

Review

An exploration into the satiric and poetic imagination of Yoruba abuse

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This study examines the Yoruba above from the satiric and literary prism both as an instrument of social reform and personal reprimand in an indigenous community. The discourse taps from the resources of literary studies to evaluate the poetic qualities inherent in the imaginative deployment of imageries and related literary devices that are built into abusive pieces among the Yoruba people. Samples of abusive languages are obtained from daily exchanges among the Yoruba people and the record of Foyanmu Ogundare (a Yoruba oral poet in Ogbomoso) whose works are replete with examples of such satire driven abusive pieces. The study concludes that Yoruba abuse is a veritable weapon of social reform whose quality is enhanced by the imaginative use of language which qualifies this art as a specialized kind of oral poetry.

Key Words: Abuse, Satire, Social reform, Imaginative, literary devices.

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INTRODUCTION

Abuse is a variant of language use whose province covers diverse situations of human interactions ranging from insulting quarrels, correction and reproach for misdeeds. For abuse to achieve maximum effects, it employ satiric reference to physical and behavioral blemishes through the instrumentality of carefully selected imageries and other literary devices thereby creating a special used of poetry in its own right. The present study examine the incidence of abuse among the Yoruba Poetic-Satiric parameters with the aim of foregrounding the creative prowlers that produce the abuse language of the Yoruba people.

SATIRE OF SATIRIC ART

Satires of satiric activities have both spiritual and ritual origins. They are spirituality motivated by man's sense of right and wrong with their consequences for both the individuals and the collective interest of the entire community. Among the Yoruba, various annual festivals of cleansing provide occasions for the society to express anger against individuals who have infringed on the community's code of conducts. It is within this context that such festivals as Gelede/efe, Oke ' badan, Edi, Opelu, Opee Pee and many other related festivals

derived their spiritual relevance as a means of ensuring healthy existence after the annual accumulation of burdens of sins. Indeed, as Dasylva (1996) puts it;

Most traditional African societies have, in acknowledgement of this fact, evolved some measures believed to be capable of ensuring their salvation and continued existence through seasonal ritualization of purification rites (8)

Essentially, it is a period when people take liberty to go round, as Dasylva (1996) observes, "proclaiming the crimes of identified criminals round the town to everybody's hearing" (10). In Olu Obafemi's (1981) view, during these festivals.

The traditional artist gets a day off seriousness and rationality to ridicule all forms of rules, individuals, high and low, gods and System. In the process, he points the way, most unobtrusively, to improvement 3 takes stocks of social ills and devious acts. (70)

Taiwo Olorunoba- Oju (1998) examining the nature of satire in the African traditional societies offers that;

In African communities, satirical abuse has been and is still Institutionalized (being quite prominent on the agenda of certain festival) as a means of exorcising the evil of vice (19).

Satire within this context is devoid of personal sentiment and thus is prevented from degenerating to the level of outright abuse. As piersen (1976) observes "the satire song carries the propriety of custom and good manners. Private slight are not allowed to fester "(66). Hence, in the satire art, the artist mediates between truly observable social misdemeanors which provide the raw materials for his enterprise and the need for the sustenance of the artist tradition of humor. Again, Obafemi (1984) is right when he describes the satirist as "a professional humorous entertainer who transforms the vicissitudes of life into laughter and fun "(71).

Donatu Nwoja, (1981) viewing satire from judicial perspective in the traditional African society offers,

Satire must... be seen as playing a role within the overall judicial System. Traditional society among which satire originated and found most violent and pervasive expressions had, for example, No prisons (230)

Hence, satire in the traditional society fills the judicial gap as we know it in the modern sense. Its methodology of ridiculing the victim through verbal assaults to the amusement of the others carries the sting of punishment

that a criminal will suffer in the modern prison.

Abuse, the focus of this paper, is personalized satiric banter between two individuals/parties whose social relationship has turned sour. Olorunoba- Oju (1998) sees it as "most direct form of satire-critical, unmitigated, non-euphemistic, non attenuated "(14)

It is a form of non-spiritual motivated satire which thrives on high humour specially propelled by the desire to hurt. As Olorunoba- Oju (1998) submits, "it is the most direct form of satire "(39).

This paper therefore examines the Yoruba abuse (eebu) through the prism of the satiric tradition with particular interest in the consideration of its artistic worth in terms of the selection and development imageries and other poetic devices specially aimed at achieving desire humorous and satiric effects. Specifically, such figure of speech as simile, metaphor, innuendoes, hyperbole and the use of phonaesthetic devices are examined in details. This effort demonstrates the veracity of Senanu and Vincent's (1980) claim,

When.. Traditional poems are subjected to literary analysis, it can be seen that they possess the same beauty of imagery and language, And the same devices that we are conscious of in written poetry and They embody profound ideas (9)

Samples of abuse for analysis are taken from foyanmu Ogundare's (1969) record in the which the art of abuse features prominently. However, other abuse samples are taken from day-to-day instances of abuse among the Yoruba people. Since the effort here is aimed at exploring and appreciating the poetic imagination in the Yoruba art of abuse, the approach in the next segment is thus decidedly literary. In this regard, we now examine those figures of speech identified above in some details vis-à-vis selected abuse pieces for proper analysis.

FIGURATIVE ELABORATION IN THE YORUBA ABUSE

SIMILE:

Simile provides the literary trick for calling up hidden images to carry out associative biddings. As Dasylva and Jegede (1997) put it, "it involves a physical or emotional similarity made between a given image and what is intended" (7). When simile is used in Yoruba abuse, it stretches, tickles and challenges the imagination through mere associative accuracy. In most cases, physical and observable attributes of the target of abuse are expressed in simileic form in Yoruba abuse. This type of abuse falls within the category that this writer prefers to call attributive inactive. In this case, the observable bodily

attribute (s) of the target is (are) brought into relief by likening such to objects or being which are known to possess, in super proportionate dimension, the target attributes (mostly tending towards the negative). This is demonstrated in the following:

Okuugbe
 Abi Kokon waju bi ako pepeye
 Abiwaju konko bi eni amala
 (Foyanmu Ogundare; 1969)
 Good-for-nothing,
 Whose fore-head is be knotted
 Like a drake's
 Fore-head hanging like amala bonus.

In this piece, the poet effectively paints the picture of a thoroughly disfigured individual by focusing attention on his facial features-which he likened to two objects. First, he is presented as a mal-formed ogre whose facial features are widely at variance with those of a normal human being. To start with, he looks like a duck, but not an ordinary duck, it is a worse specimen of the animal for that matter. The forehead is bristled like that of 'Ako pepeye', a drake with knotty facial configuration. The association operates at two cognitive levels. At the ordinary verbal level, it is a mere comment on the person's observable facial feature. It might therefore not provoke any sense of slight on the target or induced laughter in the audience. But the expression assumes pungent satiric edge as one is made to see the man (target of the abuse) going about with head bedecked with buds of bristles like a drake. The simile achieves both satiric (Ohumorous) and dehumanizing (abusive) effects.

The poet heightens the humorous effect through a careful selection of the "hard-working word", (Ogungbesan and Woolger, 1978:9) "Konko" to depict the target's fore-head which in this instance is also the laugh-line, while the suggestive of something extra (superfluous) which amala " (like amala bonus). Bonus is suggestive of something extra (superfluous) which obviously is unnecessary. Indeed, it is the fact of this extraneousness that imbues the fore-head with its hanging quality-the object of abusive derision.

METAPHOR

Metaphor, as Egulu (1977) observes "operates on the principle of equation" (21). It is a figure of speech in which an object is seen directly, in the light of the other for the purpose of clarity. It thrives on economy of words where all the encumbrances of indirection employed in simile are dispensed with. This is why Dasylyva and Jegde (1997:7) see it as "compresses comparison. Instance of metaphoric expression abound in Yoruba abuse. Indeed,

it is discovered that all aspects of non-attributive, Yoruba abuse are expressed in metaphoric terms to concretise, the abstract ideas expressed in them as the following analysis reveals:

Apa, Amumi-murawe, Alainiyeninu
 Afonufora maabenikan mu
 Alo sokoto gbo tokun
 FOYANMU Ogundare (1969)
 Prodigal son, who drinks water with its leafy
 drops, a nit wit
 A thoroughly befuddled fool; resemble of nobody
 That wears out a trouser with its waist rope.

The above shows the poet as a master metaphorist who through stock piling of metaphor-based images holds the target up as a completely useless individual. The few words used here are deliberately compact and matter of fact to stretch imagination far beyond their (the word's) ordinary denotation. Apa (prodigal) here has an elastic semantic edge in the Yoruba abusive discourse. Its cline of semantic application includes carelessness, senselessness and, above all, uselessness. One is therefore not surprised at the images that are made to keep it company.

"Amumimurawe" speaks volumes about the target's stupidity and carelessness. To simply call him "apa" (prodigal) will not achieve the desired satiric end achieved by the qualification "Amumimurawe".

The clincher lies in the last line, "Alo sokoto gbo tokun-tukun". Sokoto is the Yoruba trouser at the waist with a rope, itself made of same material as the actual trouser. The rope is normally made more resilient to outlast the trouser. But in case, the individual, a prodigal son, wears out the trouser with the rope in spite of its (the rope's) resilience. This is the punch-line of the entire piece. In the above, 'apa', the basis of the abuse which is abstract is made to assume concreteness to an otherwise non-concrete referent. Such instances abound in Yoruba abuse as we have in "Olosi", "Okuugbe", "Oloriburuku", to mention but a few.

INNUENDOES

This is the arts of indirection. As practiced in most satiric traditions, indirect expression save the performer the ordeal of having to mention names directly. It also gives the satiric piece the advantage of universality of application. In Yoruba abuse, indirection thrives mainly among co-wives in a polygamous set up. Here, the verbal gladiators invents other names to replace real names of the abuse target without the message being lost on the receiver who instantly takes up the challenge by firing equally blistering response also tiny masked by the performer's avoidance of direct name-calling:

Otutu yi mu
 Otutu yi po
 Ore mi fete bo mi
 Otutu yi po
 This cold is severe
 This cold is intense
 My friend covers me with your lips
 This cold is intense

Obviously, the performer here avoids mentioning any specific name to guard against being called the aggressor who provoked the other party into a quarrel. Its universality of application rests on the option, 'My friend' and not the co-wife who is the real object of the satiric attack in this instance. The biting edge of the song is hidden under the performer's exploitation of normal social ties among friends. It is normal to seek a friend's help during periods of need especially when such friend needs has the wherewithal to render such. The problem here is that of "killing cold" for which the friend needs covering. The impossibility of the demand lies in the deliberately absurd request. This leads to the discovery of the fact that the "friend" in question has abnormally long and possibly thick lips being satirized indirectly. As mentioned earlier, when the other responds, her response is also couched in innuendoes and so satiric/abuse 'contest' progresses as we have in the following response;

Bi e ba n wole e mase gbená
 Bi e ba n bolokunkun emase gbatupa
 Ore mi nbe lodede to tanna eyin

When entering the house, bear no light,
 When passing through the dark, do not carry a lamp,
 My friend is at the passage, with illuminating teeth

In response, the co-participant (wife) takes up the challenge by referring to the other persons blemish (obviously, dentistry abnormality which makes it impossible for the other to cover the teeth properly with her lips). She in response not only avoided mentioning the other person's name, she also took up the "benevolent" theme on which the first attack was based.

ONOMATOPOEIA

Onomatopoeia is a poetic device through which meanings are associated with sound. Osundare (1991) acknowledges the importance of onomatopoeia in Yoruba language when he attest that, "one of the most salient features of Yoruba is the fusion of sound and meaning" (66). Related to this is the preponderance of phonaesthetic ornamentation made possible through the Yoruba 8th alphabet; 'gb' to "suggest size" (Osundare,

1991; 67). It therefore features very prominently in Yoruba speech acts especially in its poetic art. The Yoruba abuse exploits this phonaesthetic device mainly to comment on size abnormality of body parts. It does so by exploiting the reduplicative linguistic resource for exaggerative and satiric effects. This is amply demonstrated in the following example:

Konga - big, owlsh, as in "konga-konga oju"; owlsh eyes.

Gbengbe - heavy, mountainous as in "gbengbe-gbengbe aya" mountainous chest

Gbongbon - heavy, burdensome as in gbongbon-gbongbon enu ; burdensome mouth. The words, 'konga', gbengbe and gbongbon suggest various shades of abnormal proportions. The abnormality is reinforced by the reduplication employed in actual abusive pieces. Note also the deliberate tonal variation which gives the abuses enhanced rhythmical effect. The above onomatopoeia reveals the following constant rhythmical pattern. The above onomatopoeia reveals the following constant rhythmical pattern:

LLL HHH
 LLL HHH
 LLL HHH

Other forms of onomatopoeia reveal the same poetic pattern, though, the use of 'gb' is absent.

The following examples clearly demonstrate the point;

Palaba - flat unshapely as in "palabapalaba ese" unshapely (flat) feet.

Booli - elongated, protruding as in "booli-booli enu" (protruding) mouth

Kolobo - thickly, unwieldy, as in "kolobo-kolobo etc" abnormally thick (unwieldy) lip.

However, there are other onomatopoeia-based abuses in Yoruba which do not take the reduction pattern as shown above. Again, some examples will suffice here;

"elenu suin bii enfunsso" – one with a twisty-hiss (full) mouthy like squeezing water out of wet cloth.

When water is being squeezed out of wet cloths, it produced a hissing sound and this is complimented by the squeezed shape assumed by the cloth there-after. Hence we, we have and exploitation of both visual and sound images here to comment on, the observable abnormality of the target's mouth. Such instances of sound manipulation abound in Yoruba abuse.

HYPERBOLE

In many instances, the Yoruba abuse tends to be

exaggerative. Exaggeration being a poetic tool for foregrounding helps in holding up an aspect of a discourse for attention. In the Yoruba satiric tradition, the object of abuse is deliberately over-blown to comical proportion through sheer over-description for satiric effect. The following example attests to this;

Obun
Ajimaaboju, aromilodomaasamra
Ipin nbe loju, lala nbe lenu
Ikun nbe nimu oloro bi okunrun-agbo
Eepa imi ati 'to nbe leyin ese
Ogundare foyanmu (1969)

The dirty
He who-wakes up without washing his face, ever
Refusing the opportunity of a bath
Ipin adorns his eyes, salivary splash fringes his mouth
Mucus floods his nose like a sick ram
Traces of faeces and urine decorate his calves

In the above, the poet employs the panegyric poetic mode- albeit negatively- to describe the in the above, the poet employs the panegyric poetic mode- albeit negatively- to describe the object of his abuse. The person's dirtiness is over-blown to almost unbelievable proportion. Through stock-piling of images, he succeeds in portraying the individual as a truly abhorable being indeed, dirtiness personified! All the references above are observable qualities of a dirty person which are visually verifiable. He goes further to appeal to the hearers' olfactory sense with the addition of:

Irun Abiya re run j'egbo lo
Bi obun ba nba o soro lowo
Bi ile-igbe l'enu re nrun

His armpit hairs produce odour worse than a sore
When the dirty converses with you
The mouth smells like a lavatory.

While "dirty armpit" and "smelling mouth" are common denominators of dirtiness, the performer succeeds in foregrounding these through successful use of hyperbole descriptions by comparing them to "festering sore" and "lavatory" respectively. Ordinarily, egbo (sore) and 'ile-igbonse' (lavatory) evoke a feeling of nausea in any conscious individual, but to think of someone going about with these characteristics really stretches one's imagination beyond description

CONCLUSION

So far, it has been demonstrated that abuse takes place where human interaction has gone sore. It can be between peers at diverse settings like motor parks, market places, and other related places. Abuse, when employed, is used to correct, offend, express anger, and comment on other misdemeanors. It is a form of satiric art that employs various poetic resources common to other forms of written poetry to hurt and ridicule.

The thin line demarcation that exists between pure traditional satire and the Yoruba abuse is that while the former takes place on a large social scale and so employs communal approbation, the latter is individualized as it is employed to settle personal grudges and misunderstandings. However, it reveals ample doses of satiric actions and humorous statements that challenge the imagination.

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