Literary and Linguistic Perspectives on ORALITY, LITERACY AND GENDER STUDIES

A Celebration Of Oluwatoyin Jegede @60

Edited by
Ayo Osisanwo
Kazeem Adebiyi-Adelabu
Adebayo Mosobalaje

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SECTION D
ORAL POETRY, NARRATIVES AND PERFORMANCE **245**

19. Yoruba Folktale as Literary Expression of Dissent against Repression 247
Wale Adegbite & Adebayo Adegbite
20. A Critique of the Cultural, Linguistic and Religious Symbolism of *Oríki* among the Yorùbá of Nigeria 269
Òkéwándé Olúwọlé Tẹ́wógboyè
21. A Didactic Adaptation of Varying Tunes of *Ere Olomoba* and *Yungba* Chants 287
Reuben Kehinde Akano
22. Transformative Themes in Hausa Lullabies: The Case of Hausa Speakers in Wukari, Taraba State 297
Maryam Yusuf Magaji
23. Oral Cultural Narratives and the Challenges Before Nigerian Women Writers 309
Rotimi Anne Olatunji
24. African Folklore: Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Development in the Contemporary Society 325
Sikiru Adeyemi Ogundokun
25. The Folkloric Tradition and the Female Characters in Efua T. Sutherland's and Ama Ata Aidoo's Plays 341
Nureni Oyewole Fadare
26. Oral Performance Techniques in the Works of D. O. Fágúnwà 361
Olanike Olaleru
27. Orature in the Digital World 375
Joseph Bankola Ola-Koyi

SECTION E
SEXUALITY AND MASCULINITY **395**

28. Sex, Sexuality and Power Relation in K. Sello Duiker's Thirteen Cents and the Quiet Violence of Dreams 397
Kazeem Adebiyi-Adelabu
29. Surveying Sexuality(ies) Representation in African Writings: Version, Subversion, and Conversion 413
Saliou Dione
30. The Portrayal of Homosexuality in Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* 437
Ebunoluwa Mobolanle Sotunsa & Festus Alabi
31. Sexuality, Morality and Identity Construction in Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* 453
Azeez Akinwumi Sesan

CHAPTER

26



ORAL PERFORMANCE TECHNIQUES IN THE WORKS OF D. O. FÁGÚNWÀ

Olanike Olaleru

Abstract

The emergence of African literature was occasioned by the gradual transmutation of the oral tradition into the written mode. With the transition from orality to the written culture, ably aided by Western education, Nigerian writers – both in the local and acquired foreign languages, began to engage their creative writing skills in constructing modern narratives while utilising resources from the oral tradition to achieve their purpose. Thus, the oral tradition, rather than diminishing, waxed stronger and continued to exist side by side with the written tradition to reinforce and enrich Nigerian literature. D.O. Fágúnwà, an indigenous Yoruba writer, is one of the best known for his skilful adaptation of oral material, as well as employment of oral presentation techniques, which makes his written works unique and unforgettable. Among oral presentation strategies exploited by Fágúnwà to maximum effect are rhetorical language, manifested in hyperboles, declamatory speech, reiteration, and stylistic features such as metaphor, proverbs, repetition, humour (èfè) among others, which actively engage his audience in a remarkable two-way communication. The crucial aspects of the oral performance tradition take for granted that enactment takes place in the lively presence of an audience who enthusiastically participate in the enactment and do not just spectate at a show. This attribute would thus explain the distinctively oral-written peculiarity of Fágúnwà narratives, and their unique descriptive flavour. These qualities have secured a lasting influence for his legacy in Nigerian literature. This paper concludes that Fágúnwà's in-depth grasp and deployment of the intricacies of the Yoruba oral performance strategies meaningfully aid his effectiveness as an exceptional raconteur and performance artist.

Keywords: Oral performance, Audience, Enactment, Techniques, Fagunwa narratives

Introduction

In his 1945 article entitled "Poetry and the Microphone," George Orwell argued passionately for the positive effects of poets reading their poems aloud to themselves prior to presenting the poems publicly. Apart from curing 'stage fright' for those who may have it, Orwell sees this approach as a way of putting a poet in the shoes of his audience, thereby anticipating their responses to and expectations of his work. Addressing particularly the possibilities of the radio as a means of achieving the foregoing, Orwell expressed the opinion that a writer (poet) "being set down at a microphone… is brought into a new relationship with his work …" (2). The idea here is of the poet being made to see and handle his work "as sound rather than as a pattern on paper" (4) in Orwell's considered opinion, will radically transform the presentation from "that grisly thing," known as "poetry reading" (3) into "a normal exchange between man and man" (4). This concept of a "new relationship" of the writer with his work and invariably with his audience sets the tone for this paper, especially as it succinctly summarises our focus; which is Fágúnwà's successful performance presentation of a written work to an orally-moulded audience.

The acclaimed success of D.O. Fágúnwà at his set objective accounts for "the longevity of his influence" (Osundare, 2017) on Nigerian literature which still reverberates with scholars and readers till the present time.

The gradual but unmistakable disengagement of most activities of the spoken word culture from those of the emergent written culture has had unprecedented effects on different areas of the arts in modern times. In the example of poetry used by Orwell, he lamented that the farther literacy spreads, the more it constituted a *problem* more or less for the oral arts and their continued existence; especially seeing the way poets responded to the new dispensation and its realities. For one, literacy ensured that poetry ultimately became divested of its foundational oral ingredients in any region where people could read. The situation gradually resulted in poetry almost only exclusively appearing in print. This new literate dispensation saw the poets becoming "more and more arrogant and unintelligible," and "the common man becoming more and more anti-poetry," until ultimately there was a "divorce between poetry and popular culture" (4). The situation called for urgent redress, reason for which Orwell made his concerns public. His propositions for a recompense mechanism identified two crucial contributors necessary for the rescue mission of poetry: the poet and the public. These two must be reunited.

In the African performance context, all three identified contributors can be represented as follows: i) the poet/writer: (performer), ii) the public/audience: (the performed-for), iii) poetry/text: (substance of performance/something to perform). All these three existed in Anglophone Africa at the dawn of our introduction to literacy and Western education, which ultimately resulted in our moving from orality to literacy. However, the success of the radical transition was going to depend on our writers whose appropriate response to the new season would determine the fortunes of our literary traditions.

In the situation reviewed by Orwell, the literate poets lost "the common man" (the general public), because they did not know *how* to transit into the new literary season by carrying along the original audience of poetry. In the case of Fágúnwà, who was writing at the onset of Nigerian literature's transition from oral to written culture, we observe that the author consciously incorporated into his works an audience not too far removed

from the original ambience of orality. In this way, Fágúnwà effectively retained the original (oral) audience while winning over a new (literate) audience for his written literature. This quick adaptability helped him in avoiding the orality-literacy disconnect discussed by Orwell. In other words, Fágúnwà adopted an attitude of the all-important "new relationship" between the artist and his work, necessary for the successful transitioning from a previous phase to a new, different one, without the tradition losing steam.

According to Ato Quayson (1997), this kind of move would be a good example of a "strategic transformation" and a tradition experiencing "continuity," or continuousness. Even though he did not mention Fágúnwà nor used any of his books in his exploration, perhaps because Fágúnwà wrote in the Yoruba language; yet Quayson's overall argument, as he looks at strategic transformations in Nigerian writing, perfectly captures what Fágúnwà did. On a general note, Quayson sees a situation where "the peculiar configuration of orality and literacy in African contexts lends a special quality to African literature" (2). The special quality of Fágúnwà's (Yoruba) written literature, and its wide acceptance at a time when the entire literary landscape was still largely given to orality is a strong focus in this paper.

Fágúnwà's unusual ability to successfully deploy the essential aspects of the oral performance tradition in a newly literate environment reverberates all over his works. The performance characteristics show up in the verbal compositions and syntactic structures of the narratives. And, according to Osundare (2016), wherever we find these characteristics in a written text, "it's only the writer/composer that can put those things there ..." This means they are deliberate acts of the artist. Fágúnwà deliberately composed his writings in a way that reflects his own essential oral background and to appeal to his oral- predisposed audience.

Also, the didactic/moralistic tendencies of a typical Fágúnwà narrative often attributed to his Christian/missionary influence are actually a feature of Yoruba oral (wisdom) literature. In wisdom literature, wise and philosophical precepts embodying the society's moral codes are taught to the young in the storytelling process (i.e. *ìtàn yí kó wa pé* ... i.e. this story teaches us that ...). Moreover, Fágúnwà's unique ability to present his narrations as if *not written* continually stand as credit to his reputation as an accomplished oral artist. Fágúnwà, even though writing, still consciously dons the garb of the traditional storyteller, whose success depends very much on his inner resources to hold an audience spellbound with his verbal skills. That Fágúnwà truly anticipated his peculiar audience and adequately prepared for them and also succeeded in transiting his tradition from what it was into what it became is proven by his continued relevance many decades after his physical departure from the literary scene. His works continue to stimulate new and exciting sources of research.

Literary Development and Its Many Phases

As pointed out by the literary critic, Izevbaye (2017), transformations brought about by any emergent dispensation actually represent phases that are "ideal types of decisive moments of change in one or more aspects of the culture" (7). And phases, according to him, are "useful for describing forms of transition in a culture" (ibid.). In other words, a

changing phase is no more than a form of transition or evolution. As such, writers ought to embrace them as tools to aid a culture in its necessary advancement to the next level. In this way the culture itself, when configured to the transformative demands, grows rather than atrophy or suffer loss for lack of adaptableness. This suggests that transition phases are meant to grow or advance a culture, not to stagnate it. A literary tradition, and in effect its society, therefore, will only experience a successful transition, as its writers embrace and respond positively to the challenges of the new dispensation. This adaptability will reflect in their writings. This is a notable achievement of Fágúnwà and his works.

As observed by Orwell in the England of his time, the status quo did not seem to follow the progressive course. Poets succumbed, rather responded to the exigencies of the new literate atmosphere because, unlike before, "lyrical and rhetorical poetry... almost ceased to be written" (3). The decline was so dire that even the habit of public declaiming of poetry as it were, became extinct. This steady decline eventually resulted in "a hostility towards poetry on the part of the common man" (3), and public presentation of poetry that used to be a feature of popular culture was now viewed as a solely elite affair.

The public loss of interest in poetry persisted because the poets did not respond with corresponding adaptability to the new dispensation. Poetry was no more a popular art and popularising poetry again became an urgent mission. A poet (writer), who achieves the above would have successfully established a relationship, that critical connection between himself, his work and his audience; and much of the observed breach would have been repaired.

Fagunwa's Concept of an Audience

The above scenario may not be essentially different from the one in which Fágúnwà must have found himself at the time of his writing. Maybe not as a writer trying to woo his audience back again from a previous alienation, because he was actually a pioneer in his field; but we see him instead as an artist of a *new* type of writing, striving to cultivate an appreciative audience right from the inception of his work. And it is as if Fágúnwà set out to get his works accepted with the big public (not only the limited, elite few), as soon as he debuted, because this was exactly what he achieved. He was able to present his new form of literature in such a way that made it *normal* and not something so unfamiliar that it must take any special process to get it accepted. It is on record that Fágúnwà was the first Yoruba novelist, and his *Ògbójú Ode Nínú Igbó Irúnmalè* was the first Yoruba novel, yet he scored such a high note on both points. This is remarkable. But the crucial issue here is that this writer did not just arrive at this high note. He worked consciously and deliberately towards it. How did Fágúnwà configure his audience? What did he do differently as a new writer in an emergent tradition? The answers to the foregoing questions will enlighten us further on the keys to Fágúnwà's evergreen strength as a writer, as we focus on the performance qualities of his works in this paper.

Call it a prescient streak in him, but Fágúnwà seems to have clearly envisaged the modernist disease of "obscurity" and "unintelligibility", and worked consciously towards avoiding it. His ingenious approach at circumventing this undesirable possibility is

noteworthy because in retrospect we compare it to the "obscurity" and "unintelligible" allegations against the first generation Nigerian (Anglophone) writers, accused of engendering the initial lacklustre public reception to written poetry. Fagunwa's decision to consciously configure his own reading audience without permitting any disconnection; but, rather, preserving continuity with oral tradition is a credit to him. This is a major achievement of Fágúnwà as a pioneer during this phase of Yoruba written literature.

For Fágúnwà to have recorded this success, it meant that this highly literate writer had to know more than just *how* to write. He had also to comprehend ways and means of getting what he was writing to *get read*. He had to directly reach his readers. This was his task at this time. Given the fact also that he was writing in Yoruba at the dawn of the flowering of English literature and the entrenchment of the colonial language, he had to know exactly how to get his game together. His manner of address and the structuring of his narratives confirm this. Another notable achievement of Fágúnwà in this regard is that while doing these epochal things, he had *no one* to learn from. This observation needs to be contextually situated.

While tracing Fágúnwà's literary circumstances, Bamgbose (2007) did observe that at the time of Fágúnwà's first attempts at writing, "there was hardly any written tradition in Yoruba to fall back on" (13). This assertion calls for qualification in the light of Karin Barber's well-documented historical narrative (2017) that before Fágúnwà there had been others such as E. A. Akintan and I. B. Thomas who "could reasonably lay claim to being the earliest Yoruba novelists" (21). However, as Barber notes, these men were not primarily 'writers' but "editor-proprietors of successful papers." It was in these papers that these men "launched their serialised fictional narratives, later recognised as early novels..." (ibid.). Moreover, by contrast, Fágúnwà's book was an "extended print fiction in Yoruba," and the concept at this moment in Yoruba literary history, was "new" (19). This means Fágúnwà did not have to serialise first and then gather the series for adaptation into a complete work; rather, he began a novel and completed it as such. So, perhaps, this is the context in which Bamgbose situates Fágúnwà's literary circumstances, and concludes that he was the first in the Yoruba novel tradition. Nevertheless, the task before this pioneer writer was an enormous one and he set about it with gusto.

Embarking on the intricate venture of Yoruba story-writing was, and still is an undertaking which no mean adventurer without a firm grasp of the rich complexities of the Yoruba culture and its traditions would dare contemplate. However, Fágúnwà not only succeeded in this endeavour, he also succeeded so well that an entire literary tradition emerged out of his ground-breaking efforts. Vibrantly alive till the present time, this tradition parades some of the finest of Africa's literary scholars and writers in its stock; a testimony to Fágúnwà's success as a pioneer.

Classifying them as "Yoruba writers", Irele (1982) explains that the rationale behind this quite broad categorisation is that the writers' works, diverse as they are, and regardless of their language of expression, serve as a form of "continuity of direction" for the process originally pioneered by Fágúnwà (108). The Fágúnwà process, for which I have here adopted the term 'Yoruba tradition,' just as Irele did, is one in which a writer having taken hold of the elements of Yoruba culture, particularly the language and the oral tradition, channels them through an individually created form which, at the end of the day, excellently reflects "the harmonization of two ways of life into a new entity" (97). It

is a conscious choice, just as we saw Fágúnwà doing with Yoruba language, in which Yoruba expressivity becomes the main aim of the creative endeavour, as the individual writer adopts whatever aspect to focus on.

Just as Irele has identified Tutuola and Soyinka with this tradition, so also can Osundare be identified with it. Osundare who, despite writing mainly in English, has personally declared that "the substructure" of his poetry is Yoruba, while "its superstructure is English" (2003: 455). Identifying himself definitively with the 'Yoruba tradition,' Osundare declares to Stephen Arnold in an interview: "I would like to write in Yoruba. ... Because if I write in Yoruba, I am freer in my expression, and I am culturally freer too...But writing in Yoruba would definitely limit my audience" (456). In other words, but for the exigencies of audience reach, Osundare would rather write in Yoruba. And this he even does whenever occasion permits, as in "Adumaradan", a Yoruba poem in *Tender Moments* (2006:17), and recently in: "Akìnwùmì Ìsòlá (E wá w'ewà èdè l'énu Àwòko) (2018), his Yoruba poetic dirge for the late Yoruba poet and scholar, Akinwumi Isola.

Furthermore however, and very importantly for the English-speaking writers in this tradition, Yoruba expressivity remains the main aim of their creative endeavours. As such, as explained by Osundare, stylistic strategies are carefully deployed "to moderate the Yoruba as much as possible, to mediate it into English" and thereby, ease "the difficulty of indigenous expression in a target language" (456). In Osundare's words, even "Soyinka does this a lot" (ibid.). This ability to make indigenous experiences intelligible to an English audience is what Irele, while naming the tradition and identifying its constituent members, has summed up as "the harmonization of two ways of life into a new entity" (97), and attributes to these writers' personal creative and individual talent.

The Yoruba tradition has also successfully spun more of its own reputable modern Yoruba writers including Adebayo Faleti, Akinwumi Ishola, Afolabi Olabimtan, among others, while notable contemporary poets in the Yoruba tradition include Akeem Lasisi, who performs in both English and Yoruba languages. All these are a testament to "the debt we owe his genius" (Osundare 2017).

The significance of what Fágúnwà succeeded in doing with his creative works no doubt accounts partly for why Dele Layiwola (2017) appealed that his writings be regarded as "narratives", rather than novels in the strict, conventional sense. Citing the character of Fágúnwà's narrative strength as evidence, Layiwola submitted that:

> "The intertextual range and interplay of forms are complex and variegated such that each work could be adapted as epistolary, story-telling or dramatic performance" (47).

Even though presenting his work in writing, it was not lost on Fágúnwà that the tradition behind him and the environment of his presentation are essentially oral and given to the spoken word more than to the budding writing culture. Fágúnwà, the writer, therefore had to also wear the hat of the performer, recognising the combined traditional roles of the story-teller as performer, poet, singer, verbal gymnast, orator and all rolled into one, who while teaching and informing, also brilliantly entertains his audience.

Fágúnwà's Reading Audience as the Olùgbó (HEARERS/LISTENERS)

In the opinion of Izevbaye, who sees the "importance of the audience as one of the primary motivations for Fágúnwà's creative activity," and the fact that his "conception of his audience shaped his writing" (1), his narratives also contain "seeds of performance" (6). Izevbaye's observations about Fágúnwà's audience-consciousness receives much boost from an earlier opinion by Bamgbose who identifies that in Fágúnwà's works, the performative seed of "direct address" (100), which comes to play because the performer is indeed acutely aware that he is addressing an audience. As a performance technique, Bamgbose asserts that this technique of direct address "is intimate and gives the effect of informality" (101) between the performer and his audience. Right from the opening pages of Ògbójú *Ode,* Fágúnwà makes clear that he is addressing not just an isolated reader somewhere, but an audience in whose warm presence he stands. He constantly uses the Yoruba plural referent 'e' or 'eyin' ('you' plural) in his addresses: "Enyin ore mi.../e ko bi mi...Nko fe ki e jo... kaka be ki e jo ilu na dada...ki e jo tayotayo..." (15), "Inu mi dun lati ri enyin ore mi ti e joko wonyi" (21), "...enyin na ti le mo...E le ro pe..." (25)," "E ko ri ..." (31), "Enyin na le fi oju inu..." (34), "Enyin ore mi..." (36), "Enyin elegbe mi gbogbo..." (39/48), Enyin ore mi...Enyin ore mi... (67).

This performer-audience intimacy, which Fágúnwà creates consciously, accounts for the ambience of his written language coming across "as if he is talking directly to a group of people sitting in a room" (Bamgbose ibid.). The intimacy ambience is a technique used also by performance poets whose works have been categorised by Hoffman (2011) as "written oral poetry," especially as far as the language of the texts is concerned. Such texts, according to Hoffman, though written, are to be experienced as oral. Therefore, the composition "seeks to encode in it a quality of oralness" (5). It is a deliberate doing of the poet. In the words of Osundare, a successful performance poet, this is a "parameter of performance" which is "integrated into the entire composition" of a work and it takes the poet to do it (personal interview with this writer on 5th June, 2016).

Despite the fact that he is literate or even highly educated, in a situation such as above, the poet's language is not elevated or grand because his intention is to reach his audience. For Fágúnwà at the time of his compositions, primary orality still largely subsists and it therefore furnishes the original context of his conception of an audience. In Izevbaye's explanation, this concept is that of the audience in the "original literal sense of the listener or hearer..., *olùgbó*" (7). This implies that even though writing, Fágúnwà sees himself originally and essentially as a narrator, a story-teller, and therefore his audience must be essentially listeners, and not *readers*.

This understanding consequentially informs his 'no holds barred' use of Yoruba, described by Osundare as "seamlessly expansive" (2017), and therefore able to carry and deliver "the burden of experiences" (ibid.) as well as graphically capture all that the writer wished to convey to his (reading) audience. *Ògbójú Ode* appears as if the entire novel were a series of different poetic movements comprising àló, ewì, àpárá/èfè, ìtàn àròso, incantation, songs, all delivered with the different requisite demonstratives that go with them. The author engages in rhetoric, evident in the use of hyperboles, reiteration, declamations, epithet-piling, parallelism, play on words, and other such performative elements that make the work so memorable. With his audience, Fágúnwà engages in a

rich interchange of shared values and mores of the Yoruba language and culture. With his unique story-telling techniques, Fágúnwà also generally creates the atmosphere of àwàdà kerikeri that the Yoruba love so much in public entertainment. This entire scenario, as pointed out by Dele Layiwola, rests upon the fact that Fágúnwà is an artist "who predicates the entire framework of his craft on the beauty, evocative strength, associative reference of language and linguistic resources" (2017, 46) of his Yoruba language.

The lyricism, rhetoric and other narrative qualities have been acknowledged in Fágúnwà's works by all who have encountered them. The sounds, the rhythm, the rhetorical patterns of Fágúnwà's expressions are crucial to the overall presentation potentials of his works. One may say the competent deployment of these oral performative potentials creates an atmosphere which in turn results in brilliance of performance. This is the power of personal effect which permeates an audience and earns for the artist the reputation of unforgettable-ness and memorable-ness. Osundare, the successful and acclaimed African lyric poet, declares as follows:

"I hear my words before I set them down on paper. I allow them to indulge me in the sheer musicality of their essence, their dramatic possibilities. Most times, I see with my ears...." (*Aké Review* 2: 2015, 30).

Oral Performance Techniques in D.O. Fagunwa's *Ògbójú Ode Nínú Igbó Irúnmalè*

Fágúnwà's *Ògbójú Ode Nínú Igbó Irúnmalè* (subsequently referred to as *Ògbójú Ode*) is the adopted text for the following analysis. Apart from being the first of Fagunwa's five published novels, it is also quite representative of the others. The analysis takes its ambience from the position of Nigerian written literature at this time, deriving more from a spoken, rather than a written, tradition.

In Bàmgbòsè's comprehensive critical work on the writings of Fágúnwà, he succinctly captures the essence of Fágúnwà's effectiveness in his chosen path by commending his "fantastic imagination, his consummate skill as a story-teller and, above all, his mastery in the use of language" (56). These are qualities which any Yoruba poet-performer worth his salt, in the calibre of popular poets such as Ógùndàre Fóyánmu, Álábì Ógùndèpó or even recognised modern *ewí* performers such as Lànrewàjù Adèpójú, Túbòsún Olàdápó, including contemporary performance poets such as Akeem Lásìsí, knows they must possess in appreciable proportions to win an audience and to maintain such audience.

Scholars and critics are also quite agreed in acknowledging these prized qualities and more in Fágúnwà. While Dèlè Làyìwolà sees him as "a griot" and "a performer" (47), Ósùndàre describes him as a writer who "...knows how to make us laugh, how to make us frown, and how to make us cry" (43). These are not commendations of Fágúnwà's writing as "a pattern on paper" (Orwell 4), but rather as recommendations of his competence at pulling off those unique Yoruba performative qualities where "Sounding is meaning and meaning is sounding" (Osundare 2015, 29). And how abundantly Fagunwa's deployment of the language proves this! His mastery at deploying the full elements of all the performatives of Yoruba language clearly worked to capture an immediate appreciative audience as soon as his works debuted, and clearly still sustains

his audience base today. They undoubtedly add to the tell-ability of his narratives and confer on them their pleasantly unforgettable-ness.

Right from the author's opening greetings in *Ògbójú Ode*, he gives a foretaste of what was to come with the drum-sounding word; ò-gì-dì-gbó (d: d: d: m). Ò-gì-dì-gbó is a kind of talking drum. Not unlike most other Yoruba talking drums, its beats are encrypted and it takes the discerning to pick out its message. The author urges his readers to pay careful attention to his ògìdìgbó drumbeats, whose message only the deep-rooted philosopher-listener (ologbón) can decipher (*Ògbójú Ode* 1). By inference, Fàgùnwá could not have had only *readers* and not *hearers* in mind, otherwise he needed not be making reference to a *talking* drum. Nobody *reads* the drum, but rather they listen to the drum with their ears. The concept of the ògìdìgbó drum proverb originates from the Yoruba saying of 'òwe l'esin òrò, òrò l'esin òwe. Bí òrò bá sonù, òwe l'à fi n wa' (parables/proverbs are the horses that carry the burden of an issue. And when we need to discuss weighty matters, we search out the right proverb/parable to deliver the message). It is instructive to note that the writer, even though writing, yet recourses to the mores of the traditional oral society where the spoken word is elevated above most other forms of communication. In a primary literate culture, Fágúnwà would probably have just addressed his readers by saying; 'greetings!' and told them to take note of the things he had to say to them in the stories. He certainly would not need to precede his address with a typically oral Yoruba manner of discourse. The second notable observation also in the opening is Fágúnwà's prefacing of his presentation with a characteristic Yoruba oral performance method of using the drum as a means of mass communication. Drum language in Yoruba traditional culture is highly recognised. When the àyàn (drummer) beats the drum in the market square, he brings a message to the entire village from the king. Notable also in the author's opening greetings is the performative element of reiteration, an element which features prominently in the call-and-response format of àlò àpagbè (folktales) performance. While relating the encounter of his hunter father with a mysterious being who threatened to kill him, the narrator, Àkàrà-Ogùn constantly repeats the refrain made by the strange being: "afi bi mo pa o dandan" (*Ògbójú Ode*, 3, 4). It was a way for the storyteller to keep emphasising the entire import of the encounter: that the mysterious being was bent on killing Àkàrà-Ogùn's father.

Secondly, considering that Yoruba as a language was no stranger to the writing culture as at the time of Fágúnwà's debut, the language having been furnished with its own orthography and enjoying pride of place as a language of textbooks [illegible] hool instruction (Barber, 2017), it meant that Fágúnwà must have had to work ha[illegible] ting the words, phrases and expressions he used and also deploying all creativ[illegible] ion as a writer to get an equally enthusiastic audience for his works. These a[illegible] of a performance artist.

Fágúnwà, who clearly has an ear for the music, rhythm and poetic q[illegible] as a language of expression, demonstrates his grasp of these qualities[illegible] any popular Yoruba performer/entertainer realises quickly, their coined [illegible] are quick to find their ways into the general flow of contemporary usag[illegible] credit that he is reputed to have invented many new words and exp[illegible] entered the register of common publi[illegible] Some are even still h[illegible] such word that easily comes to min[illegible]lá – the name inv[illegible]

capture the essence of a strange boy-child, given to wicked mischievousness and unprecedented depravity. Even though Àjàntálá as a name, has no adequate equivalence in English translation, yet given the situations created around the emergence of the name by Fágúnwà, its essence or meaning is not lost on a Yoruba person. À-jà-n-tá-lá (d:d:d:m:m), the musicality of whose pronunciation partly suggests its meaning, has become the adjective for everything evil, undesirable, troublesome and pestilential in a child, and which no parent or even community wishes to have in their domain. In Akeem Lasisi's poetry video, "Asabi Alakara," a ribald, metaphor-suffused performance poetry, this Yoruba poet also memorably invents the euphemistic expression '*jinkosha*' to refer to the male sexual organ, as a predatory weapon against the unwary female. The word was put in the mouth of a female character in the poem who was being seduced by an unscrupulous male stalker. Now, but for the sounding of the word 'jìn-kó'shà' (d:m:d) and the suggestive dance moves of the female character in question, this word otherwise has no meaning. It has no precedence of usage in Yoruba language either. Lasisi created it for this occasion. As a result, lexically it cannot be translated as a Yoruba word into any meaningful word in English. The originating context only supplies its meaning. However when people use it now, they do *know* what it means.

Words and expressions, even descriptive names, such as above, which tend to tell their own stories, or simply create drama, are abundant in Fágúnwà's creative cosmos. Such words and the followership they subsequently draw are comparable to present-day performance situations where contemporary "stand-up comedians", sometimes improvise words/expressions in the course of their acts, which afterwards end up on the lips of virtually everyone out there, and take their pre-eminent signification from that created by the performer.

In *Ògbójú Ode,* words and expressions such as: Ègbin ("Filth"– name given to a character whose very person is utter grime and filthiness), Ibèmbé Olókùnrùn (Barrel of Sickliness – name of a character who is as fat as he is a moving ball of diseases), Baba Onírungbòn yéúké (description of an ancient man whose distinctive characteristic is his overflowing snow-white beards), Àjàntálá (as described above), were obviously invented by the author for the situations he needed to portray in the course of his story-telling. They helped him in creating certain atmospheres in the stories. In inventing the name Àjàntálá, for example, the author seems to plunge into the characteristic Yoruba behaviour of creatively inventing a befitting name for a baffling situation. Àjàntálá, the character, is a mystery child whose weird behaviour could not be explained by anyone, so the author had to find an equally unexplainable (not meaningless though) name which fits this occasion. This is child-character whose entrance into the family, community and even animal kingdom marked the beginning of their sorrows. Unlike in a typical Yoruba naming ceremony where a child is given name(s), which shows the parents' joy and happiness at having the child, a joy which the entire community shares with them, Fágúnwà's tragi-comic intent in giving the name 'Àjàntálá,' is the opposite. Here, it is to vividly paint a curse of a child, whose supposed joyful arrival ironically carries with it the very anti-thesis of joy. From the very first day of 'Àjàntálá's arrival into his parents' lives, and his subsequent involvement with everyone else, including even the medicine-man, there was only confusion, destruction, pains and unimaginable sorrows. Subsequently, 'Àjàntálá' as a name connotes something that completely negates joy to anyone who

hears it, but instead serves as an adjective for an affliction of a child and a torment to all. Since Fágúnwà's creation of the 'Àjàntálá' phenomenon, the connotation has further expanded and come to be associated also with anyone whose involvement with others turns out to be a scourge and an ordeal. On the larger society, an 'Àjàntálá' is a pestilential nuisance. He is a blight on their bright spots. To cap his pained view of 'Àjàntálá' the child, Fágúnwà employs the performative technique of epithet-piling to describe him as follows: "Tuletule": (wrecker of homes), "Akotileta" (prodigal/squanderer) "Obaiyeje" (ruinous fellow).

Another name of interest is 'Àgbákò' given to the other-worldly creature with whom Àkàrà-Ogùn had a duelling encounter. One may not even need to read the writer's description of this character to have a pictorial imagination of his person. 'Àgbákò' whose name means 'misfortune' or 'calamity', in his encounters with Àkàrà-Ogùn, proved the veracity of his terrible nomenclature (*Ògbójú Ode*, 12-14). There is also a town by the name 'Èmò' (perplexity/confusion). In the town of 'Emo,' there is not a single normal or whole person, including the king. All the inhabitants have one impairment or the other while none of them talks audibly but rather communicate by murmuring. The entire market square was also littered with corpses of dead babies, with no one making any attempt to do anything about the situation. In the town of 'Èmò,' people wear their clothes inside out, they are all deaf and blind, even though their eyes are open and appear as if they could see. A person attempting to hit someone who runs into them, hits the wrong person. That wrong person slaps another wrong person and, with time, the whole place erupts in a free-for-all which results in babies dropping from the backs of their mothers, with no attempts to pick them up, and the head of the unfortunate babies serving as the playing field for the ensuing commotion. It's as if this abnormality was the norm here. Therefore, the author rightly names the town 'Èmò' (*Ògbójú Ode*, 17).

When he engages in ewì, the author employs epithet-piling, a keen feature of the oral performance tradition. This is the case in an episode where the ghomids (iwin) were praising their king, Olori-Igbo: 'Olori-igbo o! Olori-igbo o! Iwo oloja iwin, mo ni iwo Oloja iwin: ko si oloja to dabi ire. Apa omo araiye ni iwo fi nje iyan, genge aiya won ni iwo fi nje oka. Atari won ni iwo fi nmu eko: kini omo araiye ma fi o se!' (*Ògbójú Ode*, 7).

> "Oh Chief of the forest. You're the head of the ghomids. I say you're the king of the ghomids: there is no other one like you. You who accompany your meal of pounded yam with meat from human arms, the chunk from their chests supply the meat for your oka (amala) meal. Their skulls serve as the drinking vessel for your eko (corn pap): what can the children of men do to you?"

Instances of epithet piling such as above are quite rife throughout the entire novel and the author employs them with gusto (see 9, 15, 49). It is a particularly popular technique in the Yoruba oral performance tradition because it is a way of plumbing an audience for a variety of responses, ranging from thunderous clapping, showering of money on the performer in appreciation or sometimes, getting up to dance as the performance continues. Whichever way it goes, piling of epithets does not leave an audience static. This strategy is also closely aligned to the use of rhetorical devices such as repetition and alliteration particularly, techniques often used by public speakers to create rhythm and

memorability for their speeches. Consider the following: "Ki ise ejo re o: *emi* ni mo pe ogun ti mo ri ogun; *emi* ni mo pe ote ti mo ri ote; *emi* ni mo fi owo ara mi fa iwerepe mora; *emi* ni mo ba alaisododo sore ...(37).

> "It is really not your fault. I am the one that called for war and got war. I am the one that called for treachery and got treachery. I am the one that by my own hands drew down the prickly plant upon myself. I am the one that chose to make friends with an unfaithful fellow."

The essence of the repetition of the phrase 'emi ni' is to underscore the speaker's strong emphasis that he is the sole cause of the calamity that came upon him and that he accepts full responsibility for it. The technique of repetition was on display where the writer invokes the spirit of his dead mother. Employing a plethora of noun phrases the narrator piles epithets eulogising the dead mother to galvanise her to come to his aid at a dire moment of need: "A! iya mi owon, iya mi toto, iya ti o pe, iya ti o nilari, iya ti o mu yanyan, iya ti ki ise iya lasan, iya ti ki ise iya kekere, iya ti ki ise iya buburu, iya ti o je bokini laiye, iya ti o je gbajumo lorun, iya ti o ri je laiye, iya ti ri mu lorun. A! iwo iya alailabawon, ibikibi ti iwo ba wa loni, masai jeki nri o." (39).

> Ah, my precious mother, cherished mother, complete mother, consequential mother, effective mother, successful mother, no-small mother, no-mean mother, admirable mother while alive, admired mother in heaven, the mother that has enough to eat while on earth, mother that has enough to drink in heaven. A! You stainless mother, wherever you are today, kindly make yourself available to me.

In the above, the narrator's continual repetition of the phrase 'iya ti o…', with its persistent emphasis on 'iya' is somewhat reminiscent of the immortal speech "I Have a Dream" by the late American Civil Rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King. In the second half of that speech Dr. King, while painting the dream of a future glorious America for his enthralled listeners, where racial harmony would dwell supreme, Luther invokes the concept of having a dream. And in order to drive home this overriding theme, the speaker repeated the word "dream" eight times in the eight-sentence paragraph. This portion, embodying his dream concept has become the most famous, most remembered and most quoted of the speech. Repetition, or reiteration, the performance technique so masterfully deployed here, has made it such that even till today, some fifty years after Dr. King's delivery, "I Have a Dream" is still celebrated as a rhetorical masterpiece.

This means that for every sentence made, the author repeated the word *dream* to his listening audience. It was a deliberate act. In like manner, Fagunwa's unleashing of the virtues of his 'iya' in the above passage is so strong and stirring that the sheer power of it would have roused the mother even if she had been dead a million years and she had no intention of getting up from her slumber.

Another interesting use of repetition occurred where Àkàrà-Ogùn extolled his town and its people just as the brave hunters were about to set out on their great expedition to Langbodo: "Bi ilu eni kere ti o dabi ite eiye, ilu eni ni ilu eni; bi ilu eni doti ti o dabi ori atan, ilu eni ni ilu eni, bi ilu eni re ehin ti oju awon olugbe re ko la rara, ilu eni ni ilu eni, awon onilu ni si ise ilu, awon ni iso ilu idoti di mimo, awon ni si iso ilu kekere di

nla. Sugbon enikeni ti o ba wipe ilu on ki ise t'on mo, gongosu enia ni" (56).

> Even if one's town is so small that it looks like just a bird's nest, yet it is still one's town; if one's town is so dirty that it's like a dump site, yet it is still one's town; if one's town is so backward that its inhabitants are so poor, yet it is still one's town; it is the citizens of a town that cater to their town, they are the ones to turn a dirty town into a clean one, and they are the ones to turn a small town into a big town. But anyone who disparages his own town that it is no more his, such a one is a foolish person.

Just for the singular purpose of emphasising that it takes pride in one's town to make that town great, the writer repeats the word "ìlú" (town) thirteen times in that short speech. Other instances of repetition for emphasis abound in the novel, (see *Ògbójú Ode* 55, 57).

In what can be termed "Movement Two" of the story-telling of *Ògbójú Ode* where the narrative shifts to the Langbodo expedition, Fágúnwà, in the manner of a typical traditional ewì performer, sets the stage by whetting the appetite of his audience or listeners as follows: "Mo gbé t'àná dànù mo gbé òmíràn dé gbogbo yín e má tún etí yín se." (p.47).

> I have discarded the left-over from yesterday. I've come now with something special. All of you begin to re-tweak your ears.'

This could have been a line straight from a Lanrewaju Adepoju record, where the poet tantalisingly coaxes the listening pleasure of his audience. At the commencement of a performance, the performer entices his eager audience with the promise of a freshly brewed, newly minted, and juicier composition than the previous rendition. In doing these things, Fágúnwà also tantalisingly offers his readers what he himself describes as the "ìmùdùnmúdùn" (meaty treats) of Yoruba story-telling tradition.

Conclusion

Thus far, we have been able to see the three basic factors which influenced Fágúnwà and ultimately played pivotal roles in the shaping of his narratives, and ultimately resulted in their wide acceptability and continued relevance. The first was his concept of his audience as olùgbó (listeners/hearers), by which he was able to write as if he were addressing a live audience, and not just engaged in a solitary exercise of writing. The second was his understanding of the important role of the artist as a mediator of a transition. By this, Fágúnwà, understanding that his job was not to alienate but rather engage his readers and thus connect with them, chose to use the kind of language which his readers could easily identify with. Despite being highly educated, and writing in a newly literate language to an emerging literate people, Fágúnwà demonstrated sensitivity by using highly creative but accessible language with remarkably memorable words and phrases. Quite importantly too, this approach also helped Fágúnwà to establish continuity for his works with the existing Yoruba literary tradition. This strategy was a strong factor in the almost immediate acceptability of the Fágúnwà novels. The third factor was Fágúnwà's audience-consciousness. This deepened his appreciation of his audience

as an orality-influenced one, and which in turn influenced his approach to the narrative enterprise. The overall performance analysis of Fágúnwà's *Ògbójú Ode Nínú Igbó Irúnmalè*, as discussed in this paper, reveals him as a sensitive writer and an unforgettable performer, with an infectious sense of dramatisation.

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