality which is their own unconscious and un-proclaimed ideology which they do not seem to be aware of. What is uppermost in these two opposing positions is that while exponents of the philosophy of art argue that "art is free of any moral or political purpose," but exists purely on its aesthetic appeal which arouses in us the urge to appreciate it on its own merit, the opponents or ideologues are of the view that appreciation of art cannot be independent of its value or function in society. They feel that art or literature is only a means to an end. Art and literature therefore become only weapons for class war or the struggle for emancipation between opposing social classes in the human world. Literature that emphasizes only its aesthetic appeal and does not serve as a weapon of propaganda and the propagation or expansion of the frontiers of knowledge based on ideological convictions and leanings is no literature and should be discountenanced in class struggle which is a necessary characteristic of human evolution. From these, the relationship or the relevance of ideology to the aesthetics of literary production becomes difficult to comprehend especially when one observes that literary production is inseparable from given social conditions and practices in a particular environment. If literature is dependent on the social conditions which in themselves are defined by cosmic and ideological consciousness of a society, what seems to be paramount in the two positions is not so much the independence but rather the inter-dependence of the two philosophical postulations. In the face of this diversity of opinion, feeling and postulations, perhaps what should be uppermost in our minds is the internal contradictions and inter-dependence which tend to emphasize Theodor Adorno's assertion in 1969 that "it is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident," thus, scholars in different fields of art. Philosophy, anthropology and psychology have all provided operational definitions of art to cater for their different or

diverse interests in artistic production. The concept of art itself has evolved over the ages and been open to changes in time and place. Today, the word “art” implies the creative arts thus, attempting to eliminate other artistic endeavors. Art is therefore used today to designate the artist’s creative capacity or skill at innovation and linguistic manipulation. This would also entail ability to arouse and engage audience aesthetic sensibilities. To effectively discuss the relationship or otherwise between aesthetics and ideology and their relevance to contemporary Nigerian Literature, I wish to first look at the development of these terms, their implications and their transitions through the ages to their present connotations and usages to enable us apply them to the Nigerian context or discover how they have been applied by Nigerian artists in their literary productions particularly in dramatic productions. This way we can discover their relevance in the explication or ambiguation of the Nigerian literary experience.

II. AESTHETICS

is defined in Wikipedia as

- ... A branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of art, beauty and taste, with the creation and appreciation of beauty. It is more scientifically defined as the study of sensory emotional values, sometimes called judgments of sentiment and taste. Scholars in the field define aesthetics as “critical reflection on art, culture and nature.”

Aesthetics as a broad field can be viewed either from a regional perspective i.e. African, European, Indian, Islamic or Asian aesthetics; or from a temporal perspective i.e. Ancient, Medieval, Modern or Post-Modern aesthetics. It is argued that from the late 17th century to the early 20th century, aesthetics underwent a slow revolution into what is often called “modernism.” Today, beauty is emphasized as a key ingredient of artistic production and of aesthetic experience and so art aims at absolute beauty. To Friedrich Schiller therefore, aesthetic appreciation of beauty is the most perfect reconciliation of the sensual and the rational parts of human nature. This pre-supposes that man, specifically the artist, created beauty to be sensually appreciated and reasonably applied and interpreted for human edification. Aesthetic appreciation of beauty satisfies an innate urge in man to behold what is beautiful or admirable in nature. To Schiller, art should be geared towards functional realization. Arthur Schopenhauer on his part views aesthetic contemplation of beauty as the most free that the pure intellect can be from the dictates of will, here we contemplate the perfection of form without any kind of worldly agenda and thus any intrusion of utility or politics would ruin the point of beauty. Finally, Oscar Wilde emphasizes aesthetics as “the contemplation of beauty for beauty’s sake.” The contemplation of beauty, it is argued, requires total conformity or acceptability of standards which are not defined by functional relevance. Scholars therefore generally see aesthetics as central or synonymous with the philosophy of artistic creation. Aesthetic judgment is not, however, limited to only artistic creations as it applies to objects generally. While, artistic judgment would refer specifically to the appreciation and criticism of artistic works. Since artistic creations are located within the domain of the senses just as the aesthetic experience, art as Hegel argues, is a sense of perception of objective rather than subjective revelation of beauty and thus art, like aesthetics, is as such free of moral or political purposes. Art, therefore, does not connote or imply functionality of an artistic object but simply serves the conveyance or communication of an idea which must be done in an aesthetically pleasant manner. Art is thus assumed to aim at beauty over and above functional value so anything that precludes beauty cannot be said to be art. What we recognize as central to artistic creation and by implication aesthetic appreciation as identified by philosopher Denis Dutton is that aesthetics implies or contains six ingredients central to its realization. These include:

- [1] Display of perfection or expertise inherent in artistic skills.
- [2] Offer or display of non-utilitarian pleasure
- [3] Achievement of stylistic excellence i.e. that artistic objects and performances must satisfy rules of composition placing them in recognizable style
- [4] Criticism or critical reflection. i.e. that artistic objects must yield to judgment, appreciation and interpretation.
- [5] Imitation i.e. that artistic objects or creations must stimulate experiences of the world except they be abstract art.
- [6] Special Focus i.e. that art must be set aside from ordinary life and made a dramatic focus of experience

If art is set aside as a special focus of life and made a dramatic focus of experience, then one can comprehend the centrality of aesthetics in the configuration of literary products or the literary experience as an articulation of societal life and even ideology itself.

III. IDEOLOGY:

Wikipedia again defines ideology as

a set of conscious and unconscious ideas that constitutes ones goals, expectations, and actions. An ideology is a comprehensive vision, a way of looking at this... as in several philosophical tendencies... or a set

of ideas proposed by the dominant class of a society to all members of this society. As a concept, ideology originated from the French revolution during the controversial period of intense political debates that resulted in the formation of the first French empire. The word was specifically coined by Destutt de Tracy in 1796 as a reference to one aspect of his “science of ideas – i.e. the study of his ideas.” Like aesthetics, ideology has also since assumed several diverse connotations occasioned by usage and situational imperatives that necessitate variations in applicability of the term. For instance, to Napoleon Bonaparte, the word “ideologue” was coined to ridicule or derogate his intellectual opponents. Today, however, ideology has shed some of its derogatory connotation and become a neutral term in the analysis of opposing political opinions as well as divergent social inclination. Karl Marx also used the term ideology within the framework of a conceptualized class struggle and domination which was seen as “a necessary part of institutional functioning and social integration.” Exponents of Marxism later saw ideology as “a system of ideas and beliefs, especially political ideas and cultures, which articulate the world view of the dominant class.” A Marxist ideological perspective therefore identifies class conflict between the dominant bourgeoisie within an ideology that is consistent with their interest and the proletariat which is dominated or afflicted with the ideology of the dominant class thus resulting in class struggle. Generally, an ideology requires total commitment of the followers as well as an intellectual leadership. In modern terminology, ideology connotes simply “a set of conscious and unconscious ideas that constitutes one’s goals, expectations and actions,” and it has become a key term in literary, cultural and even film studies. As such, ideology has crept into every facet of human life governed by institutional formulations such as politics, psychology, economics and human social organization. Ideology now forms the basis for all human action and inaction and serves as the catalyzing agent for most human activities and engagements. As a result of its general application, scholars like D. Bell, 2000, have opined that the excessive proliferation of ideology has brought ideology to a dead end because they are too many methods for the classification of political ideologies. He posits that “we are living in a post ideological age in which redemptive, all-encompassing ideologies have failed.” Prophetic as this statement is, it does not, however, seem to hold true in the sense that ideology is so fast penetrating the literary world particularly in Nigeria, such that its effect is now felt deep in the fabric of literary endeavour. The major problem about ideology, however, lies in its assessment whether it has yielded more positive or negative gains given the Nigerian socio-political configuration i.e. her colonial experience and military dictatorship.

IV. LITERATURE, POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY:

The mere fact of its proliferation as Bell proffers, and the many methods of its classification seem to point to the invaluable position ideology occupies in our modern day academic discourses. Hardly any discipline or field of study exists without an ideology on which it is anchored. In literature and political discourse, ideology has become a key term such that critics of artistic or literary works first look for the ideological framework on which the artist’s or writer’s vision is anchored before going on to an analysis of the works themselves to decipher their relevance to any or the particular milieu from which the works are created. Ideologues have tended to emphasize Marxist ideological perspectives which define ideology from the point of view of the ideas of the dominant ruling class which exercises control over the means of material production and by implication over the means of mental production. From this perspective, a literary ideology would support the production of literature that expresses the ideas and beliefs of the class that controls both means of material and mental production. This configuration would presuppose the mental dependence of literary artists on the dictates of the ruling class. It would mean also the subjugation of the entire literary environment to the dictates of the ruling class. Critics have, however, been quick to isolate and relegate this concept of ideology to Western cultures predominantly dependent on industrial economies which easily stratify society thus subjugating the peasants or working class to perpetual labor in order to sustain the economic base. In modern society, however, ideology has shifted base to such institutional configurations as Gender, Race, Ethnicity and even Nationality. To effectively apply the concept of ideology to literature in the Nigerian context, perhaps one should borrow from the French critic, Louis Althusser’s concept of ideology in which he categorizes ideology into two types of apparatuses for maintaining dominance and coercion of society. These include

- [1] Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA’s) like the Army, Police and other Para-military organizations and
- [2] Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA’s) like the Media, Education and even the Family

The first i.e. the RSA’s readily come to the service of the ruling class as overt means for the exertion of control while the second work seemingly independently yet furthering the same agenda of the ruling class ideology. In most African States generally and Nigeria in particular, this arrangement is pervasively operational and serves as a subtle method of ideological subjugation of the entire populace (the literary environment inclusive) to the ideas of the ruling class. Fortunately or unfortunately, the Nigerian society is built on two contradictory social structures namely the traditional society and its elite and the Western educated elite whose

visions are perpetually seemingly opposed to each other. Added to this is the super structure of the ruling class which may be composed of either the traditional and Western educated elite or a Military Oligarchy. In this kind of socio-political arrangement, the question that arises is, to whom does the artist address his work? Or whose aesthetic or ideology does the artist sustain? Or does he prescribe an individual aesthetic or ideology personal and private to him in accordance with his personal convictions and cosmic predilection? Some artists like Wole Soyinka have attempted to do this based on their understanding of their cultural milieu and the inherent societal contradictions they face in their literary experiences. But this, in itself, places the Nigerian artist in particular and the African in an irreconcilable dilemma. Added to this is the fact that literary productions seem to emanate from several ideological contradictions within the environment itself which are in themselves irreconcilable. Ideological positions cannot, however, be seen as literary products but they do affect the outcome of literary products. From the foregoing, it becomes difficult to sustain the concept of a Marxist aesthetic in a milieu that is bedeviled with internal contradictions within the production or creation of literary works which will be sustained by a division in the language of apprehension of the ideological message. In African States generally, language can be seen operating at two levels, the language of the literate or educated elite and the language of the common people i.e. the masses or traditional languages. At these two levels, a different consciousness operates. The Colonial experience has foisted several languages upon the African societies all of which are authenticated by the Western propagated or formal educational systems existing alongside the traditional mother tongues. These two maintain different levels of philosophical comprehension of society and literary aesthetics. The aesthetic of the traditional society is basically that of a collectivity or the aesthetic of the masses which approximates to a dominated or socialist orientation sustainable in a revolutionary violent aesthetic that upholds the supremacy of the working class. The other level is the aesthetic of the dominant or dominating class which operates as a higher or superior force that feels the superiority of their own ideological inclinations. This duality is difficult to sustain in literary production and is what Soyinka (1973) abhors when he bifurcates the Nigerian intelligentsia and says of them

What we need really is an element of integrity... I would sooner have ninety nine percent of the intelligentsia silent rather than have ninety nine percent vocal of whom about ninety percent are purely hypocritical. There exist those I'd prefer to call intellectuals of the establishment... no matter what the status quo is, they consider it their intellectual responsibility to find reasons to justify this... By lending intellectual approval to the status quo, they enable the most moronic set of rulers to claim that they also have intellectual support on their side. I don't know whose crime is worse: the establishment intellectual or the intellectual who trots out ideological dogma and whose very conduct in society is ostentatiously contrary to the very ideology he preaches. What the Nigerian or African society requires of their artists and intellectuals today is not empty ideological proclamations. What society needs are poets and artists who utilize their acute creative sensibility for the recreation of their milieu not foisted on external influences to the process of literary creation. Politics and ideology surely have their own domain and literary creation should not be subjected to any political ideology or unconscious agenda. It is for this reason that even the advocates of the philosophy of art for art's sake stand accused by Marxists of creating a super or meta-ideology. Marxists argue that

the effect of the literary text is to provoke other ideological discourses of a literary, aesthetic, moral, political and religious nature. The literary text is the agent for the reproduction of ideology in its ensemble. It enables individuals to appropriate ideology and make themselves its free bearers and even its free creators. The literary text is a privileged operator in the concrete relations between the individual and ideology in bourgeois society and ensures its reproduction.

The Nigerian Literary environment seems to sustain a proliferation of ideological standpoints which tend to subsume aesthetic leanings and to determine the kind of literature that comes out of society. This way, ideology is almost overriding literary creativity. What we must keep in mind, however, is that literature is culture and our concern, therefore, is to determine the extent to which Nigerian writers can either resist the excessive influence of political ideologies or refashion the concept of ideology to reflect their environmental experiences and remain independent of control by the ruling class ideologies. We must also attempt to determine what the dominant influence on Nigerian literature is – ideology or aesthetics, and whether aesthetics can reshape an ideology. I have chosen two foremost Nigerian dramatists, Wole Soyinka, representing the old brigade who seem to have depended on myth for their dramaturgy and Femi Osofisan, representing the new brigade who are labeled socialists and therefore critics of the old brigade for their lack of ideological commitment. This is important because while Soyinka has relied on his mythopoesy, to remold and re-interpret the Nigerian Literary experience in line with universal mythic experiences, Osofisan believes and upholds a demystifying experience which fosters a communal theatrical paradigm for the interpretation of life.

V. MYTHOPOESY AND THE RELEVANCE OF IDEOLOGY: SOYINKA AND THE MYTHIC EXPERIENCE IN NIGERIAN DRAMA

In his book, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Soyinka presents his blue print for the interpretation of African literature. Here, Soyinka views artistic or literary production not from the perspective of ideological configurations but simply that art connects a people's cultural essence with their cosmic and archetypal primal sources. This belief in the inter-relationship between a people's literary output and their cosmology underlies Soyinka's reliance on myth particularly Yoruba myth, as a means of presenting and interpreting the Nigerian literary experience. He believes that the stage and the literary arts are very indispensable in shaping and regenerating the political and cultural identity of a people or a nation. But Soyinka rises beyond the particular to the universal in his belief that the Nigerian literary experience is akin to the Greek or European in its reliance on mythology. In defense of the universality of the artist and artistic experience and by implication, his utilization of myth in literature, therefore, the 1986 Nobel Laureate and Nigeria's dramatic giant once posited that "... the immediate humanity for whom I speak is the humanity that geographically demarcated is called Nigeria. Because it is the entity to which I immediately identify. Beyond that, I think one also speaks for humanity in general... so at no time, I believe, does one's writing stay within one's own immediate environment... as you very well know, I eschew the very facile ideological program. Soyinka's utterance here projects the artist beyond his immediate milieu and places Him within a universalist context within which he cannot isolate himself from universal socio-cultural postulations. In today's process of extensive globalization therefore, the artist sees himself as a primary source of political propaganda and growth of the process of democratization that characterize modern society. In this vein, the artist cannot extricate himself from ideological commitment. However, the artist who panders to political propaganda at the expense of aesthetic considerations, sells artistic excellence for functional purposes. These artists Soyinka describes as

Professional mouthers, the parrots of ideology...[the] Pseudo-Stalinists-Leninists and Maoists who are totally unproductive and merely protect themselves behind whole barrages of terminologies which bear no relation to the immediate needs of the society. He believes that the artist, as universalist; should be guided by universalist principles of artistic production such that he adopts styles and patterns of artistic creation that speak for universal needs of humanity rather than surround himself with a streak of ideological slogans that only becloud the meaning and relevance of artistic creations. In defense of the concept of art for art sake, therefore, Soyinka again asserts that "anything which enlarges the human mind, the human sensibility is not wrong, is not false. Whether you call it art for art sake whenever it is not associated with a political program or a reformist program, I do not know... as for commitment, I think one is committed as a human being and that is enough." This position is backed up and enunciated by his loud criticism of the philosophy of negritude which pervaded the French-Africanist literary artists' vision of African art. Soyinka's reaction was to point out that "a tiger does not proclaim its tigrity, it simply acts as a tiger by pouncing." As was expected, this utterance did not go down well with the so called "Pseudo parrots of ideology" or the proponents of ideological or committed literature who promptly accused him of mystifying African and Nigerian literature under the guise of a Yoruba pantheon which eulogized Ogun to the obscurity of literary creativity. In his analysis of Soyinka's novel, *season of anomy*, professor Dan Izevbaye posited that Soyinka "having experimented with the promethean myth and gotten dissatisfied has turned his attention to the Orphean myth," but Soyinka retorts that far from being tired, he was simply expanding his explication of the Nigerian or Yoruba world view through the utilization of European myths

It is not true to say that I've got dissatisfied with Prometheus- on the contrary. These various explications of human conduct, of man's relationship both with society and with the universe are not mutually exclusive...I described, for instance, our own Ogun, the Yoruba deity, in terms of a combination of the Promethean, the Apollonian and the Dionysian instinct...I was trying to explain these qualities in relation to the literature of other societies. Prometheus is a metaphor just as Orpheus (and perhaps Ogun). What seems to be of utmost importance in the dialectics of the controversy between the proponents and the opponents of the philosophies of artistic aesthetics and ideologically committed art is not so much the inclinations of the artists towards aesthetics or ideology. What seems to be paramount in the modernists global configuration of art is rather whether the artist is able to succinctly mirror his environment to reflect the intricate contradictions that form part and parcel of human life. The implicit question that arises there from is what method best reflects these contradictions; the aesthetic or ideological inclination of the artist? James Farrel(1942) sees the importance of this kind of portrayal when he disagrees with the critics of American realist literature and posits that Often the essential tragedy in realistic fiction is missed because of the fact that realistic writers try to maintain a tone of objectivity. They are accused of coldness.

Modernist art i.e. theater and literature emphasizes stark realism if it has to be ideologically relevant. But realism is not literature unless it is sustained by the aesthetics of literary production. The ideological writer who portrays the stark realities and true conditions of human life sacrifices aesthetic considerations for ideological propaganda which is not good art. It is for this reason that D. Bell argues that “ideology has come to a dead end because of its proliferation and what is paramount in modern terms is change, change that will encompass total integration and toleration of all human races.” Change requires recreation and destruction of old values. Perhaps this is where Soyinka’s metaphor of the Ogun myth suffices because in defense of his *The man Died*, often conceived of as a flawed work of art because of its’ presentation of stark realities, Soyinka explains I think the received ideas about what constitutes the correct literary style for any particular experience have got to be shattered. I’d like to say that several of such critics [who see the work as flawed] are still very much enslaved by the received traditions of European literary styles...they would like a straight forward reworking of a particular experience including a kind of text book pronouncement for projections for the future. In other words, there are ideas which are brought to bear about a situation and there is no preparedness in the minds of people for a complete radical and deliberate departure from what should be the normal expectations... writers should not feel that they are obliged to create a mono-stylistic narrative. Soyinka’s vision is as such never constrained by a particular Eurocentric stylistic paradigm and his mythopoesy is an outcome of his personal literary experience with world mythologies which he himself admits he cannot divest himself of but which serve as wealth of intercommunication to aid the explication of the African literary experience. He maintains that “as long as the actual metaphor itself does not become an obstacle to the appreciation of the entire message, I don’t think a poet should worry unduly about the eclectic appearance or structure of his work.” But this is precisely the bone of contention between ideologically oriented writers and Soyinka. Their position is that Soyinka’s metaphors often intrude in the way of appreciation of his literary creation and so far even the aesthetic appeal of his works of art thereby plunging the works into obscurity.

VI. DEMYSTIFYING DRAMA: OSOFISANIAN AESTHETICS AND THE USES OF IDEOLOGY IN NIGERIAN DRAMA

In opposition to Soyinka’s dramaturgy are what we call or style “the new breed” Nigerian dramatists led by Femi Osofisan. About them, Steven Inegbe(2000) observes that a new wave of dramatic and theatrical activities is brewing in the country while the old has not given way, and does not intend to do so, the new is fighting and it is succeeding in its fight for recognition. The past fifteen years of dramatic and theatrical activities in Nigeria have depicted a rich and committed effort at renewed theatrical activities. Foremost among the emergent playwrights is Femi Osofisan, who has been widely acclaimed as the next literary giant that the Nigerian literary society is producing after Soyinka. In his review of Philip Emeagwali’s *Works from a country in Progress: Nigerian Literature*, Femi Folorunso (1993) observes that)

The works of two dramatists, Femi Osofisan and Bode Sowande, represent the mood of the new Nigerian drama. The two believe in committed art, especially Osofisan [who] resorting to the Marxian theory of reflection as a means of dissecting society, both playwrights are concerned with history and myth but believe, passionately, that history is an ongoing spectacle in which units of experience can be isolated... Nigerian literature is constantly drawing from the realities of the country’s social processes in the finest tradition of protest art. Sandra Richards (1987) therefore notes the divergent inclinations of the playwrights, Soyinka and Osofisan, when she observes that Osofisan while owing a debt of gratitude to Soyinka has a different vision from him. She argues that Osofisan acknowledges a discipleship to his predecessor Wole Soyinka but is “more concerned with specific social issues than with universalized themes, and is pre-eminent among contemporary Nigerian playwrights in combining a radical perspective with recognition of the importance of cultural traditions.” In agreement with Richards are the voices of Sola Afolayan and Ade Adeseke (2012) who argue that the [new] generation of the younger playwrights, though less popular among the critics of dramatic literature, home and abroad,... are more famous as Marxist writers whose aesthetic standpoints evince the alienation between the haves and the have not’s of the society. But Soyinka has consistently defended his mythopoesy on the grounds that it aids the explication of his literary themes because, as he argues, it is not only the ideological or the stylistic leaning of the artist that sustains beautiful art. It is also the capacity of an artistic work to portray the realities and the experiences of a people under subjugation that matters. From this perspective therefore, Soyinka’s dramatic pieces are seen to predominantly rely on a mythic framework to explicate the contradictions in the Nigerian milieu. *A Dance of the Forest* intricately portrays the dilemma of a Nation in search of dynamic and purposeful leadership. *Kongi’s Harvest*, *The Road*, and *Death and the King’s Horseman* portray Soyinka’s heavy reliance on myth as comments on dictatorship, the futility of excessive reliance on abstract philosophies and the tragedy of foreign intervention in the fulfillment of a society’s ambitions respectively. Even *The Swamp Dwellers* utilizes myth to comment on over reliance on human destiny in determining the affairs of man. Because of this mythological bent, Soyinka has received much critical attention not only from critics but also

from ideologically oriented modern dramatists who argue for the destruction of this mythopoesy and consequent demystification of Nigerian drama along ideological lines. The relevance of this to literary production, they argue, is that in modernist democratic parlance, it is necessary for the sensitization of society towards positive revolutionary action that would ensure freedom of the mentality of the masses and their enslaved intellects in order to pave way for “true” democracy and the dismantling of dictatorship and capitalist mentality in the country. Bayo Ogunjimi (2009) therefore opines that

attempts have been made by African artists to evolve a revolutionary ideology that will negate the evils of colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, imperialism and capitalism [but] vacillations and apathy typify the search for such an ideology of development... this raises a big issue in modern African literature since contemporary African Arts have a maximum opportunity to develop ideologies [but have seemingly failed] This vision or new advocacy, as it is often referred to, is occasioned by changing circumstances which have been aptly articulated by Dr. Harry Garuba who in 1984 observed the movement and posited that

the overwhelming pressure of historical events and its attendant effect on criticism has sometimes had a rather salutary effect on the appreciation and evaluation of African works of art. A concern with socio-historical phenomenon is, in our case, virtually mandatory for any artist who does not intend to blunt his moral conscience and reduce his art to levity and banality. Harry however warns that despite this awareness of the socio-historical imperative of change, the critic who decides to abandon the job of analyzing “patterns of literary expression” and hunts solely for “messages and relevance” from a work of art risks abusing and debasing his vocation. In the face of this ambivalence i.e. the new ideological consciousness and the risk the critic faces if he does not succumb to its awareness, Harry advocates what he describes as a blend of medium and message which implies “a marriage of the aesthetic and the epistemological [because] an enquiry into the aesthetic structure of a work of art is more likely to reveal its embedded message than a reversal of that procedure.” What Harry does not address is whether the artist should also follow in the marriage of medium and message which is of course imperative. In carrying out an analysis of Femi Osofisan’s works, *The Chattering and the Song* and *Morountodun*, Harry warns that critics should be wary in their hasty labeling of artists as radical, revolutionary, Marxist or otherwise which are sometimes merely prescriptive and theoretical appellations without any practical foundation which echoes Soyinka’s criticism of empty ideologues. Literature, we are aware, thrives on cultural modes or paradigms of expression which are common to both artist and his society. Both artist and society share this collective inheritance and the artist who wishes to be part of the sensitization of his community must be seen to be relevant to that society in the utilization of their common heritage.

Femi Osofisan, like Soyinka, is another renown Nigerian dramatist of Yoruba extraction whose dramaturgy has often been described in critical parlance as Marxist, revolutionary or activist. The argument is that his drama is given force or impetus as a result of his Marxist socialist inclinations and convictions; that his revolutionary stance is catalyzed by his socialist ideological bent. He is therefore generally conceived of as a counterpoint to Wole Soyinka whose vision is said to be dependent on a mythic configuration of society and its cosmic viewpoint. It should be noted, however, that these two major Nigerian dramatists derive from the same culture and utilize the same cultural heritage for their dramaturgy. The two writers using the same heritage do, however, seem to have divergent views of dramatic derivations from their cultural heritage which encourages one to look at the different methods they have adopted in their literary creations. Their different approaches may reveal the several ways by which drama can become or be employed as a literary apparatus for ideological disambiguation to bring drama to the service of aesthetic and artistic explication of societal experiences rather than for explicit ideological indoctrination. Harry Garuba(1984) argues that Osofisan’s dramaturgy is sustained not primarily by a Marxist ideological bent but by a revolutionary aesthetic foisted on a different interpretation of a mythic consciousness in society. In a paper titled “Ritual and revolutionary Ethos” Osofisan (1976) explicates his literary vision when he posits that ...The dramatic heritage available to us has simply proved to be inadequate and it is not only that the machinery provided by the old society for dealing with chaos has lost its capacity for total effect, it is also that the very metaphysical *raison d’être* of that machinery has been eroded with the advent of a new socio-political philosophy.

Osofisan is acutely aware of his social concerns as he posits that when “chaos and incoherence define the modern state, how then does the dramatist, concerned with this state of anomy, evolve the artistic tools for exploring and dealing with this phenomenon without compromising his vision through the medium of his art?” To borrow Harry Garuba’s question, given this scenario, does the artist abandon his heritage or develop upon it? Osofisan is of the view that the way forward is not just “to identify the dramatic apparatus with its thematic content which amounts to narrowing the definition of the ritual experience,” but also for the dramatist to consider “appropriation of the apparatus by an act of mediation and re-interpretation, adjusting it to his own

requirements [because] as long as the archetype remains on the objective level of historical symbol rather than eternal paradigm, the wedding of ritual form and the revolutionary ethos should be possible.” Osofisan, like Soyinka, also uses myth as the basis for his dramatic encapsulation of experience BUT their visions of societal needs and reformation differ hence their methodologies also differ. Osofisan relies on the Yoruba god “Orunmila” for his vision while Soyinka uses “Ogun” another Yoruba god as the metaphor for societal rejuvenation. While Osofisan sees Orunmila as the mythic personage who incarnates tension between the real and the visionary worlds, between the past, the present and the future, not as a deity but as a metaphor, Soyinka sees Ogun as reminiscent of the force of destruction and creation and only this way serves as a metaphor for dramatic presentation of these co-existent capacities for destructive and creative rejuvenation in human life. Osofisan does not emphasize thematic content but rather the capacity of the dramatic apparatus itself as a reformative tool in societal restructuring. It can therefore be argued that while Soyinka’s vision is interpretative of societal experience, Osofisan’s is prescriptive and geared towards mass sensitization. For this reason, the two dramatists have been seen as fostering two divergent dramatic styles and consciousnesses which have affected the content and artistic thrust of Nigerian drama in recent years. Contemporary or modern Nigerian drama however does not seem to portray the same force and vitality exuded by the past schools led by Soyinka and Osofisan but the trend is not limited to dramatic production alone. Titi Adepitan (2006) has argued that

- ... There are disturbing trends in African literature [which] have been apparent at least for the past two decades, but as the generation of African writers with an international reputation grows older, it is inevitable that attention will shift to the quality of writers and writing that will come after them. The 1980s and 90s heralded the arrival of a new breed of African writers [dramatists inclusive] but they came laboring under too many anxieties. The political landscape was becoming more and more desperate; before they learned to write, many were co-opted into the vanguard of literature as an instrument of protest and that was all they wrote.

It does seem therefore, that ideology or protest does not favour good literary production. The question now bothering most Africans in the literary arena, particularly in the face of the concern with a new socio-historical experience to drive African literature through the 21st century and which emphasizes a revolutionary aesthetic that roots for ideological or committed literature in order to be relevant is what should be the status or place of Nigerian Literature and drama today? What also are the new directions in the development of say Nigerian literature in the face of an emphasis on ideologically opinionated literary production in the 21st century.

VII. DEFINING THE FRONTIERS OF LINKAGES BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND AESTHETICS IN NIGERIAN LITERATURE AND DRAMA

In the face of the strong advocacy for a revolutionary or ideologically pinioned consciousness in Nigerian drama, occasioned by the African historical experience of colonialism which has not dissipated but only metamorphosed into neo-colonialism, some critics have observed that the development of African literature including Nigerian drama in the past thirty or so years has been positive. Others like Titi Adepitan (2006) however hold a contrary opinion and argue that these other critics

...err when they point to the few isolated examples of writers who have published a decent title or two...In taking up literature as a tool and a weapon we never took care to point out that literature also had a responsibility to insist on its own self-contained meaning, outside of the particular occasions that might seem to generate it at any given time.

Adepitan articulates the worry of most people who feel that ideology does not favor the production of good art since it subsumes aesthetics in favor of functional values. Her observation clearly emphasizes the concern about ideologically oriented literature which fails to take into consideration the demands of literary aesthetics thus leading to poor propagandist productions that clamor for acceptance as literary works. Aesthetically oriented critics do not argue that literature should fail to respond to societal needs as the need arises but that too much reliance on a professed ideological consciousness precludes the self contained meaning which is central to an artistic creation. Adepitan(2006) therefore argues that

- ...Even social commentary needs some polish, some skill, and there can’t be much to admire in it when it becomes an invitation to all comers who think they have a message...possibly because we have yet to systematize the different functions of the literary critic, a lot of very poor works keep coming to the fore. In the news papers of countries such as Nigeria, fierce debates rage about standards.

Lamentable as this state of affairs may be in Nigeria the situation cannot be divorced from the socio-historical experience of the country. A country like Nigeria, embroiled for a long time in military dictatorship, the experiment with democracy is still enigmatic given the feudal hegemonic structures erected by the military

to justify their seizure and control of power at the expense of the helpless electorate. In this kind of setup, the call for a literature rooted in an ideological background became attractive and even desirable as the best option to reflect a country in a military era heavily policed with social interaction so disorganized and uncertain that literary production could only be seen in the light of what Andrew Gurr and Angus Calder (1974) described in terms of ...The artist, if he merely wishes to survive, physically into middle age cannot exempt himself from political action. He must commit himself to the destruction of a system which destroys humanity.

This kind of literary consciousness becomes the advocacy of the exponents of ideologically committed literature and drama that calls for the dismemberment of liberalism and classical Marxism to pave way for the provision of, as Gurr and Calder put it “a critical consciousness that can aid social mobilization and spur society out of their indifference to engage in concerted effort at armed struggle for mental and physical liberation.” The response to this kind of call led to the production of ideologically oriented literature devoid of aesthetic refinement but steeped in propagandist slogans. This defines the new thrust of contemporary Nigerian drama and theatre which have largely become tools for mass mobilization and conscientization of the populace for revolutionary action. Contemporary Nigerian dramatists like Odua Ofeimun, Tess Onwueme, Olu Obafemi, Bode Sowande and Ben Tomoloju have largely utilized theatre as a tool for reaching out to the conscience of the masses. Apart from their portrayal of the realities of contemporary Nigerian life, these writers rely heavily on an ideological consciousness which serves as the force of their dramatic postulations. In her analysis of Tess Onwueme’s force of theatrical enactment and the thrust of her dramaturgy, Nilgun Okur(1998) states that

- the preponderance of oral tradition and the traditional force of the proverb in African cultures does not only illustrate the power of the spoken word...but serves as an educational tool and emerges as a narrative strategy in her [Onwueme’s] writing...her dramaturgy is close to Osofisan in the sense that their aesthetic creativity is centered on the functional, collective and committed attributes of art.

Ross Kidd(1980) on his part observes that traditional festival drama has yielded positive fruits in this direction when he notes

- ...All over the world groups of peasants and workers are re-discovering the potential of peoples theatre as a weapon in their struggles for land, better working conditions and political rights. The new tradition builds on a long history of peoples songs, drumming and puppetry being used in resistance against colonial and other forms of oppression

If contemporary Nigerian drama and theatrical performances become too ideologically charged as can easily be discerned today because of intellectual sycophants who bandy empty ideological slogans for selfish interest, Nigerian artists could and should rely on or resort to traditional performances and the use of festivals which are aesthetically or artistically structured for societal control and edification to pass on messages that can maintain artistic excellence and de-emphasize excessive ideological indoctrination. A case in point is Femi Osofisan’s participatory theatre and Ola Rotimi’s de-mystifying examples which have been very successful in Nigeria as theatrical machinery in the mobilization of the masses. Here again, the appeal derives from the aesthetic content which veils the overt ideological message. Other examples cited by Ross Kidd include “community theatre in the Philippines; the RCDA experience in India; the Escambray in Cuba; the Kenyan Kamirithu theatre example and the Freire’s empirical participation in Guinea Bissau’s revolution.” These examples can suffice as succinct testimony of the efficacy of traditional dramatic aesthetics which can easily be mobilized and modified to serve the purposes of an ideological aesthetic frame work for African or Nigerian drama. This should however, never preclude artistic aesthetics from literary productivity. In this way the scripts will not be judged purely from an academic perspective for their artistic or aesthetic relevance but from the perspective of traditional ritualistic ensembles serving sensitization purposes and free from the shackles of academic or modern dramatic and elitist theatrical constraints of production. Like Soyinka’s mythopoesy or Osofisanian ritualistic metaphors, the traditional theatrical models will challenge the peoples’ awareness to critically examine their experiences in their environment and provoke a re-assessment of their mythic consciousness towards the creation and utilization of myths that will destroy reactionary tendencies while remaining aesthetically relevant as principles for literary productions. The example of Ibrahim Hussein’s *KinJeketile* and Sembene Ousmane’s *Gods Bits Of Wood* in which myths are employed for progressive education of the people remain memorable examples of community theatre. The total participatory theatre eliminates the artist’s impository monologue in form of prescriptions and instead according to Kidd (1980)

- ...Turns theatre...into a dialogue in which the audience is actively engaged in the production of meaning. It converts the audience from passive recipients of received truth to active protagonists in creating a theatrical experience.

The perceived impediment to total participatory theatre in Nigeria may be the language problem since language is central to the creation and sustenance of a literary experience. Today Nigeria boasts of over 200 linguistic groups apart from the major tribal units of the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa/Fulani and Tiv etc. This linguistic constraint has been a subject of many international conferences but no feasible solution appears to be in sight. Nigeria, however, has the advantage of what can be regarded as an “inferior form” of the English language called Pidgin which permeates all facets of life among the tribal groups and can easily be utilized by artists for the literary artifacts. In the alternative even the tribal languages can become handy because it is hoped that traditional theatrical models if well funded and sustained can transcend both linguistic and cultural boundaries and yield positive aesthetic and social results. It should also be noted that in traditional popular theatrical renditions stylistic use of language can serve the purpose of subverting any overt ideological inclinations since ideology will not be consciously placed above artistic use of language already known to the community. The conviction about the efficacy of traditional popular theatre is based on their concept as predominantly fostered by satire and control of deviant behavior in traditional society. The adoption of satire in these theatrical models as a dialectic for an African aesthetic standard will largely expand their capacity to enhance beauty as well as to mobilize and arouse society into appraisal of their experiences. The examples of satire as utilized by John Dryden, Alexander Pope and several restoration dramatists like William Wycherley, William Congreve, George Etherege etc are shining examples of the force of satire as reformatory tools in literary developments. Though, made from a very powerful ideological conviction, Bayo Ogunjimi’s (2009) advocacy for an African literary aesthetic that will control the production of what are truly African artifacts may be considered a viable option for the development of African and Nigerian drama. He asserts that

- ...The transformation of society through arts demands a more pragmatic ideological approach. The fluctuations of ideas and ideals, the inability of many African[and Nigerian] artists to translate and interpret the historical and materialistic perspectives of African developments to a progressive literary and social vision, adversely affect the emergence of a coherent revolutionary art. By examining concepts such as “critical Realism” and “socialist realism”, [perhaps] we can elucidate further the absence of ideological precision in African literature.

For the simple reason of avoidance of any ideological labeling Soyinkas’ *King Baabu* (2002) a decidedly satirical representation of the despotic rule of General Sani Abacha in Nigeria defies classification and is realized in diverse dramatic techniques to create a feeling of revulsion, decadence and mindless brutality that characterized the Abacha years in Nigeria. Here again, satire suffices as a model for commentary on depravity and bestiality yet aptly veils the ideological inclination of the artist. From all the above, it can be gleaned that our purpose and vision for Nigerian literature and drama within the ambit of African literature in the 21st century is as Ernest Emenyonu(2006) has aptly put it

- ... To open up a dialogue that will move African literature forward in the 21st century and to invite comments and inquiries into the appropriate directions for African literature in the new millennium--directions which challenge writers, readers, teachers and publishers of African literature to invest their best initiatives in harnessing the 20th century legacies of African writers and African literature towards a consolidated base for the 21st century.

To achieve this vision perhaps, we should deeply assess Charles Nnolim’s assertion that \we must

- ...Of necessity, draw attention to Africa’s’ pre-history, to a time when its oral literature stood alongside the best celebrated epics of Europe. These epics include the Ozidi Saga, the Mwindo epic, the Sundiata epic, Shaka Zulu and several others which could be favorably compared with Greek, Roman, German, Indian or even English or French epics of the ancient or early periods of human civilization. These epics are replicas of the unique creative excellence of African artists which were condemned and relegated to obscurity in favor of westernized versions and typologies of artistic creation.

From the past we can assess our progress and project into the future with the realization that literature is only relevant when it is adjudged to satisfy social functions of reflecting the individual and collective experiences of the producers of that literature. Any literary work which is not aesthetically pleasant or which is deliberately couched in ideological obscurity is no good literary work. Nigerian and African literature of the 20th century responded to the colonial experience. In the 21st century and buoyed by dominant strides towards globalization, Nigerian literature should be striving at re-directing the minds of our writers and critics towards new directions that will aid the advancement of this literature to break new grounds rather than keep looking backwards at the wasted years. As a result of the need for literature to satisfy social functions and to respond to new socio-historical experiences, contemporary Nigerian writers or “the new breed” as they are fondly called easily succumb to such sobriquets as radicals, Marxists/socialists, revolutionaries, activists etc. which appellations were sometimes empty theoretical constructs because the writers were mostly unable to rise up to the challenges posed by institutionalized repressive state apparatuses of the military dictatorships in governance.

The Marxist socialists failed because their vision and mission were utopian – to create a perfect society and as Charles Nnolim puts it,

... The enthusiasm, the vibrancy of the 1960s and 1970s are definitely lacking... who is the new writer on the literary scene today whose message is large enough to elicit spontaneous response from the critics because the critic feels unchallenged by the depth of the writers insight?

It is in the quest for a change of vision to eliminate Eurocentric approaches to African or Nigerian literature which has narrowed our perspectives in the field that one advocates a widening of the generic forms and a concentration for now on oral or popular theatrical models which still hold potential and still bask in unexplored grounds for African literary development. This genre of African literature has played very little part in the formalization and expansion of African identity and consciousness for the simple reasons that

- [1] The field was dominated by Western anthropologists who emphasized functional at the expense of artistic and aesthetic values of the verbal forms and
- [2] Scholars, critics and instructors in the field have limited access to the forms due to linguistic constraints to carry out what accurately portrays the rich and varied potential of the verbal forms as well as their artistic and stylistic variability.

Okot P' Bitek's examples are very well received in East Africa and still serve as reference points for many writers who wish to follow that example. These epic forms, folktales, traditional songs, dramatic festivals and ritual ceremonies can easily be harnessed into popular theatre for the satisfaction of social functions of literature as they are abundantly popular in all African traditional communities and offer rich forms of literary mobilization.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the thrust of this paper is that the literary text is and must be seen primarily as a cultural product which relevance and appeal is judged from its artistic excellence yet its artistic and aesthetic qualities are often suppressed or out rightly marginalized in favor of ideological commitment or functional relevance. Ideology may be important and relevant in politics and governance but the total immersion or subsumption of a literary piece in ideological considerations beclouds artistry and leads to the production of substandard literature that fails to satisfy the very social function that literature is meant to satisfy. Furthermore, literary works must be couched in stylistic patterns that are congruent to the portrayal of the social inconsistencies and contradictions being articulated and not in profuse ideological slogans which are the ambiance of such other social institutions like politics and anthropology which aim at social revolutions that can reorganize society towards revolutionary attainment. Ideological commitment, if not properly handled, can easily destroy or marginalize aesthetic standards central to the production and sustenance or perception and judgment of literature. Soyinka's mythopoesy, though Universalist in its attempt to interpret the African or Nigerian literary experience, is difficult to comprehend. Osofisan's metaphors may lead to profuse ideological claims which sometimes enhance erroneous interpretations of the messages intended in the works. In modern dramaturgy, therefore, satire and popular theatre have been discovered to play major roles in attempts by literary artists to raise aesthetic potential of their works while achieving the exposition of social ills thereby producing relevant aesthetic messages through which people perceive contemporary experiences or sensibilities. Modern dramatists rely on oral forms like satire and popular theatre to subsume their ideological bent just as Soyinka has done in his *King Baabu* to reinterpret traditional myth and achieve meaning and aesthetic quality in their creations.

It is also reiterated that any ideological approach to literary creativity that emphasizes direct representation of external or experiential reality, social condition and authorial backgrounds or ideological bent plays down on aesthetic aspects of the literary text as well as originality and uniqueness of the narrative style of that author. It emphasizes politics or ideology at the expense of aesthetics. After all, an ideology, if any, can only be sustained or explicated if the work of art is artistically well written or aesthetically pleasant and attractive enough to sustain audience interest. Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1867) once argued that "it was not Irving who invested the Hudson with romance, but the Hudson that inspired Irving," therefore, by implication, it is art and aesthetics that will sustain ideology not ideology explicating artistic works because ideology tends to suppress and obscure the importance and intrinsic message or the artistic and aesthetic vitality of authors while the literary text consequently becomes nothing more than a tool for the propagation of an ideological or political agenda. As a result, critics have sometimes argued that neither artistic reality nor ideology should be emphasized at the expense of each other but rather in their complimentary interaction and contextual relevance. Furthermore, because of ideological inclinations, people have tended to either forget the true function of literature in society and are arrogating other secondary functions to it above its primary function

of entertainment and education or they out rightly divest it of its primary functions. For this reason, Jonathan Culler (1997) argues that “what theorists have done is to reflect on literature as a historical and ideological category, on the social and political functions that something called literature has been thought to perform.” On whether literature or drama is ethics or should be ethically grounded, Oscar Wilde (1993) argues that

...there is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are either well written, [implying aesthetic pleasure] or badly written... No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style... No artist is even morbid. The artist can express everything.

Ideology can therefore only be relevant to literary creativity in its complementary interaction to the literary text's contextual relevance. This is so because the literary text is not a direct interpretation of the world of reality and cannot be otherwise it ceases to be literature. The literary work creates its own reality which is verisimilar to the world of reality but within which aesthetic paradigms are superior to experiences in the world of reality. In most cases therefore, literature challenges existing reality. To this end, Jaroslav Kusnir has argued that even in criticism of literary works, ideological and structuralist approaches to criticism play down on artistic excellence. He therefore posits that

in the past decades [critics] have gradually displaced a literary text from the centre of attention and [dealt] either with the social reality or with a meta discourse (i.e. literary theory which is about itself, or with a philosophy of a discourse) rather than with the literary text. The result he argues is that critics

take a literary text only as an instrument to be taken to prove some sociological, political, ideological or philosophical positions and theories rather than its literary, artistic or aesthetic quality and meaning.

In the modern world of extensive globalization, Nigerian literature and in particular Nigerian drama will only achieve relevance when there is a shift of consciousness and vision from the current portrayal of the social problems and dilemma of the writer caused by colonialism and neo-colonialism to a vision of artistic and literary production that will reflect Nigerian characters grappling with the problem of integration into the global transnational cultures. This shift of consciousness will also mark the end of ideology in its present context in the sense that, as Dell puts it, writers will no longer be concerned with the problems of corruption and crass materialism and debasement that characterize the Nigerian environment today. Writers will redirect their vision to face how Nigerian literature can fit into global literary standards dictated not by ideological concerns but by the aesthetic pleasure it solicits and achieves when compared with literary creations from other nations of the world. That is the task before the Nigerian artist, dramatist or novelist of the 21st century. To achieve this, Harold Scheub has aptly observed and calls our attention to the fact that

...the strength of the oral tradition seems not to have abated; through three literary periods, a reciprocal linkage has worked these media into a unique art form against which potent influences from East and West have proved unequal... the African oral tradition distills the essences of human experiences, shaping them into rememberable, readily retrievable images of broad applicability with an extra ordinary potential for eliciting emotional responses. These are removed from their historical contexts so that performers may re-contextualize them in artistic forms. The oral arts, containing this sensory residue of past cultural life and the wisdom so engendered, constitute a medium for organizing, examining, and interpreting an audience's experiences of the images of the present. The tradition is a venerable one.

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