



## Foreword

The National Teachers' Institute, Kaduna, was established in 1976 to provide in-service education for teachers through the open and distance learning system (DLS). As stipulated in Decree No. 7 (now Act No. 7) of the then Federal Military Government of Nigeria (1978), the Institute is **“charged with the duty of providing courses of instruction leading to the development, upgrading, and certification of teachers as specified in the relevant syllabus, using Distance Education techniques”**.

After several years of running the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programmes, the Institute deems it appropriate to upgrade the academic and professional qualifications of teachers to the degree level, in order to greatly raise the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Consequently, the Institute has embarked on offering degree programmes, in affiliation with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), initially in the following areas:

- (i) B.A. Ed. (English)
- (ii) B.A. Ed. (Social Studies)
- (iii) B.A. Ed. (Primary)
- (iv) B.Sc. Ed. (Mathematics)
- (v) B.Sc. Ed. (Integrated Science)
- (vi) B.Sc. Ed. (Physical & Health Education)

In order to ensure the highest quality degree, existing course materials initially developed by NOUN in four (4) programmes of English, Mathematics, Integrated Science, and Primary Education were critically and expertly reviewed, updated, and upgraded by a team of seasoned academics from various universities across the country and the NTI. For programmes not available in NOUN, fresh course materials were expertly designed, developed, and produced by a core of experts in the areas of Social Studies and Physical and Health Education (PHE) ab initio. Furthermore, in order to ensure quality delivery of the degree programmes, course facilitators with the highest academic qualifications (Ph.D, M.Ed.) in the degree course programmes have been screened and employed to deliver the programmes to mature students along open and distance education lines, using best practice methods and techniques (learner-centred, participatory, and interactive approaches). The innovative techniques involve various media, which include ICT, audio-video, CD ROMs, and the net.

In order to further enhance quality, various facilities, such as science and PHE labs/workshops, library, etc are provided at the study centres.

For you to gain maximum benefits from the course materials, you are expected to study them very carefully/critically as well as acquaint yourself with their accompanying Study Guides. Furthermore, you are expected to work through the assignments in every unit/module in order to ensure full mastery of the contents and

concepts presented in the course materials. This will help you in assessing your learning achievement as you progress towards your degree. I wish you the best.



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**ENG 113: INTRODUCTION TO NIGERIAN LITERATURE I**

**1<sup>st</sup> Edition**

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**COURSE GUIDE****INTRODUCTION****Welcome to ENG 113: INTRODUCTION TO NIGERIAN LITERATURE**

ENG 113: Introduction to Nigerian Literature 1 is a 2 credit one semester undergraduate course. It comprises 15 study units subdivided into 3 modules. The materials have been developed with Nigerian context in view. This course guide gives you an overview of the course and also provides you with information on the organisation and requirements of the course.

The course introduces you to the development of Nigerian literature from oral to written and the socio-political conditions that influenced this development. Attention is drawn to the changes in scope, consciousness and pre-occupation of the Nigerian artists over the years.

**Course Aim**

- a. To expose students to the concept of Nigerian Literature in English.
- b. To acquaint the students with the literary writers in Nigeria.
- c. To acquaint students with the stages of the development of Nigerian Literature.

**Course Objectives**

To achieve the aims above, we have some overall objectives. Each unit also has the objectives that will guide you in your study. They are usually stated at the beginning of the unit and when you are through with studying the units, go back and read the objectives. This would help you assimilate the task you have set out to achieve. On completion of the course, you should be able to:

- a. trace the origin of Nigerian written literature in English
- b. trace the evolution of Nigerian written literature in English from oral literature.
- c. discuss the major phases in the development of Nigerian literature in English
- d. recognise the colonial influences in the development of Nigerian Literature
- e. explain the major thematic thrusts of Nigerian writers from the pioneers to the contemporaries.
- f. appreciate the form of Nigerian literature in English

**Working through this Course**

To complete the course, you are required to read the study units and other related materials. You will also need to undertake practical exercise for which you need a pen, a notebook, and other materials that will be listed in this guide. The exercises are to aid you

in understanding the concepts being presented. At the end of each unit, you will be required to submit written assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of the course, you will write a final examination.

### **Course Materials**

The major materials you will need for this course are:

1. Course guide
2. Study units
3. Relevant textbooks including the ones listed under each unit
4. Assignment file
5. Presentation schedule

### **Study Units**

There are 15 study units in this course as follows:

#### **Module 1 : Introduction to Traditional Oral Literature**

Unit 1 – Traditional Oral Narrative Forms: Myths, Legends, Folktales and Fables

Unit 2 – Traditional Oral Narrative Forms: Act of Speech

Unit 3 – Introduction to Traditional Poetry

Unit 4 – The Performance Traditions: Festival, Rituals, Masquerades, Social/Travel Performance

Unit 5 – Oral History as a Source of Nigerian Literature

#### **Module 2: Colonialism and the Development of Nigerian Literature**

Unit 1 – Colonialism in Nigeria

Unit 2 – Representation of Africa in the Colonialist Literature: The Writing of Joyce Cary, Joseph Conrad, Sir H. Rider Haggard.

Unit 3 – The Rise of Modern Nigerian Poetry and Prose

Unit 4 –Early Nigerian Novelists: Oluadah Equiano, D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola, Cyprain Ekwensi and Chinua Achebe

Unit 5 – Pioneer Nigerian Poets- Dennis Osadebe, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Gabriel Okara.

#### **Module 3: The Development of Nigerian Drama**

Unit 1 –The Development of Drama: From Alarinjo Itinerant Theatre to the European



**Concert Tradition**

Unit 2 - The Popular Traveling Theatre Movement: Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola, Moses Olaiya.

Unit 3 – Nigerian Drama I: Onitsha Market Literature and Ene Henshaw

Unit 4 – Nigerian Drama II: First Generation Playwrights

Unit 5 – Revolutionary Aesthetics in Nigerian Drama: Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, and Tess Onwueme

**Assignment File**

An assignment file and a marking scheme will be made available to you. In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the assignments file itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

**Tutor Marked Assignment (TMAs)**

You will need to submit a specified number of the Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs). Every unit in this course has a tutor marked assignment. You will be assessed on four of them but the best four (that is, the highest four of the fifteen marks) will be counted. The total marks for the best three (3) assignments will be 30% of your total work. Assignment questions for the unit in this course are counted in the Assignment File. When you have completed each assignment, send it, together with the TMA (tutor-marked assignment) form to your tutor. Make sure each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline for submission. If, for any reason, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor to discuss the possibility of an extension. Extension will not be granted after due date unless under exceptional circumstances.

**Final Examination and Grading**

The final examination for ENG 113 will be of three hours' duration. All areas of the course will be examined. Find time to read the units all over again before your examination. The final examination will attract 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises and tutor-marked assignments you have previously come across. All areas of the course will be assessed. You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will also find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

**Course Marking Scheme**

The following table lays out how the actual course mark allocation is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignments (Best three Assignments out of Four marked)	= 30%
Final Examination	=70%
Total	=100%

### Presentation Schedule

The dates for submission of all assignments will be communicated to you. You will also be told the date for completing the study units and dates for examinations.

### Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activity	Assessment (End of Unit)
	<b>Course Guide</b>	<b>1</b>	
	<b>Module 1</b>		
1	Traditional oral Narrative Forms: Myths, Legends, Folktales and Fables	2	Assignment 1
2	Traditional oral Narrative Forms: Act of Speech	3	Assignment 2
3	Introduction to Traditional Poetry	4	Assignment 3
4	The Performance Tradition: Festivals, Rituals, Masquerades, Social/Travel Performance	5	Assignment 4
5	Oral History as Source of Nigerian Literature	6	Assignment 5
	<b>Module 2</b>		
1	Colonialism in Nigeria	7	Assignment 6
2	Representation of Africa in Colonialist Literature: The Writing of Joyce Cary, Joseph Conrad, Sir Rider Haggard	8	Assignment 7
3	The Rise of Modern Nigerian Poetry and Prose	9	Assignment 8

<b>4</b>	Early Nigerian Novelists: Oluadah Equiano, D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola, Cyprain Ekwensi	<b>10</b>	Assignment 9
<b>5</b>	Pioneer Nigerian poets: Dinnis Osadebe, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Gabriel Okara	<b>11</b>	Assignment 10
	<b>Module 3</b>		
<b>1</b>	The Development of Drama: From Alarinjo Itinerant Theatre to the European Concert Tradition	<b>12</b>	Assignment 11
<b>2</b>	The Popular Traveling Theatre Movement: Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola, Moses Olaiya	<b>13</b>	Assignment 12
<b>3</b>	Nigerian Drama 1: Onitsha Market literature and Ene Henshaw	<b>14</b>	Assignment 13
<b>4</b>	Nigerian Drama 11: First Generation Playwrights	<b>15</b>	<b>Assignment 14</b>
<b>5</b>	Revolutionary Aesthetics in Nigerian Drama: Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, and Tess Onwueme	<b>16</b>	<b>Assignment 15</b>

### How to get the Most from this Course

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecturer instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might give you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other materials. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. If you make a habit of doing this, you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from your course guides. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into trouble, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it. Follow the following advice carefully:

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly, it is your first assignment
2. Organise a study schedule. Refer to the 'Course Overview for more details.

Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write your own dates for working on each unit.

3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason why students fail is that they lag behind in their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late to seek for help.
4. Turn to Unit 1 and read the Introduction and the Objectives for the Unit
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'Overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit, you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Review the objectives for each unit to be sure that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to space your study so that you keep yourself on schedule
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the Course Objectives (listed in the Course Guide)
11. Keep in touch with your study centre. Up to date course information will be continuously available there.

### **Tutors and Tutorials**

There are 8 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or through a discussion if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary.

Contact your tutor if:

- you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,
- you have difficulty with the self-tests exercises,
- you have a question or problem with the assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

## **SUMMARY**

This course guide gives you an overview of what to expect in the course of this study.

**MODULE 1: INTRODUCTION TO TRADITIONAL ORAL LITERATURE**

- Unit 1 Traditional Oral Narrative Forms: Myths, Legends, Folktales and Fables
- Unit 2: Traditional Oral Narrative Forms: Acts of Speech
- Unit 3: Introduction to Oral Poetry
- Unit 4: The Performance Tradition
- Unit 5: History as a Source of Nigerian Literature

**UNIT 1 TRADITIONAL ORAL NARRATIVE FORMS: MYTHS, LEGENDS, FOLKTALES AND FABLES**

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- 2.0 Objectives
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  - 3.1 Literature
  - 3.2 Oral Literature
  - 3.3 Classification of Oral Literature
  - 3.4 Traditional Oral Narrative/Prose Forms in Nigeria
    - 3.4.1 Myths
    - 3.4.2 Legends
    - 3.4.3 Folktales
    - 3.4.4 Fables
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, you will learn about pre-colonial / traditional forms of oral literature which serve as antecedents of modern day prose fiction. These forms manifest in different ways from one ethnic group to another. The oral form is the earliest form of literature across

the world. Like African literature, Western literature developed from oral narratives as well. For instance, Greek and Roman myths or legends like that of *Oedipus*, *Ulysses* and *Aeneid* inspired great works of classical literature. In the same way, the oral forms influenced early Nigerian writers as they attempted to represent their African experience through the novel or the short story medium. The playwrights are not left out as they re-enact some myths and make copious use of other oral narrative forms of proverbs, riddles and many others in their plays. Poets also draw inspiration from their cultural background and reflect some aspects of oral forms in their works. You should therefore learn to pay more attention to the oral narrative forms as it will help you to understand the development of modern Nigerian literature, better.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the traditional oral narrative forms
- define myths, legends, folktales and fables
- explain the style, functions and structure of these narrative forms
- differentiate between the oral and written forms of literature
- show the influence of the oral mode of narrative on the Nigerian fiction

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Literature

Generally, literature is a word that is applied to virtually anything that is written under the sun. For instance, a manufacturer who is offering the consumer some new products encloses it in a leaflet or manual containing more information on the product or gives some prescription on its use. This is called literature. Similarly, every discipline from humanities to social sciences, law, environmental studies, and mathematics to medical sciences has its own literature. It is therefore necessary for us to distinguish the literature we intend to discourse in this material. Nkem Okoh categorized literature into literature of knowledge and literature of power. Literature of knowledge refers to the literature that gives more information on products or subjects while literature of power is imaginative. We are concerned with the latter, the imaginative type of literature.

This imaginative literature is a powerful form of human expression in an artistic manner. It is an art that conveys its message through language. This language is organized in a colourful manner to make it enjoyable. The writer uses words in their denotative and connotative ways in order to please the audience. Generally, literature is expected to delight and instruct. Through literature, we learn more about, people, the physical, psychological, religious, political, cultural and social issues in the world around us. It also inculcates values, imparts knowledge and helps us in our intellectual and emotional growth as individuals. In fact, it helps us also to understand human beings and their interpersonal relationships better.

Literature therefore is a composition in language (words) which tells stories, represents, mirrors, enacts or dramatizes real life situations, advocates ideas and expresses emotion. We are familiar with works like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* or J.P. Clarks "Abiku" or even popular nursery rhymes like "Baa Baa Black Sheep" or "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star". These are works of imagination that tell stories about events, animals, concepts, or objects. As we read them, we learn more about the world around us while at the same time we enjoy the stories presented. The unique feature of literature is made manifest more in its use of denotative and connotative language. This means that words are used in their literal, figurative or symbolic sense. The writer, through the manipulation of words, sends his message across to his/her audience.

### **3.2 Oral Literature**

Generally, literature is seen as a form of expression in which ideas of local and universal interests are presented. It is presented in the form of poetry, romance, history, biography, essays, and other forms of writing. It is used to denote a piece of writing that deals with a particular subject.

The definition of literature above emphasizes written literature but in this section we are concerned with oral literature. What is oral literature? In simple terms, oral literature is a



spoken or imaginative communication that is not written but transmitted through the word of the mouth for entertainment and sometimes edification of the audience. Oral literature therefore means literature that is not written but presented orally, preserved and transmitted from one generation to the other in that form.

Oral literature reflects the people's way of life. Those from riverine areas for instance base their folktale on the sea/sea animals while a race of hunters dwell move on hunting, animals and the forest. Thus we have different versions of the same basic story, in which the setting and characters change according to the occupation and environment of the people. Generally, oral literature is realized in performance. The performer in oral tradition "formulates it in words on specific occasions" (and) renders the performance to suit the occasion. Unfortunately, as the oral form is translated and written in a foreign language for documentation or used in literary works, the actualization of an aesthetic experience of the original work is not realized. This is because the general tones, symbolic associations and meanings of words and phrases are lost in most cases.

### **3.3 Classification of Oral Literature**

Oral Literature, like the written form, is categorized under three broad genres.

The spoken form – prose

The sung form – poetry

The performance – drama

#### **A. Prose**

The spoken form is further divided into such as

- Myths
- Fables
- Legends
- Folktales
- Anecdotes
- Riddles
- Proverbs and
- Tongue Twisters

**B. Poetry**

The musical form is realized in different forms of songs presented on different occasions like works, births, wars, marriages, funerals and other ceremonies. These are presented in poetic forms.

They are further grouped into the following types of poetry

- Musical poetry
- Lyrics
- Dirges/Elegy
- Invocative poetry
- Didactic poetry
- Narrative poetry
- Praise Poetry
- Heroic Poetry
- Satirical Poetry
- War Poetry
- Ritual poetry
- Casual poetry
- Special Occasion poetry e.g. Births, Weddings...

**C. Drama**

The Performance is done as

- Masquerades
- Dance
- Festivals
- Ritual.

**3.4 Traditional Oral Narrative/Prose Forms in Nigeria**

Before the advent of the novel, the novella and the written short story genres, there existed in many Nigerian cultures, stories that recorded the people's cultural experiences. These stories serve as the repository of the people's beliefs, social philosophies and

observations about life. They also provide insightful information about their environments. In these stories, we find the people's attitudes to natural phenomena and depict the way of life of a particular community. The stories are generally educative while they entertain the audience. They are also part of the socialization process, because through them, the community perpetuates its knowledge, values and experience especially into the minds of the young ones. They attempt to explain the origin of existence, and also present the lives and contributions of great personages. In addition, they create a nexus between the past and the present. Sometimes this past dates back to the primordial or prehistoric era. Modern Nigerian written prose narrative evolved from the traditional oral narratives. They include myths, legends, folktales and fables.

### **3.4.1 Myths**

Myth refers to an ancient story or a body of stories that attempt to explicate the early history or origin of a people. Myths are set in earliest times. It is presented as incidents or events that happened "in those days", so, it is difficult to situate myths in a particular period hence there is no date for the origin of myths. It is assumed that they exist in each community. Myths also help to explain the process, the whys and wherefores of certain natural events which are usually viewed or sound mysterious. Stories about the origin of a community are often regarded as myths because they appeal to the imaginative fancies of the people. Myths essentially fuse the physical with the metaphysical and the natural with the supernatural. Hence, they cannot be meaningfully subjected to the rules of logic, rationalism and empiricism. An example of myth is the creation story of Yoruba people of Western Nigeria that traces the origin of the people to a myth which states that Olodumare sent Orunmila to the earth but the whole place was flooded. Orunmila then sent the dove which perched on top of the water and deposited the sand it clutched in its two legs. The sand that was deposited started expanding on top of the water thereby gaining more solid lands. The act of spreading which in Yoruba means Ife, is where Ife got its name Ife and the town is regarded as the origin of the Yoruba race.

Myths also try to explain certain phenomena in the traditional societies like the origin of life and death, other great forces of nature and the reasons why certain features are where they are or why certain things happen. They deal principally with past events relating to the origin of the universe, the creation of heaven and earth, the separation of the sky sea from the land. They also try to explain other matters of great significance for instance another Yoruba myth of creation claims that an ancestor called Oduduwa descended from heaven to the earth through a chain, a bag of sand and a pigeon in hand. He began the work of creation and expansion of the earth with the help of the pigeon at a spot that became known today as Ile Ife (meaning “the place where the land began to expand”). Hence, in the two myths, Ile Ife is seen as the origin of mankind.

Akporobaro (2006) defines myth as “a kind of story or rudimentary narrative sequence, normally traditional and anonymous, through which a given culture ratifies its social customs or accounts for the origin of human and natural phenomena, usually in supernatural or boldly imaginative terms”. People tend to regard myths as being false or unreliable, but its literary quality is assured.

Myth is close to legend. It is however, distinguished from it because myth is far removed from history. Etymological myths explain why certain truths about human existence have come to be. For instance, the story about why the sky is separated from the earth exists in many Nigerian cultures and such a story is classified as etiological myth. The coming of death into the world and the struggle between good and evil, are other examples of such myths.

This prose narrative which in the society where they were told are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past is myth. They are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed and they can be quoted as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief. Myths are the embodiments of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual. Their main character are animals, deities, or cultural heroes, whose actions are set in an earlier world, when earth was different from what it is today, or in another world such as the sky or underworld.

### **3.4.2 Legends**

Legend is set in the past but deals with heroes/heroines in a known past. The link between myth and legend is that both are set in the past. However, they differ in nature. Unlike myth, legend has some measure of claim to history in an unknown past. Legend refers to a story that is passed down orally from one generation to another and has its foundation in history. They are fragments of history that help to teach morals, encourage and inspire members of the community. They are close to life and some of them are authentic. They tell stories of people who actually lived and the things that really happened. However, most of them are embellished to enhance the aesthetic perspectives of the stories and make them more fascinating, and entertaining. Legends present personalities and events that are believed to have existed in the history of a particular community, whereas myth draws its subject from gods, superhuman entities and natural phenomenon. Thus, the deeds of great warriors, kings and leaders of a community are woven into legends. Legends have provided inspiration for the modern Nigerian novelist and short story writers.

### **3.4.3 Folktales**

This is the most popular and important form of oral literature. Folktales are narrative stories constructed from the imagination of people over time. They are as old as the culture of the people. The tales may be about human beings or animal community or both in mutual interaction. From the above description, you have seen that unlike myths and legends, they are not concerned with history or set in primordial times. They are mainly fictitious and depict the cultural background of the people. They are mainly didactic and most of the moral principles that a child received in the traditional society used to come from folktales. The Predominantly didactic or moralistic nature of folktales combined with entertainment make them the most popular form of oral narratives. Folktales make no claim to historical antecedent or factual background. The ultimate end is to entertain and teach moral principles. Folktales feature in the moonlight night story-telling sessions of different ethnic groups in the country and are not identified with any individual author. They are handed down from one generation to another. It is important to note that Amos Tutuola, D.O. Fagunwa and

Chinua Achebe drew heavily from the folktale traditions of their people in *Forest of a Thousand Demons*, *The Palm Wine Drinkard* and *Things Fall Apart* respectively. The stories are made up of inexhaustible exploits of the trickster, either as tortoise, hare, or fox usually narrated to children by adults at night in many cultures.

#### **3.4.4. Fables**

Fables are stories that are considered fictitious and imaginary. They draw their subjects essentially from the animal world. Adults use fables also to teach morals to the young generations for whom they are primarily composed. As the animal characters speak and act, they remind us of the human world and its load of vices, intrigues, virtues and moral principles. As such, fables derive their significance from the imitation of, and relevance to the concrete realities of human existence. You should note that fables are essentially imaginative and fictitious stories that are not founded on history or reality.

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Narrate the myth of creation of your ethnic group.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

To conclude this unit, it is evident from the discussion that Nigerian written literature has its roots in the oral narrative tradition of the various ethnic groups in the country. The modern writer has myths, legends, folktales and fables of his/her culture to draw from in the creation of his/her literary compositions.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

The unit has traced the origin of Nigerian literature in the oral narrative traditions of different ethnic groups. It stresses the importance of oral traditions in the development of the literature. It also underscores the import of indigenous myths, legends, folktales and fables in the evolution of the Nigerian novel and short story. Many Nigerian literary artists, especially the novelists draw from the oral narratives. Folktale is seen as the root of modern Nigerian novel.

**6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Define myth and legend. Examine the differences between myth and legend

**7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

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**UNIT 2: TRADITIONAL ORAL NARRATIVE FORMS: ACTS OF SPEECH  
CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Contents
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
  - 3.1 Rhetorical Forms
  - 3.2 Tongue Twisters
  - 3.3 Riddles
  - 3.4 Proverbs
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit introduces you to other traditional oral narrative forms. These forms differ and assume significance from one ethnic group to another. They are presented in sentences/phrases. They are passed from one generation to the other through the word of mouth. They are used mainly to embellish speech, for entertainment and inculcation of societal values on the younger generation.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify these oral forms in speeches
- define tongue twisters, riddles and similitudes
- identify them in written literature
- discuss the influence of oral speech forms on the Nigerian literary tradition

**3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

Riddles, proverbs and tongue twisters are rhetorical forms of oral narratives. They play important role in the speech act of the people in different traditional societies. They are



used as ornaments of speech for effective and persuasive communication in the traditional society in the rhetorical education of the child, for entertainment and to promote fluency in speech. Participation in these narrative forms increases the personal repartee (the power give quick and arousing answer). It helps the participants to be witty.

Most Nigerian novelists, playwrights and poets make effective use of these oral narratives (speech act) forms, in their words.

### **3.1 Rhetorical Forms**

These are those forms that are closely connected with rhetoric or the act of speech in the traditional society. They include Tongue Twisters, riddles and proverbs and are used as ornaments of speech for effective and persuasive communication. The rhetorical forms of oral lit in any Nigerian culture include these genres that are used in speech for persuasion or for more entertainment. This involves the skillful deployment of the resources of the language of a people for effective and persuasive communication.

### **3.2 Tongue Twister**

Tongue Twisters in whatever language fulfill very important roles in the rhetorical education of the child. They help to promote fluency in speech. They do so by confronting the child with patterns of speech error in the language. It is expected that through constant confrontation with such patterns or errors in the language the child is expected to learn to overcome speech errors of this kind. He therefore grows up groomed linguistically to overcome slips of tongue. This is in recognition of the difficulties the slip of tongue can cause speech. In tongue twisters, a child is expected to repeat a set words or phrases as fast as possible and as many times as possible. In such games and practices s/he perfects his/her speech patterns and avoids or overcomes error in speech.

Tongue Twisters also present patterns of word play or pun as well as patterns of alliteration and assonance which make for sweetness in speech thereby making whatever one says memorable and enjoyable. Tongue twisters play very important roles in the education of the child, as it helps the child in the development of his/her communication

skills. I will give two examples, one in vernacular (Igbo) and the other one in English.

1. *Nwanyi na-akwa akwa, I na-akwa akwa na okuku yili akwa na-enu akwa akwal'akwa di na-enu akwa.*

*We see that the word 'akwa' is repeated nine times.*

*Nwanyi na-akwa*

*Akwa – cloth*

*I na-akwa akwa – crying*

*Okuku yili akwa – egg*

*Na-enu akwa – cloth*

*Akw'al'akwa – sewn*

*Di na-enu akwa – bed*

The literal translation is 'The woman who sews/is sewing, are you crying that the hen laid an egg on top of the cloth you have sewn and placed on the bed.'

2. I saw father Francis, frying four fresh fish for the few fresh fathers from Calabar.

### 3.3 Riddles

Riddles are also part of the rhetorical form of oral literature. Riddles are quizzes or enigmatic questions or descriptions wrapped up in a figurative language. Riddles consist of a complete system of verbal expression which encompass the major rhetorical expression used in the language of a particular people. In the traditional society, riddles involve two contestants either as individuals or groups. The first group poses the question and the other gives the answer. In Igbo land, it starts with gwam gwam gwam – tell me, tell me, tell me. This is followed by tell me what... In this way, participation in riddles enables the child and or adult to increase his/her personal repertoire of traditional rhetorical devices. The materials of riddles are drawn for every area of reality in the world like the natural environment, aspects of the culture and practically from every realm of human life/experience. In this way, they help to expose the child to his environment by presenting various facts of experience in striking and memorable images. They help in the process of initiating the child into the culture of his own society. Some

examples of riddles from the Igbo language are:

Q: Tell me the plate washed by God that never dries (Language?)

A: Tongue

Q: Tell me two people walking under the rain; the rain beats one person but does not beat the other person

A: Pregnant women

### **3.4 Proverbs**

Proverbs deal with all aspects of life. They are used to emphasize the words of the wise and are the stock in trade of old people, who use them to convey precise moral lessons, warnings and advice since they make a greater impact on the mind than ordinary discourse. The judicious use of proverbs is usually regarded as a sign of wit.

Proverbs are often “marked by briefness of expression, by a form different from that of ordinary speech and by a figurative mode of expression abounding in metaphor”. (Finnegan, 399). They are picturesque, figurative and at the same time poetic in nature and these qualities differentiate them from the normal everyday speech or discourse.

A few examples of Nigerian proverbs from various tribes, which are translated into English, are given below:

1. Too much speed in wrestling is always followed by a bad fall.
2. If you do not provide for old age, you cannot expect old age to be good for you.
3. The ear that pays no heed to advice is usually cut off with the head.
4. A monkey broke the razor after shaving, not knowing that the hair would soon grow again.
5. A poor man's hen is his cow.
6. A short man hangs his bag where his hand can reach it.
7. A disobedient fowl obeys in a pot of soup.
8. Size is the legacy of the elephant
9. A hen can never lay duck eggs.

10. He who sells sand as salt is paid stones as money

The proverb occupies “a commanding position in the rhetorical arsenal of African cultures.... Proverbs constitute a dominant device, whether in everyday conversation or more serious, formal talk” (Finnegan 39). In Igbo culture, it is described as the palm oil with which words are eaten. They are in fact the most prevalent category of rhetorical devices in any oral tradition. Proverbs are wise sayings, observations of nature and of the cultural environment, comments on human relation and statements of law and custom wrapped up in memorable images by means of striking images. They serve as quotable quotes in various kinds of communicative events, be they story-telling, oratory or the performance of poetry. They also serve as formulae in various acts of communication in which they feature. They are particularly useful in oratory in which they constitute, alongside other similitudes, the major ingredients of speech.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Identify the rhetorical forms contained in the passage above from Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*.

*There was a wealthy man in Okonkwo’s village who had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children. His name was Nwakibie and he had taken the highest title which a man could take in the clan. It was for this man that Okonkwo worked to earn his first seed yams.*

*He took a pot of palm wine and a cock to Nwakibie. Two elderly neighbours were sent for, and Nwakibie's two grown up sons were also present in his obi. He presented a kolanut and an alligator pepper, which was passed round for all to see and then returned to him. He broke it, saying: ‘We shall all live. We pray for life, children, a good harvest and happiness. (1) You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. (2) Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break’.*

*After the kolanut had been eaten, Okonkwo brought his palm wine from the corner of the hut where it had been placed and stood it in the centre of the group. He addressed Nwakibie, calling him 'Our father'.*

*'Nna anyi', he said. 'I have brought you this little kola. As our people say, a "man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness". I have come to pay you my respects and also to ask a favour. But let us drink the wine first'.*

*Everybody thanked Okonkwo and the neighbours brought out their drinking horns from the goatskin bags they carried. Nwakibie brought down his own horn, which was fastened to the rafters. The younger of his sons, who was also the youngest man in the group, moved to the centre, raised the pot on his left knee and began to pour out the wine. The first cup went to Okonkwo, who must taste his wine before anyone else. Then the group drank, beginning with the eldest man. When everyone had drunk two or three horns, Nwakibie sent for his wives. Some of them were not at home and only four came in.*

*'Is Anasi not in?' he asked them. They said she was coming. Anasi was the first wife and the others could not drink before her, and so they stood waiting.*

*Anasi was a middle-aged woman, tall and strongly built. There was authority in her bearing and she looked every inch the ruler of the women folk in a large and prosperous family. She wore the anklet of her husband's titles, which the first wife alone could wear.*

*She walked up to her husband and accepted the horn from him. She then went down on one knee, drank a little and handed back the horn. She rose, called him by his name and went back to her hut. The other wives drank in*

*the same way, in their proper order, and went away.*

*The men then continued their drinking and talking. Ogbuefi Idigo was talking about the palm wine tapper, Obiako, who suddenly gave up his trade.*

*There must be something behind it,; he said, wiping the foam of wine from his moustache with the back of his left hand. 'There must be a reason for it. A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing'.(Achebe)*

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The rhetorical forms are sayings that express fundamental truths of human life or experience in concrete or abstract terms. Their languages especially in the case of proverbs and riddles, are usually allusive, enigmatic, codified, graphic and vivid. They are used to embellish speeches and enhance effective and competent communication. An orator who skillfully employs the use of these forms is respected in the community. They help to enliven and enrich speeches. Tongue twisters, riddles and proverbs form the preparatory grounds and resources for oratorical arts. Tongue twister helps in fluency, riddles provide images and encourage witticism while proverbs present images and ideas. Together, they all help the traditional orator to communicate in a beautiful and effective manner.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have been exposed significantly to the detailed description, and articulation of the rhetorical form of oral literature. Some illustrations were used to make the meaning explicit and for easier understanding of these forms.

#### **6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

List any five each of tongue twisters, riddles or proverbs in your own culture, and translate in English language.

**7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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**UNIT 3: INTRODUCTION TO ORAL POETRY****CONTENTS**

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    - 3.2.1 Lament
    - 3.2.2 Dirge/Elegy
    - 3.2.3 Rhapsody
  - 3.3 Invocative Poetry
    - 3.3.1 Self Praise
    - 3.3.2 Panegyric
  - 3.4 Didactic Poetry
  - 3.5 Narrative Poetry
  - 3.6. Ritual Poetry
  - 3.7. Casual Poetry
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, we discussed the narrative forms of oral literature. They are likened to prose form of written literature. In this unit, you will learn more about the traditional poetic forms. The knowledge gained from this unit will help you not only in your studies but in your appreciation of the various types of poetry as you encounter them in real life at different traditional ceremonies.



## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Identify different types of traditional poetry;
- Differentiate different types of oral poetry; and
- Be in a position to discuss and appreciate traditional poetry.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Traditional Oral Poetry

Traditional Oral Poetry comprises performances in the form of songs, chants or recitation in which the performer binds himself in advance to follow a certain regular rhythmic pattern. Under this we have folk songs which are songs with choric refrains in a call-and-answer-pattern. In most cases the song has alternating sole lines and verses that serve as the chorus or refrains. Some of them present coherent stories while some of them are just sung for entertainment. In Yoruba land, *Ewi* is a common term for poetry and it is sung at different occasions. So, there is the *Ewi* that is sung at weddings like the bridal poetry called *Ekun Iyaw* and *Rara Iyawoo*; the one for hunters is the *Ijala*; *Oriki* is for the praise of an individual, family and lineage; while the *Iwi Egungun* is for the *Egungun* masquerade and *Orile* for towns/race. Each poetic form has its own peculiar rhythm and occasion for rendition. They have professional poets who render poems to the accompaniment of music.

### 3.2 Musical Poetry

This is poetry in the form of chant performed to the accompaniment of music. This includes various types of lyrical performances. The lyric is a short emotional poem in an expression of emotion which is composed to follow a particular rhythm. Here the word lyric is referred to in the modern sense as poetry which **expresses intense emotion**. There are two types of such of emotional expressions which are **emotions of joy** (rhapsody) and **emotions of grief** (elegy). **Elegy** is further divided into lamentative and dirge.

**3.2.1. Lament**

This is personal elegy because it expresses personal grief without reference to any particular event. It could be about the tragic circumstances in the world at large or to other causes of grief in the individual's personal life. The poet generally renders his laments laden with philosophical statements. Laments are presented mostly when a person or group of people are oppressed or on cases of injustice.

**3.2.2 Dirge/Elegy**

Is the type of elegy that is common at funeral/burial ceremonies and is usually musical. It also contains philosophical statements about the inevitability of death, the grief and other effects of death on the living.

**3.2.3 Rhapsody**

Rhapsody is the category of the musical type of joy. In this form of oral poetry the individual celebrates causes of happiness in his own personal life and in the world around him. It is a kind of chant usually common in minstrels. A man bursts into it when he is happy himself and the world. It expresses his sense of total well-being. It is also the kind of chants by maiden at moonlight plays and or at marriage ceremonies. Lullaby could also be categorized as rhapsody.

**3.3 Invocative Poetry**

This poetry addresses a second person in an attitude of veneration or respect. The addressee could be human, plants, animals or inanimate objects. This is one major category of invocative poetry that is found mainly all over Africa in the form of praise. It comprises a series of praises or celebration of the achievement of the individual animal or objects. Also in the invocative poetry is the poetry of self-praise. Self praise poem as the name implies occurs in a situation where one sings his own praises while in the panegyric poetry accolades are lavished on the presumed deserved person/or animal/object. Here is an example of invocative poem from Yoruba land below:

**Traditional Poetry*****Salute to the Elephant***

*O elephant, possessor of a savings-basket full of money*

*O elephant, huge as a hill, even in a crouching posture.*

*O elephant, enfolded by honour; demon, flapping fans of war.*

*Demon who snaps tree branches into many pieces and moves on to the forest farm.*

*O elephant, who ignores "I have fled to my father for refuge",*

*Let alone "to my mother".*

*Mountainous Animal, Huge Beast who tears a man like a garment*

*And hangs him up on a tree.*

*The sight of whom causes people to stampede towards a hill of safety*

*My chant is a salute to the elephant.*

*Ajanaku who walks with a heavy tread.*

*Demon who swallows palm-fruit bunches whole, even with the spiky pistil-cells.*

*O elephant, praise named Laaye, massive animal, blackish-grey in complexion*

*O elephant, who single-handed causes a tremor in a dense tropical forest*

*O elephant, who stands sturdy and alert, who walks slowly as if reluctantly.*

*O elephant, whom one sees and points towards with all one's fingers*

*The hunter's boast at home is not repeated before the elephant.*

*Ajanaku looks back with difficulty like a person suffering from a sprained neck.*

*The elephant has a porter's-knot without having any load on his head.*

*The elephant's head is his burden which he balances.*

*O elephant, pause named Laaye, "O death, please stop following*

*me" This is part and parcel of the elephant's appellation.*

*If you wish to know the elephant, the elephant who is a veritable ferry-man*

*The elephant whom honour matches, the elephant who continually swings his trunk, His*

*upper fly-switch,*

*It's the elephant whose eyes are veritable water-jars*

*O elephant, the vagrant par excellence*

*Whose molar teeth are as wide as palm-oil pits in Ijesaland.*

*O elephant, lord of the forest, respectfully called Oriiribobo*

*O elephant whose teeth are like shafts  
 One tooth of his is a porter's load, O elephant fondly called Otiko  
 Who has a beast-of-burden's proper neck  
 O elephant, whom the hunter sometimes sees face to face  
 O elephant, whom the hunter at other times sees from the rear  
 Best who carries mortars and yet walks with a swaggering  
 gait  
 Primeval leper, animal treading ponderously.*

(Translated by A. Babalola)

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What qualities of invocation does this poem possess?

#### **3.3.1 Self Praise**

Praise poetry is in the form of praises of another person and also a praises of oneself. The former is the panegyric treated below in 3.3.2. and the latter presents poems in praise of oneself. In it, the individual, or masquerade, chants own praise. This genre is found all over the country. In Awka, for instance, a masquerade like the *Agaba*, *Okwomma* or *Idu praises itself with names that portray its prowess*. For example, a masquerade refers to itself as “the dry meat that fills the mouth; the wind that that cannot be trapped” and many more. Some warriors or noblemen do the same thing sometimes. We find such also in Tess Onwueme’s *The Reign of Wazobia* the Regent praises herself as “... the masquerade /Who dances the hot steps of the new day, The finger that laps the soup when it is hottest...” (130). Also, in Yoruba land, there is an *Oriki* in which the individual praises himself as we find below:

*Emi ni Akinmogun ma sa  
 Arija ma sojo Apogun pote Apote pogun  
 Ogbagba agbote mole gba, gba, gba a  
 Anjounu eyan ti o nsun nile,  
 Ti o fun nba ara re leru* (from Dr. Olu Akeusola, the Otunba Akinrogun 1 of Oni Land).

**The translation:**

I am Akinrogun, the royal warrior that can never refrain from war  
 That can never be intimidated by any conflict  
 That crushes wars and uprisings 2  
 He who wields the sledge hammer that destroys confrontation completely.  
 A spirit-like person that sleeps at home and is afraid of himself.

**3.3.2 Panegyric**

In the traditional Nigerian societies, especially among the Hausas and Yorubas, the royal courts that flourished were characterized by wealth, power and pleasure. Poets were part of the court retinues and their main specialty in poetry rendition was panegyric as they compose elaborate praise poems to eulogize their kings and other noblemen. Apart from royal households, the *Oriki* in Yoruba land is used to praise an individual, a family or a lineage. Poets who specialize in them render them as the occasion demands. In the *Oriki*, the individual is praised with accolades and his ancestry is traced. Each family has an *Oriki* and each community has its own *Oriki* too. According to O. A Adewale, there are two versions of individual *Oriki*. In his father's lineage, his *Oriki* starts with "son of an Elephant". The elephant here symbolizes wealth, majesty/royalty. In the one from his mother's side, he is addressed as Son of a lion which depicts bravery and fearlessness. The *Oriki* has an ability to intoxicate the addressee. This intoxication is seen as some people as possession. This is because sometimes when the praises is being rendered the addressee may be carried away by the accolades that he give out more that is expected to the poet. Some panegyric poems could be classified as **heroic** poems when they recount the exploits of heroic deeds of an individual, gods, families or communities

**3.4 Didactic Poetry**

This form of poetry teaches moral, spiritual and philosophical lessons. It offers advice or provides moral instruction on the moral codes of society. It teaches mainly the young ones on how to comport themselves and how to be responsible citizens of society.

### 3.5 Narrative Poetry

This includes the epics. It is a specie of heroic narrative poetry which celebrates the achievements of a hero. Usually, the epic presents the emergence of an individual as a champion in the society against the background of evil in the society. History is celebrated in another category of narrative poetry. In this kind of narrative poetry, the major character is that community itself. Other characters are a galaxy of personalities associated with the development of the community. This is called historical narratives.

There is also the mythological verses which recount myths. Myth as seen in unit one, is specific account concerning gods or super-human beings and extra-ordinary events or circumstances in a time that is altogether different from that of ordinary human experience. Every myth presents itself as authoritative, always an account of facts, no matter how completely different they may be from the ordinary world. Myth occurs in the history of all human traditions and communities and is a basic constituent of human culture. This poetry that presents exclusively one aspect or another of the peoples myth may be described as mythological poetry e.g. The Fulani myth of creation tells how the world was created from a drop of milk.

#### *The Fulani Creation Story*

*At the beginning there was a huge drop of milk.*

*Then Doondari came and he created the stone.*

*Then the stone created iron;*

*And fire created fire;*

*And fire created water;*

*And water created air.*

*Then Doondari descended the second time.*

*And he took the five elements*

*And he shaped them into man*

*But man was proud.*

*Then Doondari created blindness, and blindness defeated man*

*But when blindness became too proud,*

*Doondari created worry, and worry defeated sleep;*

*But when worry became too proud,  
Doondari descended for the third time,  
And he came as Gueno, the eternal one.  
And Gueno defeated death.*

### **3.6 Ritual Poetry**

This comprises of recitations and speech forms in a verse that are spoken chanted or recited in magical or religious contexts. They include all kinds of prayers, divination chants, oracle chants, curses or malediction chants, and incantations by magicians. A good example is presented below:

#### ***Breaking Kolanut***

*God the Creator  
Who lives on high  
And his eyes cover the whole ground  
Who lives under the ground  
And no dirt soils him;  
Who lives in the waters  
And is dry;  
Who moves with the winds  
The wind is never seen by eyes –  
And yet air is everywhere,  
I come with greetings  
And with pleadings!*

#### ***God the Tryst Maker***

*Who makes tryst with men,  
Makes appointments with them  
Where and when he pleases,  
And they cannot escape!  
God who creates and who destroys*

*Who beats up human beings  
And consoles them;  
Crushes them and remains their friend;  
Who brings and who takes away,  
And who creates  
Before the created knows,  
At dawn we open our doors and our mouths,  
At night we close our doors  
But not our minds!*

*It is KOLA I bring!  
It's all I can offer!  
A little baby  
Can only hold its mother  
As far as its hands can go!  
KOLA is small  
And yet is big!  
Like the sacrificial food,  
It is more important that it goes round  
Than that it fills the stomach  
Our fathers' fathers  
And their fathers before them –  
All our ancestors –  
Saw all the fruits of the land  
But they chose kola  
As the prime substance for hospitality  
And for offerings:  
What an old man lying down has seen,  
Has the young man ever seen better  
Though he perches on the highest tree?*



*Of all food on earth,  
Only kola  
Is not cooked by water and fire  
But by spoken word!  
The rich can afford it! And the poor can afford it;  
And kola is the biggest offering  
Men bring to you GREAT GOD  
To whom the swallower of what swallows an elephant  
And with an hippopotamus tucked into its mouth  
And palmyra as chewing stick,  
Whistles freely,  
Is smaller than spittle!*

*It is not that kola  
Is the sweetest food on earth,  
Or that it fills the stomach fastest;  
But it's only with kola  
That we pray for life.  
And whoever brings kola  
Brings life,  
And brings health,  
And brings prosperity,  
And brings peace,  
And children,  
And what we shall feed them with!  
For it's YOU, God  
Who brings kola  
And ordains its manner of breaking.  
The KOLA  
Is like a mound in the middle of the arena,  
On which we stand and speak in the assembly*

*Of people, and of spirits,  
And our ancestors,  
And YOU Great God  
The TRYST MAKER,  
And the words reach the ears they're made for!  
So our fathers' fathers' fathers  
Hear my voice!  
God hear my voice!*

*I am a little innocent child who washes his stomach only! But your eyes  
see me  
And you can judge;  
If I've ever touched the wife of a relation  
Or seen the nakedness of a sister;  
If I've ever stolen what belongs to any human being  
Or oppressed a widow or cheated an orphan;  
Or borne false witness, or spoken calumny;  
If I've killed any human being  
With knife or spear,  
Or arrow or rope,  
Or poison or witch-craft,  
If I've done any of these things,  
May this our land  
And the Mother Earth EAT ME!*

*But if none of these is my guilt  
And my fellow-man would afflict me  
Because of anger of the heart or anger of the eye,  
Then let whoever comes to kill me  
KILL HIMSELF!*

*Anybody who says he must see me and my household*

*With evil eyes*

*Let his eyes perish in the seeing!*

*Any person who says an innocent house-hold*

*May not sleep*

*Make him roost with the chicken*

*I pray for the good of the people in the bush,*

*And the good of those at home;*

*For the good of those in the hills*

*And the good of those in the valleys;*

*For the good of those at work*

*And for the good of those at play,*

*But if a man I can stand by does not stand by me*

*Let what kills traitors kill him*

*If a spirit I can vouch for does not vouch for me*

*Let what kills spirits kill it.*

*If anybody would bring poison into this house*

*Let his polluted hand enter his mouth!*

*Let no guest bring evil to his host;*

*On his departure*

*May no hunch grow on his back.*

*Let a rat not dare to eat the bag of a medicine-man*

*And let the medicine-man not dare curse the rat.*

*It is said that an innocent man,*

*Guiltless of any sin big or small*

*Crosses the waters on a piece of*

*calabash; That it's with a snail's good*

*tongue*

*That the snail moves over thorns.*

*So I'll keep clean my hands;*

*You will defend me from cows:  
A man cannot wrestle with a cow.*

*If I must suffer for my offences*

*It is just;*

*If for the guilt of my children*

*I'll bear it –*

*The mouth speaks what earns the jaw a slap.*

*A man's head shakes the ant's nest.*

*His trunk suffers for it.*

*What is good is what we want.*

*I have not asked you to give that to me only:*

*Eating everything alone is bad eating!*

*If the kite perches,*

*Whichever denies the other the right to perch.*

*May its wings break.*

**GOD**

*May we never be in need and find no helper.*

*A man who has friends is greater than a wealthy man!*

*Give our wives fruitfulness –*

*One blow, one fall.*

*Give us children*

*And give us the means to feed them.*

*Let any of us or our children*

*Who goes out to work*

*Come back*

*With plenty of money,*

*And come back safe.*

*Let any weed that brushes us*

*On our departure*

*Brush against us on our return  
 – It is not an evil weed.  
 When we are at the back,  
 Let evil be in front;  
 And when we are in front  
 Let evil be behind Let  
 no illness come And let  
 no doctor cure. Let no  
 one be ill  
 And let no one heal.  
 But I have not spoken and it is final  
 You have the yam;  
 And YOU have the knife.  
 To whomsoever you give  
 And in whatever measure, he will eat!...  
 I break the KOLA NUT*

(Traditional Poetry from the Igbo Songs by Lawrence Emeka)

### 3.7 Casual Poetry

These are poetry of incidental and non-serious type found in various situations in social relationships. A good example is greetings to welcome the new moon, as is seen in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Some of the casual poems are found in the hawker's song used to sell merchandise and many others.

### 4.0 Conclusion

In the traditional communities, songs are rendered virtually at every occasion especially during festivities festivals and ceremonies. These songs are poems and they permeate every aspect of the Nigerian life and culture. They derive their names from the different occasions during which they are performed. The poems are presented appropriately to suit each occasion. A dirge for instance, cannot be rendered during a wedding ceremony. The composer in the traditional society is aware of this fact and composes appropriately.

**5.0 SUMMARY**

This unit has introduced you to oral traditional poetry. You have also learnt the different forms of poetry and occasions they derive from. You have learnt too that some of the traditional songs you are familiar with are forms of poetry. You will now be able to classify and appreciate them appropriately.

**6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

List five types of oral poetry and the occasions where they will be performed appropriately.

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**UNIT 4: THE PERFORMANCE TRADITION****CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit you will be introduced to different forms of traditional performances that could be classified as drama. You will learn that Western parameters of drama should not be used to ascertain what constitutes drama in the traditional Nigerian society. Dramatic performances are part of the traditional way of life as they are seen in traditional festivals, rituals and other performances and ceremonies.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit you should be able:

- To identify various forms of traditional performances
- To identify dramatic elements in the performances
- Ascertain the ones that could be classified as drama.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Traditional Drama in Nigeria**

All aspects of oral literature involve one sort of performance or the other. The story teller performs his story, and the poet also performs but the degree of performance of each genre varies and is not comparable to the traditional dramatic performances. Drama as an art form thrives on performance because it involves an imitation of an action, an enactment or a re-enactment of a story in lifelike situations. The aim is to entertain, lampoon, condemn, satirize, educate or to inculcate moral values. In all these, action or imitation of an action is involved.

Aristotelian concept of drama with its emphasis on imitation, plot, dialogue, conflict and so on has generated much controversy on what constitute drama in the context of Nigerian traditional performances. Based on the Aristotelian concept, Finnegan declares that drama did not exist in African societies before colonization. According to her, Africans had what she described as “certain dramatic and quasi-dramatic phenomena” (500). Her stance created a division among Nigerian dramatic scholars on the definition of African traditional drama. Some of them oppose her while others align with her totally or with some modifications. Consequently, there evolved two schools of thoughts on that contentious issue. These are the relativist school of thought and the evolutionist schools of thought.

##### **3.1.1 The Evolutionist School**

This school headed by M. J. C. Echeruo and he argues that the traditional festivals are not a form of drama but are actually rituals (Ogunbiyi 7). They opine that these festivals emphasize songs and dances with little or no attention to plot and dialogue. It insists that until a festival or ritual is forced to yield its story, the dramatic content will remain an integral part of ritual. Echeruo, in his argument insists that there must exist a story to be enacted or imitated for a performance to be classified as drama.



In his contribution, Kalu Uka (insists) that “what is usually called drama is not yet drama but “essentially elements of drama” (quoted in Ogunbiyi, 7). Ola Rotimi also hinges his argument on the presence of an imitation of action in the performance for it to be termed drama. He opines that “any ritual display which contains mimetic impulse ought to be classified as drama not ritual” (Ogunbiyi, 7).

This school insists therefore, that for any performance to be classified as drama, it must contain elements of an imitation of an action and a story to be enacted or re-enacted. They conclude that the ritual festivals in Africa must conform to the Aristotelian concept of plot as the soul of drama, to be regarded as drama.

### **3.1.2 The Relativist School**

The views of the relativist school, championed by Ossie Enekwe and J. A. Adedeji, is that drama and ritual are reciprocal in function and similar in structure so one can easily lead to the other. It means that it is difficult to separate ritual and drama, therefore, drama exists in traditional performances. Supporting this view, Emmanuel Obiechina wonders why Greek’s parameter should be used in the evaluation of drama in Nigeria. This school believes that “theatre is first and foremost an experience” so should be experienced in different ways by people in different cultural milieu.

We believe that drama which is an art is an outcome of a creative instinct. A creative person is an imaginative individual who is capable of impressing an audience with the product of his imagination. Traditional African drama and theatre are embedded in performances. These include, rituals, festivals, story-telling, masquerade poetry composed performances, music/dance, puppet shows and many other forms of performances. We also believe that for drama to exist there must be an element of imitation of an action. Dialogue and unified plot structure should not be considered as obligatory in dramatic performance. However, in some traditional performances ritual and theatre are so interwoven that it becomes difficult to extricate the drama embedded in such performances.

### **3.2 Festival**

A festival is a periodic feast, a celebration of an event. It includes forms of entertainment and performances and which are often held at a particular time of the year. African festival theatre brings together ideas, actions, aesthetics which are partly sacred (religious) and partly secular (sometimes profane). For instance, there could be a new yam festival to thank a particular god or pay homage to him for a good harvest and pray for a better yield in the following year. A man sets out with this noble intent but along the line, gets drunk, molests people or indulges in other unwholesome acts. You see now that there is a mixture of the sacred and the profane in his action.

Festival theatre is different from theatre festival. The former is a theatre produced as festival. The latter is a conscious attempt to declare theatrical productions in a given environment. Festivals are important in the Nigerian traditional society because of the following reasons:

- Festivals uphold and promote solidarity and collective consciousness among a particular people.
- They are characterized by collective euphoria where the sacred and the profane are interwoven. Usually, there is a suspension of the rules and norms of ordinary life.
- They are characterized by non-work posture. Leisure is the central element in festivals so people look forward to festivals as a period of enjoyment and relaxation. There is usually a gradual change of occupational activities. Many festivals take place during the period of 'rest' for the people when there is less to be done in the farms. Festivals provide a forum for an entertainment and recreation for the people.

### **3.3 Ritual**

A ritual is an honest act which follows a particular pattern, is performed for a particular effect (result) and in accordance with the tradition. In the early times, sometimes, the seasons did not come as expected or calamity may strike in a community. In this event of an abnormality in the cosmos, men felt that the gods were angry and that they had

offended the gods, one way or the other. They then devise means or ways of atoning for their sins and or appeasing the gods. Sometimes this appeasement is conducted only once but at other times it becomes a regular form of ceremony for the community. When it becomes a regular occurrence following a definite pattern to achieve a specific result, it becomes ritual. So, ritual is a continuous practice of a group of people either to satisfy custom or cause certain things to happen. It is a kind of rite that is performed faithfully, a re-enactment that looks like drama but different from drama because of intent. When the intent is simply to entertain, it is drama and audience is made up of human beings. But if the intent is to achieve a particular result and audience is supernatural, it is ritual. The audience is the people to whom the message is directed and the priest is medium through which the message is relayed, and the suppliants are the actors. Ritual is a transformation of belief into action through enactment.

### **3.4 Ancestor Worship**

In the Nigerian traditional communities, ancestral worship is very common. Deceased relatives, especially the elders, are regarded as ancestors and are believed to have some influence on their younger generations. People therefore, are cautious not to offend their ancestors but whenever such thing happens, such ancestors are appeased. Apart from the appeasement, ancestors are invoked or revered from time to time as the occasion demands to intercede or intervene for the living in some critical moments. In some Igbo societies for instance, after breaking the kolanut, a piece of the kolanut is thrown outside for the ancestors to eat before the mortals would eat their own share. Even in the prayers preceding the breaking of the kolanuts, the ancestors are invoked for protection as we have seen in Unit 3. Also, before taking a gulp of palm wine, part of the wine is used to pour libation to the ancestors before the mortals drink their own.

In many homes, there were, and are still shrines for the ancestors. In some communities, particular tree are dedicated to them. In Awka, Anambra State, a tree is usually planted in honour of an ancestor whenever a first male child is born. It is called “Ogbu chi”. Ogbu is a type of Boabob tree and this tree represents the person’s god. From time to time, he is expected to perform some sacrifices at this tree or make some supplications. These minor

gestures are performed freely by any adult male, preferably the eldest in the family. However, whenever there is a serious problem or in a communal reverence, the diviner is usually consulted and he prescribes the requirements for the ceremony. In this case, the priest acts as a mediator between the living and the dead. While the living worship the dead in with reverence in supplication, penitence, invocation or thanksgiving. This in some cases these ceremonies or assumes a higher sacrifice dimension, and culminates in a festival. You can see that some form of representation and imitation of action is involved. The priest yields his personality as a person and assumes the role of a priest.

Some of the ancestor worships involve masquerades. In some communities the masquerades represent the ancestors. Adedeji explains that “Alarinjos are bound to the Egungun culture by ancestor worship and participate at Egungun festivals. He also explains that Sango, a one-time Alafin of Oyo introduced the phenomenon of the ancestor worship called baba (father) or later Egungun (masquerade). In other tribes and traditional societies, ancestor worship is equally present in different names and dimensions. Try to find out how the ancestors were worshiped in your own community. We are concerned with the ancestor worships at the communal level. Some of them take place periodically while some occur as the need arises.

### **3.5 Masquerades**

In most traditional African societies, masquerades are seen as gods or heroic ancestors. They take different forms and there are many varieties depending on the region, the purpose, the content and the pattern. They are usually masked figures of various kinds. A mask is a covering or a disguise used to transform the identity of the individual or the wearer into that of another character. So, there is an element of impersonation. In traditional African societies, we can identify different types of masks according to their functions based on the areas of the body covered. (Thus we head pieces, face masks and body masks).

### **3.6 Story-Telling as Theatre**

In traditional African society, story-telling is in some cases seen as theatre. Stories are told as forms of entertainment. These stories are often enacted in the sense that to a greater or smaller degree, the speech and gestures of their characters are imitated by the narrator, and the action is largely exhibited through dialogue. The theatrical and sometimes dramatic performance is heightened by the frequent occurrence of music and sometimes rudimentary dance movements. Usually, at the beginning and end of the story, there is a form of witty exchange between the narrator and the audience. This is called focus formulae in oral literature. The popular one in English is 'story-story, the audience responds story'. This is to get the attention of the audience and sometimes to create humour. These used draw the middle and is used by the story teller to draw attention to the moral aspect or the significance of the story. Also, in the course of the story the narrator introduces a song by, or representing the actions of one of the characters and this is taken up in the form of an anthem by the audience, which acts as the chorus. In this way the audience partakes in the dramatic enactment of the story. Occasional too, the narrator could move among the audience to emphasize a point or imitate a particular character. It includes mime gymnastics and acrobatics that are sometimes structured to or orchestrated by music.

### **3.8 Carnival**

Carnival is a public celebration that is held periodically at a particular time of the year. It involves the community appearing in groups according to affiliations like age groups or families. Each group tries to beat the other group in their presentations which involve flamboyant costumes, music and dance. In the riverine areas, the carnivals are in the form of boat regatta in the rivers while in other communities, the performers perform along the streets. In Lagos, the Fanti cultural carnival is very popular.

### **3.8 Puppet Shows**

Puppets are models of human beings or animals that are manipulated to move by means of devices. These devices could be human hands/fingers or strings. These models are created according to the roles and the stories to be presented. They are used in dramatic

performances. They come in different shapes and sizes but the sizes are made as small as possible for easy manipulation. In the Nigerian setting, the puppets are used for both entertainment and edification. A common feature of puppet shows in Nigeria is that they reflect moral prejudices, sanctions of communities and the depiction of social ills. They inform, educate and entertain through laughter. The actions of the puppets are usually explained through dialogue, narration or music/dance.

Puppet shows are popular in the Northern part of Nigeria. In the Kwagh-Hir theatre a narrator tells the story in fragmentary episodes with jokes that help to enliven up the mood of the participation while the performance by the puppets is going on. Some of the puppets are naturalistic while others are grotesque and ridiculous, but “all reflecting moral prejudices and sanctions of the community” (Enem, 250). The incidents they reflect cover both abstract and realistic situations, attitudes and behavioural patterns of the people and other universal human situations.

Here Puppets are manipulated to present dramatic performances. They come in different shapes and styles depending on the characters they represent. The common feature is that they reflect moral prejudices, sanctions of the communities and other social ills. Usually, they inform, entertain and educate through laughter comedy/satire. The actions of the puppets are explained through music, songs and narration.

In Bornu also, the puppet show is a popular form of entertainment. The puppets are called the *dogodogo* in Kanuri and the manipulated is known as *dogodogoma*. Unlike in the Kwahir puppet shows that involve many manipulators the Bornu show features only one manipulator who carries the puppets in a hyena bag. He plants a stout forked stick, places his bag in front of it and sits behind the stick. He uses his flaming gown to build a tent which is supported by his head and the stick and brings out his hand above his head to manipulate the puppets. He delivers the lines in a still voice to the accompaniment of drums from drummers behind him. Each scene tells a story on social issues. R.R Ellison recounts that the action is highly dramatic in one scene, a thief enters a man’s house and

is just about to escape with his last when the man's wife raises an alarm and the husband emerges and "gives the thief a sound beating" (252).

### **3.9 Popular Theatre**

This is a form of theatre that is commonly approved and widely liked by the common people in a given community. The performer here does not need a text, or an elaborate stage but a place, time and an audience. Here entertainment and amusement are foremost in the minds of the performers and their theatres are so flexible that they can adapt easily to any environment. The Yoruba traveling theatre was a popular form of entertainment in the communities.

### **3.10 Music and Dance**

Most of the traditional performances are embedded in music and dance. However we have decided to discuss them separately because they, on their own are forms of traditional performances. Also, some dances contain some re-enactment of stories. A good example is the Ohafia War Dance, some dance dramas from northern Nigeria or the Egwu Amala from Delta State.

Dance is usually accompanied by music. In traditional Nigerian society, dance is a form of entertainment during festivals and other traditional ceremonies and rites. Some of the dances are for mere entertainment while many of them are re-enactment of feats/incident or the dance is usually used to communicate or promote dramatic intention.

Music is, according to Meki Nzewi, "dance which is stylized and structured movement in time and space. Dance involves or at the marginal, implies music" so both are somehow inseparable. "Dance includes mime, gymnastics and acrobatics, structure to, or orchestrated by music.

Many people conceptualize dance of mere entertainment but in the oral literature; some forms of dance are drama. Dance drama is very common in the traditional society. The "Egwu amala" of the Delta Igbo is a good case in point. In the north wooing and marriage are common features in their dance drama.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

Drama is an art. That is, an outcome of the imagination, the creative instinct of man. In drama, the artist strives to impress an audience with the product of his imagination. In the same vein, the artist in oral literature tries to impress his audience with his art which is a product of his imagination. Traditional Nigerian drama is embedded in performances, like ritual, festivals, puppet shows, ancestral worships, masquerades, carnivals music and dance. Some of these are so interwoven that it is difficult to separate them.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit you have been exposed to different forms of performances in Nigeria. However, it does not encompass all the wide range of performances in Nigeria. The popular Yankamanci, Hausa comedians' performances and other dramatic skits, satires and full blown comedies performed in different parts of the country are not included here. You have learnt also that drama is significant in traditional performances but of varying degrees.

#### 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write a short note on one traditional performance in your community which you think is drama.

#### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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**UNIT 5: HISTORY AS A SOURCE OF NIGERIAN LITERATURE****CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
  - 3.1 Fiction
  - 3.2 Falsehood
  - 3.3 History
  - 3.4 Literary Artists vs History
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, you will know more about fiction and the relationship between literature and fiction. We will also try to differentiate between fiction and falsehood. Finally, we will find out the correlation between history and literature, and how literary artists make use of history in their works.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be in a position to:

- a. Differentiate between falsehood and fiction.
- b. Identify the relationship between history and literature.
- c. Explain how a writer could draw his material from history.

**3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

The three concepts of fiction, falsehood and history are inter-related as long as they all tell stories. The distinguishing factor is how the stories are told. The important factor is

the intent or motivation. What differentiates one from the other is the intention of the story teller in each category as well as the level of distancing from actuality.

### 3.1 Fiction

Fiction is an imaginary work. It means that the stories you read in the novels and plays are products of the writer's imagination. Fiction writers try to craft stories that are as close to reality as possible though they are not real-life experience. A good novelist observes his society, incidents, and situations around him very closely and based on his observation, he creates his own story. Creative writing is a form of self-expression. The writer can get his germinal idea from an incident and develops it into a story. He could create a story based on a real life experience but the story is not factual because he does not report the incidents accurately. That is why Plato threatened to ban them from his republic. He insisted that the artists deceive people with their stories which look like real-life accounts yet they are products of the artist's imagination.

The writer's story may be close to an original incident but is not exactly the same. The names of characters and sometimes, the setting, are fictitious. This is what makes it a fiction. Let us take Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, for instance; it is possible that a man like Unoka existed in a certain village. He may have had a son who rejected his father's way of life, aspired for greatness, worked for greatness, achieved greatness and perhaps eventually falls. But, this man's story can never be the same with Okonkwo's story. Some fictions are so true to life that some people feel that their own stories are being told. This explains why in some novels, the publisher warns that all the events and characters presented are fictitious and that any semblance to any living person is regretted.

The fiction writer's motivation is to share an experience. S/he wants to express himself, to let others into what is in his mind. He wants to communicate his personal feelings or opinion on certain issues in his society to make his society a better place. As Chinua Achebe puts it:

*The important thing is that you have something inside you,*

*something burning, something that wants to come out something that you want to communicate to other people, to fellow human beings so it may be a story, it may be whatever. And if you don't have a chance communicating, you are unhappy (83).*

### **3.2 Falsehood**

Sometimes, people interchange fiction with falsehood. You all know that the opposite of truth is falsehood (a lie). We talk of falsehood in real life experiences when someone tells a lie orally or in a publication. We find falsehood mainly in journalism where facts are distorted or outright lies are told to make sensational headlines and stories that would boost the marketing of their papers. Falsehood in writing is when you present a false story and want people to believe that it is true. If for instance, an undergraduate who is not intelligent approaches a lecturer to solicit for marks and the lecturer refuses, the student gets his friends in the media to frame the lecturer and publish a story that claims that he has been sleeping with female students in his office. In this story, the lecturer's real name and university are mentioned. The intent is to disgrace the lecturer or even get him sacked. But in fiction, even if the lecturer sleeps with his female students, the writer will just pick the theme of sexual harassment in universities and depending on the intention, crafts a story on that. In the second story, the lecturer may be caught pants down and sacked to serve as a deterrent to others. Those of you who watch "Super Story" may recall the episode on "Mr. Lecturer". This is fiction and not falsehood.

### **3.3. History**

History is a factual documentation of events in the society. In history it is expected that there should be no distortion of any type. Accurate names, dates, places and incidents are documented in history. It is unfortunate that history as a subject has been neglected in the secondary schools in Nigeria. This is a national tragedy because it is through history that citizens learn more about their leaders, past events, and other important incidents in their country. It is through history that we learn about the great Oyo Empire, Kanem Bornu Empire, the exploits of Queen Amina of Zaria, the Alaafin of Oyo, Kan-Kan Musa and many other great leaders and empires. If not for history we will not have known of the

Aba women's riots of 1929 and many others. Though history, also, we learn what happened in other countries in the past for instance, the origin of slave trade and the final abolition of slave trade, are good examples of historical events.

History as stated earlier dwells on accuracy. The motive is simple and straight forward. It is to record important events, major achievements and notable land marks in society. So historians must be sure of the facts of the story before documentation.

Through oral literature, historical accounts are passed from one generation to the other. Some of such accounts in many towns include how the inter-tribal wars in pre-colonial Nigeria were fought. Some of them are still being recalled. The effect of the war, especially as it affects the relocation of some towns, are also recounted. However, with the advent of western education, printing and publishing, the history of many towns are being documented in print for posterity. So history is not close to reality but is reality itself.

The creative writer writes from the innermost part of his/her being. William Wordsworth calls it "an overflow of powerful emotions". The motive of the creative artist therefore is to release that emotion that is "boiling inside you and it wants to come out" (Achebe 83), for the edification of the society. The intention of the creative artist is to instruct, to inform and to entertain.

### **3.5 Literary Artist vs History**

Creative artists write from their imagination but sometimes, they draw their materials from history. A civil war was fought in Nigeria from 1967 to 1970. Ideally, there should be only one authentic (historical) account of that civil war from Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu's coup in January, 1966 to the Biafran surrender in January 1970 presented by Major General Effiong. All the major participants, on the both sides should be mentioned. For instance, he narrated how Col. Ifeajuna and others were executed in Biafra as saboteurs, the Aburi conference, the killings of Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, Colonel Samuel Ladoke Akintola and others must be documented in details with specific mention

of real names, specific time, year, or dates authentic towns or locations. The major battlefields, like the Nsukka sector, Abagana sector and the blowing up of the River Niger Bridge at Onitsha must not be left out. This is history and there is only one such history.

On the other hand, in fiction, there have been so many novels, and poems on the civil war. It is difficult to mention all of them. Each writer imaginatively, creates a story from his or her perspective depending on what is “boiling inside” of him/her that he or she wants to share with the society. Festus Iyayi’s *The Heroes* for instance, focuses on the wanton destruction of human and material resources; the effect of the war on innocent civilians; destroyed relationships; and the fact that the officers sit back to enjoy while other ranks fight and die in the war front. The names are fictitious though there are some allusions to real life events like General Gowon’s wedding.

Lord Lugard, the colonial Governor-General of Nigeria wanted a unification of northern and southern Nigeria later known as amalgamation. He approached Attahiru for friendship but was rejected. Attahiru was not just interested in the protection of his territorial integrity but also the Islamic religion. He had seen how the British subdued or defeated the neighbouring towns so he declared that “The only relationship that can exist between a believer and an infidel is...war (27 ).

On their own part, the colonial masters were eager to conquer and annexe Sokoto as fast as possible before the French that had made an inroad into the northern Nigeria and was “moving close to Sokoto through the north of Katsina” (Ajayi 65) war became inevitable. In a fierce battle, Attahiru bravely tried to defend his kingdom but because the colonial masters had more sophisticated weapons, he was defeated and he died gallantly in the battle.

The Civil war in Nigeria became a major concern to the Nigerian writers in the sixties and seventies. The Nigerian Civil War took place between 1967 and 1970 and was said to have claimed the lives of over 100,000 soldiers as well as countless civilians. This affected the Nigerian literary scene in many ways. It claimed the life of one of the

country's most celebrated poets, Christopher Okigbo, and caused untold hardship to other writers like Wole Soyinka, who were detained for crying out against the atrocities perpetrated in the war.

However, the war provided inspiration for many writers particularly those directly involved. These writers poured out their frustration, anger and memories in considerable quantities and qualities. For instance, Elechi Amadi wrote a powerful novel, *Sunset in Biafra* (1973), depicting his war-rime experience. Other testimonies to the madness of the era were Soyinka's *The Man Died* (1972), Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), Ken Sarowiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985), Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1976) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007).

Another historical event that has provided material for fiction in Nigeria is colonialism. During the colonial period the deposition of kings who resisted the colonial incursions into their territories was rampant. Two of such kings are Attahiru and Oba Ovoranwenrem Nogbaisi. Two plays have been written based on the latter one by Ola Rotimi and the second by Ahmed Yerima. Also Ahmed Yerima has written a play on the deposition of Attahiru. The play, *Attahiru* is about Sultan Muhammadu, Attahiru 1 of Sokoto. The play, set in Sokoto between 1907 and 1903 the colonial period from the ascension of Attahiru as the 12<sup>th</sup> Caliph of Sokoto and the Sarkin Musulmi to his death in the battle of Burmi.

The playwrights pick the main historical incidents of what happened to the kings and based on their perspectives produced beautiful plays that remind the audience of the historical events while entertaining them. Other historical plays include Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* ( 1982 ) and Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* ( 1988 ).

Both the historian and the artist need to carry out a research to authenticate their documentation. The historian needs a more thorough and exhaustive research to ensure accuracy. The creative artist needs a research to ensure that he gets the correct account of the particular incident/event s/he wants to depict in his/her work. Here the research is not usually comprehensive. In most cases, he gets his material from the historians

document, and presents it with additional information from his imagination to make his work interesting and class.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Sometimes fiction and falsehood are used interchangeably. This explains why Plato proposed to banish artists from his Republic. According to him they tell lies and deceive people. He insists that they can only fight and win wars in their works but cannot do the same in real life. Although, some falsehoods are imaginary tales, they are told for selfish reasons. Generally, fiction which is an imaginary art is produced for the benefit of the audience, the society. The fiction writer's motive is to inform, to educate and to entertain. Fiction differs from history because history has nothing to do with imagination. The historian is a documentarian for s/he records facts the way they are and not the way they appear to him, the way he wants them to be or the way he imagines them. So, he deals with raw facts, undistilled, undiluted. Creative writers present these facts from their perspectives, distilled, filled with ingredients added to make a pleasurable reading.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

You have learnt the similarities and differences between fiction, falsehood and history. You have also learnt the fiction is a product of the writer's imagination and that the writer writes through his or her experience. He can base his story on the society, on people, incidents, myth, legend and history. The important point here is that he or she does not reproduce the material the way it is, but he embellishes it to create a unique entertaining story from which the reader or audience can learn some lessons.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Differentiate between fiction and falsehood.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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**MODULE 2: COLONIALISM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN LITERATURE**

- Unit 1 Colonialism in Nigeria for Nigerian Way of Life
- Unit 2 Africa in the Eye of Colonialist Literature
- Unit 3 The Development of Nigeria Literature
- Unit 4 The Rise of Nigerian Literatures
- Unit 5 The Pioneer Nigerian Poets

**UNIT 1: COLONIALISM IN NIGERIA FOR NIGERIAN WAY OF LIFE**

**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
  - 3.1 Colonialism in Nigeria
  - 3.2 Colonialism and the Nigerian Culture
  - 3.3 Colonialism and the Nigerian Tradition
  - 3.4 Colonialism and the Nigerian Religion
  - 3.5 Colonialism and the Nigerian Politics
  - 3.6 The Implication of Colonialism on Nigerian literature
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References for Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

It is not possible to talk about Nigerian literature without mentioning the Nigerian colonial experience. In this unit you will learn more about the Nigerian colonial experiences and its impact on the development of Nigerian literature.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Recount the Nigerian Colonial Experience
- List its effects on Nigerian tradition
- State how it affected Nigerian culture
- State its influence on Nigerian Socio-Political Experience
- Learn its influence on Nigerian religions and belief system
- State its relationship with Nigerian literature

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Colonialism in Nigeria**

Europeans at a point in their history became so adventurous that they sailed to other parts of the world and claimed that they discovered these areas. Africa was the worst hit in this discovery expedition. Christopher Columbus was said to have discovered while Mungo Park is the acclaimed founder of the River Niger. If they had discovered these areas, made history, included their names in their Guinness Book of Records, the word colonialism would not have emerged. The truth is that these countries and communities were in existence before the exploration of West Africa by the colonialist. They discovered continents, countries and towns and felt that the inhabitants of these areas were insignificant and so decided to “humanize” them. First of all, they imposed themselves on countries, peacefully or by force. Those who did not resist them, they settled peacefully with them and those who resisted them were subdued through a military force. Africans had bows, arrows, spears and clubs as weapons while their adversaries came with sophisticated guns. In the face of the guns, Africans became powerless. They imposed their civilization through education, culture, religion and politics. They deposed kings and installed warrant chiefs. People that lived together

harmoniously were torn apart. One of the gravest evils of colonialism is the slave trade through which many innocent Nigerians were cargoed abroad for cheap labour to work in the plantations of some of their colonies.

European countries scrambled for space in Africa. Each of them claimed the countries where they were the first to arrive as their colonies. Thus, some countries in Africa were colonized by the British, some by the French, some by the Spaniards, some by Portuguese and so on. The struggle for space led to the partition of Africa to avoid a large scale war among the world powers then. This explains while in West Africa you hear terms like Francophone and Anglophone countries. Francophone countries refer to the countries that were colonized by France while the Anglophone countries were those countries colonized by Britain.

Nigeria is an Anglophone country. The Europeans, who arrived in Nigeria from Britain, came with their 'civilization' that was heralded by many. The Christian priests and evangelists were sent ahead of the political set. In some cases, they came together but the evangelists were the first to approach the indigenes with their religion of peace and salvation. As the saying goes, they came with the cross in one hand and the gun in the other. As the priests moved, the administrators followed to quell any resistance wherever there was one. They imposed their government, religion and culture, on Nigerians.

Gradually, some Nigerians acquired the western education and fought for independence which was granted in 1960. Nigeria got her independence without bloodshed unlike Kenyans and South Africans. The reason is that the colonial administrators did not discover any solid mineral or fertile land for tea, coffee or other produce. If they had discovered, for instance, crude oil, the fact that they were scared away by the thick rain forest, mosquitoes, and malaria would have been nullified. After all, despite the hostility from the Niger Delta, they are still in the creeks drilling oil.

### **3.2 Colonialism and the Nigerian Culture**

Nigeria was and is still a plural society. There are many ethnic groups and the language, food, mode of dressing and the general cultural attributes of each group is unique. The colonial masters condemned the culture of the people and termed it barbaric. They claimed that the people did not wear dresses, and those who did, did not cover their bodies very well. They forgot that the climatic conditions in Europe differ from that in Nigeria. However, they imposed their way of dressing on the people. The traditional way of dressing was condemned but now our sensibilities are being assaulted daily on the screen, posters and everywhere with obscene nudities; another importation from the West. In the traditional society, people went about naked in innocence, but in contemporary Nigeria influenced by colonialism, nakedness is sold for money. Nigerian cultural festivals were condemned as fetish, while their own, especially Christian feast days were glorified and celebrated.

However, they did not succeed in destroying all aspects of the Nigerian culture. People still ate their food, and observe most of other aspects of their culture like language and literature. Some Nigerian festivals still exist till date.

### **3.3. Colonialism and the Nigerian Tradition**

Tradition is the way things are done in a particular place, situation or circumstance. It comprises the norms and values of a people. The tradition of learning in NOUN/NTI, for instance, is that course materials are given to students, they study at home and go for facilitation for discussions. The tradition of a people involves the totality of the culture, customs, the 'dos' and 'don'ts' in that society. Nigerian traditions were condemned. Some of them include polygamy, killing of twins, kingship, some rituals associated with the cycle of death and burial, the system of outcasts, abandoning a man in an evil forest to die because he committed an abomination and many others. Some of the abrogated ones like killing of twins is applauded. The colonialists destroyed traditional boundaries and created artificial ones, thus forcing some people into a different socio-political set ups.

### **3.4 Colonialism and Nigerian Religion**

The most devastating effect of colonialism on Nigeria succeeded through religion. Nigerians seem to be too fanatical about religion. Before the colonialists arrived in the country, there existed traditional religions practised differently by each community. These are the oldest religions as both Islam and Christianity were introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This means that traditional religion existed in the North before a greater part of Northern Nigeria was converted to Islamic religion during the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The southerners worshipped God through different means in shrines, grooves, river banks. Ancestors were revered, and in other natural places. They are seen as the living dead since they still have influence on the living. They are invoked for intercession in times of adversity and are honoured in times of plenty before the advent of Christianity.

### **3.5 Colonialism and Politics**

Each ethnic group or town in Nigeria had its own system of government before the advent of the Europeans. In the north, the Emirs were at the helms of affairs. They ruled their subjects with perceived justice and the subjects were very loyal to the emirs. With this, peace reigned in the society. That system of government had its rules, regulations and a hierarchy that was abided by and respected by all. Offenses were punished while good deeds were extolled.

In the western region, the Yorubas had their Obas, and other ethnic groups had their kings with different names. These kings had their council of chiefs who ruled with them as advisers, chief warriors, judges and so on. Citizens subjected themselves to the laws of the land. Any offender knows the punishment that awaits him or her and accepts it without question.

Most of the Igbo tribes did not have the type of kings mentioned above. They were ruled by council of elders or titled chiefs. Every member of that society knows his or her place and lived in conformity to the rules and regulations of the community and carried his/her obligations appropriately.

Nigerian societies, like many societies in the world, had a system of patriarchy that privileged men. But despite that, women did not complain before the advent of colonialism because in pre-colonial societies, there were checks and balances ensuring that gender roles did not translate into economic and political impoverishment of women” (Ngugi in preface to Tess Onwueme’s *Tell It To Women*, 1994)

Unfortunately, colonialism came with discriminations of race, gender, class, religious affiliations, and other influences. The dominant social class, those close to the colonial administrators developed prejudices and negative attitudes towards the local government. Gender roles became questioned, for instance, a man is expected to marry only one wife unlike in the traditional society where a man was free to marry as many wives as he could cater for. Polygamy had and is still has its problems and women have tried to challenge it in different ways different from western concepts of resistance.

The biggest blow on the indigenous politics was the introduction of warrant chiefs. These warrant chiefs snubbed and in some cases abused the existing system of government in their societies. They were very corrupt and manipulated and oppressed their people especially their perceived enemies. They extorted money and other materials from the people to judge cases in their favours. The bribery and corruption entrenched in the Nigerian system by colonialism through these warrant chiefs and their aides are still with us till date. The process of selection of leaders that was not by merit influenced the Nigerian political system so much that its eradication remains a mirage.

### **3.6 The Implication of Colonialism on Nigerian Literature**

One of the most outstanding effects of colonialism on Nigerian lifestyle and culture is the evolvement of Nigerian literature. As a result of colonialism, Nigerian literature moved from orature to written art. Colonialism introduced western education in the country. Consequently, some Nigerians acquired the skill to read and write. They were able to read the literature of other countries and other forms of writing. These, influenced the development of Nigerian literature the way we have it now. The Nigerian artists sought to

be like others, to record their stories for others to read instead of presenting them to a selected audience in their localities, the written stories had a wider audience.

The writers were also able to read what foreign authors wrote about Nigerians or Africans and wrote their own reactions against such pieces of writing. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is said to be a reaction against Joyce's *Mister Johnson*. Achebe was able to react, to present his own view because he could read and write. This means that colonialism had a positive impact on Nigerian literature. Other implication of colonialism on Nigerian literature is that it provided early Nigerian writers with themes for their works especially in prose and poetry. Colonial themes, like the culture clash, tradition/modernity, oppression, subjugation and many others.

Western influences began to affect Nigerian literature as early as the eight century AD when Arabic ideas and culture were introduced to Africa. Later in the fourteenth century, written and spoken Arabic flourished in Northern Nigeria and by the seventeenth century, some Hausa literature had been translated into Arabic. Christian missionaries accelerated the importation of Western education into Nigeria during the nineteenth century. Some native black Moslems reacted to the incursion of colonialists with protests in poetry. Aliyu dan Sidi, for example, utilized the oral literature tradition to write poetic protests against the missionaries. However, other Yoruba authors, such as D.O Fagunwa and Isaac Delano, wrote novels promoting the missionaries and teaching the Christian religion. Although Fagunwa and Delano offered Christian religious instruction and preached acceptance of western ideas, both relied heavily upon their ancestral folktales in creative writing. Fagunwa's pieces in particular "show an extensive use of proverbs, riddles, traditional jokes and other core central to Yoruba belief." (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/d.o.fagunwa>)

In various parts of the country, novels developed around 1930. They were mostly centered upon fantastic, magical characters of humans and fairies. Hausa novels, called "non-realistic novels," were based on folktales. The "mysterious" characters transmuted into other beings such as fairies, animals, and humans. From Muhammadu Bello's fantasy novel *Gandoki*, Ajuwon comments thus, "One is led to say that the book is a

reduction of Hausa oral tradition to written literature (Richardson, 56). “In the 1930’s, Igboland also saw a growth in the number of novelists who expressed the dedication of their people for the Christian missionaries. While poetry of that period emphasized devotion to Allah (shunning the Christian god), Pita Nwana’s 1935 prize-winning book *Omenuko* shows the style of “didactic intention” (Emenyonu, 34). Racism was the common theme in early Nigerian literature.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

It is clear that colonialism affected the Nigerian society culturally, religiously, socially and politically. It has negative effects on the society but it also had positive effects on the society because without colonialism, may be no Nigerian citizen would not have been educated. Consequently, Nigerian literature would have remained an oral art that is transmitted from one generation to the next through the word of mouth. The implication is that it would have been difficult for one tribe to learn about the literature of other tribes in Nigeria. Without colonialism, there would not have been any country like Nigeria with a lingua franca - English

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

You have learnt from this unit that colonialism had both positive and negative effects on the country. One of the outstanding positive effects is the education of Nigerian and the birth of Nigerian written literature.

#### 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List and discuss three effects of colonialism on Nigerian literature.

#### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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**UNIT 2: AFRICA IN THE EYE OF COLONIALIST LITERATURE****CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content Colonialist Literature
  - 3.1 The Writings of Joyce Cary
  - 3.2 The Writings of Sir M. Rider Haggard
  - 3.3 The Writings of Robert Stevenson
  - 3.4 The Writings of Joseph Conrad
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Studies

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, you will be introduced to some of the works of some colonialist writers. The intention is to expose you to the views of the colonialists on Africa as depicted in their literary works. You will see in this unit that Africans are depicted as cannibals, corrupt people and people with low mentality. Chinua Achebe's reaction to this misrepresentation is included in this unit.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Discuss the influence of colonial literature on African Writers
- Discuss the presentation of Africans in such works

**3.0 MAIN CONTENT (COLONIALIST LITERATURE)**

Colonialist literature refers to literary works written by colonial masters in Africa, Nigeria to be precise. As we have seen in unit one, the colonialists came to Nigeria with their "civilization" in form of religion, education, politics and culture. They tried to impose their way of life on Africans who they saw as uncivilized.

This view of Africans as savages, uncivilized, naïve and brutal is portrayed advertently or inadvertently in their novels. Most of the novels were inspired by their experiences in Africa. As a creative output, each writer records his own perspective of the encounter between Africans and the west.

### **The Influence of Colonialist Literature on the Development of Nigerian Literature**

Chinua Achebe admits that he was actually motivated to write novels because he wanted to correct the lopsided portraiture of Africans in colonialist novels especially *Mr. Johnson* which is set in Nigeria. He alluded to these works as part of his motivation for becoming a writer calling them “appealing novels” about Africa. More specifically he has said:

*I know around '51, '52, I was quite certain that I was going to try my hand at writing and one of the things that set me thinking was Joyce Cary's novel, set in Nigeria, Mister Johnson, which was praised so much and it was clear to me that it was a most superficial picture not only of the country but even of the Nigerian character and so I thought if this was famous then perhaps someone ought to look at this from the inside. (Achebe, 89)*

Looking at this from the inside involved drawing on the model of his own Igbo society and its oral traditions. By reconstructing a picture and narrative of Africa and using Cary's fiction as a point of departure, Achebe set out to challenge the colonialist depiction of Africans and their society.

### 3.1 The Writings of Joyce Cary

Arthur Joyce Lunel Cary was born in Derry, Ireland, on December 7, 1888. Throughout his childhood, Joyce Cary spent much time with his grandmother in Ireland and in England. Although he always remembered his Irish childhood with affection and wrote about it with great feeling, Cary lived in England for the rest of his life. The feeling of displacement and the idea that life's tranquility may be disturbed at any moment informed much of his writing.

In 1906, determined to be an artist, Cary studied Art in Edinburgh. He did not fare well as a painter so decided to apply himself to literature. He was an adventurous young man and in 1912, Cary served as a Red Cross orderly during the Balkan Wars. During the First World War, he served with a Nigerian regiment fighting in the German colony of Cameroon. The short story *Umaru* (1921) describes an incident from this period in which a British officer recognizes the common humanity that connects him with his African sergeant.

Cary was wounded at the battle of Mount Mora in 1916. He returned to England on leave and got married to Gertrude Oglivie. Three months later, Cary returned to service as a colonial officer; leaving a pregnant Gertrude in England. Cary held several posts in Nigeria including that of magistrate and executive officer in Borgu. Cary began his African service as a stereotypical colonial officer, determined to bring order to the natives, but by the end of his service, he had come to see the Nigerians as individuals facing difficult problems, including those created by colonial rule.

By 1920, Cary concentrated his energies on providing clean water and roads to connect remote villages with the larger world. His wife wanted him to resign and go back to England but he could not due to financial reasons. However later on he was able to sell some of the stories he wrote in Africa to *The Saturday Post* through a literary agent. His works were then published in this American magazine under the name "Thomas Joyce". This provided Cary with enough incentive to resign from the Nigerian service and settled with his wife in Oxford. They had four sons.

Cary worked hard as a writer but his brief economic success soon ended as the Post stopped publishing his works. Cary worked at various novels and a play, but nothing sold and the family soon had to take in tenants.

However, in 1932, Cary managed to publish *Aissa Saved*, a novel that drew on his Nigerian experience. The book was not particularly successful, but sold more than Cary's next novel, *An American Visitor* (1933). His next novel, *The African Witch* (1936) did a little better and his finances improved.

Although none of Cary's first three novels was particularly successful critically or financially, they are progressively more ambitious and complex. He decided to change the structures and style so he wrote his next novel, *Mister Johnson* (1939), entirely in the present tense, which is now regarded as one of Cary's best novels.

Some of his other works are: *Castle Corner* (1938), *Charley is My Darling* (1940), *A House of Children* (1941), *The First Trilogy* (1941 – 44), and *the Horse's Mouth* (1944) which remains his most popular novel.

Cary's themes include the tension between creativity and colonial administration, which destroys the old as it fashions the new; the conservative desire to preserve things as they are; the difference between liberty which consists of a lack of restraint, and freedom, which lies in the ability to act; and the sense that human life is difficult and happiness elusive; that fleeting joy is life's only reward; and that love is necessary to humanity. We will treat his most popular novel, *Mister Johnson* which has been criticized greatly by African literary scholars Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is said to be a re-action to this novel.

***Mister Johnson (1939)*** is the story of a young Nigerian who had an unsuccessful career in the service of the British colonial regime. Although the novel has a comic tone, the story itself is tragic. Johnson, a young African, is assigned a clerk at an English

district office in Fada, Nigeria. He is from a different district and is regarded as a foreigner by the native. However, he works his way into local society, got married there but never really fitted in. He also has difficulties in adjusting to the regulations and mechanism of the district office and his official duties. Meanwhile, the district officer, Rudbeck, is dissatisfied with his work and life in Africa. Rudbeck decided to build a road linking Fada to the main highway and larger population centers. Johnson, as Rudbeck's clerk is happy about the project.

Johnson is one of Cary's joy-filled characters, possessor of a great energy that infects all around him. People are drawn to Johnson and follow him without realizing that they are being led. Indeed **Johnson has no clear idea of where he is going**. His delight is in seeing those around him happy. His mood infects Rudbeck and, when Johnson suggests how the books may be fiddled to support Rudbeck's road project, the colonial officer agrees. Unfortunately, Rudbeck's swindle is uncovered and he returns to England to be with his wife. Johnson now goes to work for Gollup, a retired British sergeant who has married a native woman and runs a local store.

Unlike Rudbeck, Gollup is an abusive drunk, racist, but he admires Johnson's good humored courage. Johnson, in turn, enjoys the compliment to his courage. On one occasion, Gollup attacked him and he retaliates. Gollup does not take the incident seriously so does not change his attitude towards Johnson, but he cannot have an employee who has struck him in public. Johnson is therefore tired and leaves Fada. Meanwhile, Rudbeck is recalled because of a shortage of political officers. Immediately, he recommences his road-building project, but funds were inadequate so he was forced to manipulate to provide the needed funds. His superior cautions him to be careful because another scandal will destroy his career.

Rudbeck recalls Johnson and Johnson's infectious enthusiasm makes the road-building successful. Johnson's stay is short-lived because Rudbeck discovers that Johnson has been engaged in petty graft and dismisses him. Johnson turns to theft from the store to support his lifestyle and, when Gollup's the storekeeper discovers this, Johnson kills the

store keeper. Johnson is tried for murder. The trial brings Rudbeck to the breaking point. Johnson is found guilty and begs Rudbeck to keep him from the gallows by killing him. Rudbeck follows his heart rather than the rules and does so, though the act is expected to destroy his career and possibly have other ramifications, legal and personal.

Chinua Achebe has said that Mister Johnson struck him as superficial and helped from his determination to write his own novels about Nigeria. Other critics have found Cary's portrayal of his main character patronizing and Johnson himself childish. But these criticisms miss the universal quality of Johnson as one of the world's creators. It is important to see Johnson as an individual character and not as a generalized racial type.

### 3.2 The Writings of Rider Haggard

Henry Rider Haggard was born at Bradenham, Norfolk, the eighth of ten children, to Sir William Meybohm Rider Haggard, a barrister, and Ella Doveton, an author and poet. His father had a low opinion of him so sent him in 1875 to what is now South Africa, in an unpaid position as assistant to the secretary to Sir Henry Bulwer, Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Natal.

He returned later to England in 1882, studies law and was called to the bar in 1884. His practice of law was desultory, and much of his time was taken up by the writing of novels, which he saw as being more profitable. Rider Haggard lived at 69 Gunterstone Road in Hammersmith, London, from mid 1885 to circa April 1888. It was at this Hammersmith address that he completed *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). This was heavily influenced by the larger than life adventures he met in Colonial Africa.

Haggard is most famous as the author of the novels *King Solomon's Mines* and its sequel *Allan Quatermain*, and she and its sequel *Ayesha*, swashbuckling adventure novels set in the context of the Scramble for Africa (the action of *Ayesha* however happens in *Tiber*). He is also remembered for *Nada the Lily* (a tale of adventure among the Zulus) and *Eric Brighteyes*.

While his novels portray many of the stereotypes associated with colonialism, they are usually acclaimed for the degree of sympathy with which the native populations are portrayed. Africans often play heroic roles in the novels, although the protagonists are typically, though not invariably, European. Notable examples are the heroic Zulu warrior Umslopogas and Ignosi, the rightful king of Kukuanaaland, in *King Solomon's Mines*. Having developed an intense mutual friendship with the three Englishmen who help him regain his throne, he accepts their advice and abolishes witch-hunts and arbitrary capital punishment. Three of his novels are written in collaboration with his friend Andrew Lang who shared his interest in the spiritual realm and paranormal phenomena.

Haggard also wrote about agricultural and social reform, in part inspired by his experiences in Africa, but also based on what he saw in Europe. At the end of his life he was a staunch opponent of Bolshevism, a position he shared with his friend Rudyard Kipling. The two had bonded upon Kipling's arrival at London in 1889 largely on the strength of their shared opinions, and the two remained lifelong friends. He was a prolific writer. His other works include: *Cetywayo and His White Neighbours; Remarks on Recent Events in Zululand Natal, and the Transvaal* (1882) *Dawn* (1884) *The Witch's Head* (1884) *Hunter Quatermain's Story* (1885); *Long Odds* (1886) *Jess* (1887), *A Tale of Three Lions* (1887) *Mr. Meeson's Will* (1888) *Maiwa's Revenge* (1888). *Me Fellow Laborer and the Wreck of the Copeland* (1888) *Colonel Quaritch, V. C.* (1888) *Cleopatra* (1889); *Allan's Wife* (1889) *Beatrice* (1890) *The World's Desire* (1890); co-written with Andrew Lang; *Eric Brighteyes* (1891); *Montezuma's Daughter* (1893); *The People of the Mist* (1894); *Joan Haste* (1895); *Heart of the World* (1895) *Church and State* (1895) *The Wizard* (1896) *Doctor Therne* (1898) *Swallow* (1898) *A Farmer's Year* (1899) *The Last Boer War* (1899) *The Spring of Lion* (1899) *Montezuma's Daughter* co-written with Andrew Lang (1899) *Elissa; The Doom of Zimbabwe* (1899); *Black Heart and White Heart; a Zulu idyll* (1900).

<http://en.wikipedia.org/rider-Haggard> # writing career.

### 3.3. The Writings of Robert Stevenson

Stevenson was born Robert Lewis Balfour Stevenson in Edinburgh, Scotland, on 13 November, 1850, to Thomas Stevenson, a leading lighthouse engineer, and his wife Margaret. Lighthouse design was the family profession. Stevenson spent the greater part of his boyhood holidays in his maternal grandfather's house. "Now I often wonder", says Stevenson, "what I inherited from this old minister. I must suppose, indeed, that he was fond of preaching sermons, and so am I, though I never heard it maintained that either of us loved to hear them.

Stevenson's parents were both devout and serious Presbyterians, but the household was not incredibly strict. His nurse, Alison Cunningham (known as Cummy), was more fervently religious. Her Calvinism and folk beliefs were an early source of nightmares for the child; and he showed a precocious concern for religion. But she also cared for him tenderly in illness, reading to him from Bunyan and the Bible as he lay sick in bed. Stevenson recalled this time of sickness in the poem "The Land of Counterpane" in *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885) and dedicated the book to his nurse.

He was an only child, strange-looking and eccentric, who found it hard to fit in when he was sent to a nearby school at six, and at eleven. However, he mixed well in lively games with his cousins in summer holidays. His frequent illnesses often kept him away from his first school, and he was taught for long stretches by private tutors. He was a late reader, first learning at seven or eight; but even before this he dictated stories to his mother and nurse. Throughout his childhood he was compulsively writing stories. His father was proud of this interest: he had himself written stories in his spare time until his own father found them and told him to "give up such nonsense and mind your business". He paid for the printing of Robert's first publication at sixteen, an account of the covenanters' rebellion, published on its two hundredth anniversary, *The Pentland Rising: a Page of History, 1666* (1866).

It was expected that Stevenson's writing would remain a sideline as he entered the University of Edinburgh to study Engineering. From the start, he showed little or no



enthusiasm for his studies and devoted much energy to avoiding lectures. This time was more important for the friendship he made: with other students in the Speculative Society (an exclusive debating club), particularly with Charles Baxter, who would become Stevenson's financial agent; and with one professor, Fleeming Jenkin, whose house staged amateur drama in which Stevenson took part, and whose biography he would later write. Perhaps most important at this point in his life was a cousin, Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson (known as "Bob"), a lively and light hearted young man, who instead of the family profession had chosen to study art. Each year during vacations, Stevenson traveled to inspect the family's engineering works. He enjoyed the travels, but more for the material they gave for his writing than for any engineering interest: the voyage with his father pleased him because a similar journey of Walter Scott with Robert Stevenson had provided the inspiration for *The Pirate*. In April 1871, he announced to his father his decision to pursue a life of letters. Though the elder Stevenson was naturally disappointed, the surprise cannot have been great, and Stevenson's mother reported that he was "wonderfully resigned" to his son's choice. To provide some security, it was agreed that Stevenson should read Law (again at Edinburgh University) and be called to the Scottish bar. Years later, in his poetry collection *Underwoods* (1887), he looked back on how he turned away from the family profession:

In other respects too, Stevenson deviated from his upbringing. His dress became more Bohemian: he already wore his hair long, but he now took to wearing a velveteen jacket and rarely attended parties in conventional evening dress. Within the limits of a strict allowance, he visited cheap pubs and brothels. More importantly, he had come to reject Christianity. In January 1873, his father came across the constitution of the LJR (Liberty, Justice, Reverence) club of which Stevenson with his cousin Bob was a member, which began "Disregard everything our parents have taught us". Questioning his son about his beliefs, he discovered the truth, leading to a long period of dissension with both parents:

*What a damned curse I am to my parents! As my father said, "You have rendered my whole life a failure". As my mother said, "This is the heaviest affliction that has ever befallen me". O Lord, what a pleasant thing it is to*

*have damned the happiness of (probably) the only two people who care a damn about you in the world.*

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/writing> career.)

He settled in Upolu, Samoan Islands and adopted the native name Tusitala (Samoan for “Teller of Tales”, i.e. a storyteller). His influence spread to the natives, who consulted him for advice, and he soon became involved in local politics. He was convinced the European officials appointed to rule the natives were incompetent, and after many futile attempts to resolve the matter, he published *A Footnote to History*. This was such a stinging protest against existing conditions that it resulted in the recall of two officials, and Stevenson feared for a time it would result in his own deportation. Fortunately, he was spared.

In 1894, Stevenson was depressed; feeling that he had exhausted his creative talent. He insisted that he had “overworked bitterly”. He even feared that he might again become a helpless invalid. He rebelled against this idea: “I wish to die in my boots; no more Land of Counterpane for me. To be drowned, to be shot, to be thrown from a horse – ay, to be hanged, rather than pass again through that slow dissolution”. He then suddenly had a return of his old energy and he began work on *Weir of Hermiston*. “It’s so good that it frightens me,” he is reported to have exclaimed. He felt that this was the best work he had done. He was convinced, “sick and well, I have had splendid life to it, grudge nothing, regret very little...take it all over, damnation and all, would hardly change with any man of my time” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/writing> career).

Without knowing it, he was to have his wish fulfilled. During the morning of 3 December 1894, he had worked hard as usual on *Weir of Hermiston*. During the evening, while conversing with his wife and straining to open a bottle of wine, he suddenly exclaimed. “What’s that!” he then asked his wife, “Does my face look strange?” and collapsed beside her. He died within a few hours, probably of a cerebral haemorrhage, at the age of 44. The natives insisted on surrounding his body with a watch-guard during the night and

on bearing their Tusitala upon their shoulders to nearby Mount Vaea, where they buried him on a spot overlooking the sea. Stevenson had always wanted his 'Requiem' inscribed. His novel *Treasure Island* is very popular among Nigerian students.

His novels include:

*Treasure Island* (1883); *The Black Arrow: A Tale of the Two Roses* (1883); *Prince Otto* (1885); *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886); *Kidnapped* (1886); *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889); *The Wrong Box* (1889); *The Wrecker* (1892); *Lloyd Osbourne Catriona* (1893); also known as David Balfour, is a sequel to *Kidnapped*.

*The Ebb-Tide* (1894); co-written with Lloyd Osbourne.

*Weir of Hermiston* (1896). Unfinished at the time of Stevenson's death, considered to have promised great artistic growth.

*St. Ives: being the Adventures of a French Prisoner in England* (1897)

Unfinished at the time of Stevenson's death, the novel was completed by *Arthur Quiller-Couch*.

### 3.4 The Writings of Joseph Conrad

Joseph Conrad whose name at birth was Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski was born in December 3, 1857 and died in 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 1924. He was a Polish but became a British subject in 1886. He is regarded as one of the greatest novelists in English though he did not speak the language fluently until he was in his twenties (and hence always with a marked Polish accent). He wrote stories and novels, predominantly with a nautical setting, that depict trials of the human spirit by the demands of duty and honour.

Conrad lived an adventurous life, dabbling in gunrunning (smuggling of arms and ammunition) and political conspiracy, which he later fictionalized in his novel *The Arrow of Gold*. Apparently, he experienced a disastrous love affair that plunged him into despair. In 1878, after a failed suicide attempt in Marseille by shooting himself in the chest, he as a childhood ambition to visit central Africa was realized in 1889, when Conrad contrived to reach the Congo Free State. He became captain of a Congo steamboat, and the atrocities he witnessed and his experiences there not only informed his most acclaimed and ambiguous work, *Heart of Darkness*, but served to crystallize his

vision of human nature – and his beliefs about himself. These were in some measure affected by the emotional trauma and lifelong illness he contracted there. During his stay, he became acquainted with Roger Casement, whose 1904 Congo Report detailed the abuses suffered by the indigenous population.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1924, Conrad died of a heart attack. He was interred at Canterbury Cemetery, Canterbury, England, under his original Polish surname *Korzeniowski*.

The singularity of the universe depicted in Conrad's novels is such as to open him to criticism. Conrad is at pains to create a sense of place, be it aboard ship or in a remote village. Often he chose to have his characters play out their destinies in isolated or confined circumstances. Arguably, Conrad's most influential work remains *Heart of Darkness*, to which many have been introduced by Francis Ford Coppola's film, *Apocalypse Now*, inspired by Conrad's novella and set during the Vietnam War. The novella's depiction of a journey into the darkness of the human psyche, still resonates with modern readers. In Conrad's time, literary critics, while usually commenting favourably on his works, often remarked that his exotic style, complex narration, profound themes and pessimistic ideas put many readers off. Yet, as Conrad's ideas were borne out by 20th century events, in due course he came to be admired for beliefs that seemed to be in accord with subsequent times more closely than with his own.

### 3.4.1. *Heart of Darkness*

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad refers sarcastically to the supposedly noble aims of European colonists, thereby demonstrating his skepticism about the moral superiority of white men. This, indeed, is a central theme of the novel; Charles Marlowe's experiences in Africa expose the brutality of colonialism and the false rationalization given for it. Ending a passage that describes the condition of chained, emaciated slave workers, the novelist remarks: "After all, I also was a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings". Conrad, whose own native country had been colonized by European powers, empathized by default with other colonized peoples.

Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* is a dark, disturbing and haunting tale about colonial powers and trading companies, exploiting the riches and people of Dark Continent to fill their hungry belly. In this narrative, Captain Marlowe is hired by the Belgium trading company to search for a mysterious, most successful employee (of the same trading company) and powerful man named Mr. Kurtz.

Inside the Dark Continent on river Congo, Captain Marlowe finds out that the boat he is to be captain of has sunk, before he can begin his job he must salvage and repair the vessel. When he finally meets Kurtz, he realizes the terrible deeds the man has committed with the threat of violence and abuse of power. He recognizes Mr. Kurtz as pure evil and a man without any morality at all. There is a saying "Power corrupts, but absolute power corrupts absolutely" Mr. Kurtz has enthroned himself as God and King of the poor and illiterate native people. Outside the house of Mr. Kurtz, Captain Marlowe saw several stakes displaying human skulls. A horrific sight, he later finds out that Mr. Kurtz has become cannibal, and the skull belongs to the poor victims. Mr. Kurtz used brutal and inhuman violence to not only subdue and enslave the natives and force them to work for him, but to turn over their ivory and their very lives to him. He becomes the great white conqueror and god and despite his violence and brutality, his native subjects and victims respect and revere him. Instead of bringing light of civilization to the Dark Continent, the thirst for power, riches and omnipotence has turned Mr. Kurtz into an evil monster with diseased and dark heart and amoral personality. It's the journey not into the Dark Continent, but into an exposition of how deadly and devilish a civilized man can sink for mere game of power and riches.

His works include:

*Almayer's Folly* (1895); *Heart of Darkness* (1899); *Lord Jim* (1900); *The Inheritors* (with Ford Madox Ford) (1901); *Typhoon* (1902, begun 1899); *Romance* (with Ford Madox Ford, 1903); *Nostramo* (1904); *The Secret Agent* (1907); *Under Western Eyes* (1911); *Chance* (1913), *Victory* (1915); *The Shadow Line* (1917); *The Arrow of Gold* (1919); *The Rescue* (1920); *The Nature of a Crime* (1923, with Ford Madox Ford); *The Rover* (1923).

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

The colonialists presented here are mainly novelists. In these novels the colonialists present Africans and black people as people with little or no intelligence. Some of them are not as biased as some critics claim. Mister Johnson, for instance could be seen as any other character in any race that is not too vicious or too virtuous. But most African critics see him as a racial representative of Africans which may not be the intention of the writer. The portrayal of the African society is that of a place where crime and moral decadence abound.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

You have learnt more about the perceived biased and lopsided portraiture of the African society in colonialist literature. Some of the novels are still available in the market. Try to get copies read them and form your own opinion.

#### 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List the three colonial novelists discussed in this unit and four novels written by each of them.

#### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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Online wikipedia dictionary

<http://en.wikipedia.org//writing> career.

**UNIT 3: THE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN LITERATURE****CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Early Missionaries
    - 3.1.1 The Islamic Missionaries
    - 3.1.2 The Christian Missionaries
  - 3.2 Colonial Education
  - 3.3 The Publishing Houses
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Studies

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, you learnt how the colonialists depicted Africans in the literary works they wrote which were set in different countries in Africa. In this unit, you will learn how Nigerian literature the way we know it today developed. We will trace the rise of Nigerian Literature by introducing you to the establishments and issues that influenced the development of Nigerian Literature. Some of those influences are the early Christian and Islamic missionaries, colonial education and the efforts of publishing houses, which made the publication of the literary works possible.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the role of missionaries in the development of Nigerian Literature;
- discuss the impact of colonial education on Nigerian literature; and
- identify the contribution of the publishing houses to the growth of Nigerian literature.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 The Early Missionaries**

Early Christian and Islamic scholars contributed immensely to the development of Nigerian Literature.

##### **3.1.1 The Islamic Missionaries**

The religion of Islam was introduced in Nigerian Hausa states through the Wangera traders from Mali in the 13th century. However, the religion became widespread in the 14th century with the arrival of Maghili from Kanem. He was followed by some other missionaries who were either merchants, pilgrims or Mallama. Islam is a form of religion and also a form of education.

Consequently, the spread of Islam was accompanied by the spread of Islamic education. The implication of this is that Islamic scholars and clerics were produced simultaneously, the people were converted to a religion, and at the same time were given Arabic education.

The Jihads, of the 19th century accelerated the spread of Islam. Apart from education and religion, Islam is not only a religion but also a way of life, so it brought other benefits in its trail. The leaders of the Jihad were learned in every conceivable standard. Consequently education received adequate attention after the Jihads. Koranic schools were opened and there was a great stimulus to learning. Islamic civilization was introduced and “other oriental cultural achievement such as the art of reading and writing as the media of disseminating the religion” (Yahaya 10) was also introduced. Arabic was the medium of instruction so the early literary output in Hausaland was written in Arabic. Scholars wrote books and poems. These were read and translated to Hausa but later, the Arabic letters were converted to produce the Ajami. Similarly, Roman letters were converted to produce the Boko. This means that the bulk of early Hausa literature were written in Ajami and Boko. The old and the young embraced the new re-awakening of



knowledge. Muslim scholars led by Uthman Dan Fodio and others contributed to literary attainments of the era.

Shehu Usman Dan Fodio was said to have composed 480 poems. His daughter, Nana Asama'u wrote 17 poems; his brother, Shehu Abdullahi Fodio wrote 8 poems and his son, Isan Kwere, 7 poems. Many of his disciples and other scholars also composed poems.

These poems, like other poetic works in other literary traditions vary in length ranging from 11 to 450 stanzas (Yahaya 12). At that time, there were no printing press or publishing houses so these scholars wrote with ink on plain sheets of paper and their disciples and pupils copied them out. These poems were had religious undertones or backgrounds as preachers "recited some relevant sections of relevant poems to illustrate or emphasize a point in sermons". Apart from poetry which appeared to be the popular genre of literature at this stage of the development of Nigerian literature, other Islamic scholars wrote other imaginative works too.

Arabic became the literary and sophisticated language of the society. The learning and enlightenment stimulated by the Islamic religion produced many intellectuals, and among them were literary artists. Consequently, the Islamic way of life "affected the style, content and purpose of literature". Islamic literature flourished throughout the Northern region. Some radical movements emerged and used the literary medium to propagate their ideologies or criticize the power elite. The literature of this period in the Islamic states were written mainly in verse.

Gradually, there was an attempt to transcribe the Arabic literature into Hausa. The result of this effort was the emergence of a language known as "Ajami", a fusion of Arabic and Hausa. "This was widely used for literary purposes. But the literary tradition that resulted remained essentially Islamic, with models drawn from classical Arabic prototypes" (Darah 2).

**3.1.2 The Christian Missionaries**

The Christian religion was another powerful catalyst of change that greatly influenced the development of Nigerian Literature.

Just like Islam, Christianity contributed a good deal to the development of Nigerian literature. Unlike the Moslems, the Christians came first and foremost with the conversion of the Nigerians they encountered. The early Christian missionaries seemed to have had an ultimate goal of winning more souls for Christ. They viewed the traditional Nigerian religion as barbaric, fetish and idolatrous. The adherents of the traditional religion were regarded as pagans who were doomed and if not converted would end up in hell fire, a place of intense suffering and ‘gnashing’ of teeth forever. However, they also brought along Western education which enabled some of their converts to learn to read and write.

The Portuguese missionaries worked in Benin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But their new faith had a meteoric existence due to the resistance of Edo to the anticipated cultural disintegration which a total acceptance of Christianity might engender within the Edo society. Apart from Benin, the missionaries made an early incursion in Calabar and Warri but were not quite successful. This means that the Roman Catholic Church made a feeble attempt to Christianise Nigeria before the high blown missionary enterprise in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Nigeria.

Another missionary attempt to evangelise Nigeria came with the expedition of the Niger of 1841. The aims of the expedition included the promotion of trade in the metropolis, signing of treaties with local chiefs, and the building of school and churches. The British also wanted to establish an equivalent of Freetown in the heart of Nigeria, Lokoja was their choice. Unfortunately, fever broke out on board the ship and fifty (50) out of the one hundred and fifty (150) Whiteman died of an ailment that was suspected to be malaria. This expedition failed. That notwithstanding, it succeeded in setting up some establishments in Lokoja which became a springboard for the missionaries in later years.

The missionaries realized the necessity of writing in Nigerian Languages to facilitate their works evangelisation so initiated moves towards the development of the indigenous language. First of all, they decided to encourage indigenes to undertake the preaching of the gospel. One of such preacher was Ajayi Crowder who later became the first African Bishop who joined the 1841 mission in Nigeria. They were joined later by Rev. J.C. Taylor; both Ajayi and Taylor were Yoruba and Igbo ex-slaves respectively. They were given the task of founding the Niger Mission. Crowther sailed up the River and founded another station at Lokoja while Taylor was left in charge of Onitsha. The returning slaves were returning then helped to establish missions in Egba, Abeokuta, Badagry and other places. As they raised preachers, they educated them and some of them engaged in imaginative writings those in the influence of the missionaries on the Nigerian literature is mainly through colonial education which will be treated in the next segment (3.2).

### **3.2 Colonial Education**

The Christian missionaries like their Moslem counterparts did not concentrate only on religion and evangelization as discussed. They consciously contributed to the socially and economically uplift of Nigerians. One of the remarkable contributions of the missionaries is the reduction of Nigerian languages to writing. Some of the results of their labours in this direction is the production of the Igbo vocabulary, and the translation of the Bible and Anglican Prayer Book into Yoruba by Ajayi Crowder. In 1884, he published *A Vocabulary of the Youruba Language* (Falola 24). Consequently, literate and semi literate Nigerians started writing, first in their indigenous languages. They started with textbooks and later literary works.

This linguistic achievement is very important in the development of Nigerian Literature because language is an integral part of a people's culture and the medium of expression in literature. This development of the vernacular made it possible for early Nigerian literary writers like Peter Nwana, Daniel Fagunwa and Mallam Tafida, to have produced their masterpieces in their indigenous Nigerian languages. The missionaries established primary schools at first for the children of the converts and later admitted other children whose parents, though not Christians, allowed to go to

schools. These children were exposed to literary words mainly poetry and prose from the Western World. As these children grew, they were influenced by the literature of other people and sought to write their own. Nigerian writers were all products of western or Arabic education acquired in Christian and Koranic schools. Thus, colonial education contributed immensely to the development of Nigerian literature in the secondary schools which were established in the country mainly in the Western and Eastern parts of the country. The products of these schools became teachers, catechists and priests.

Classical literature was introduced in the schools. This ignited the interest of Nigerians in literature. But most importantly, colonial education made it possible for Nigerians to be able to express themselves in both the indigenous and English language both in speech and written forms. This led to the establishment of indigenous newspapers which encouraged literature. The products of these schools were among those who championed the Onitsha market literature, a prominent landmark in the development of Nigerian literature.

### **3.3 The Publishing Houses**

We have decided to mention the publishing houses here because without them, the literary works would have remained in the manuscript form. The implication is that it would have had limited audience like the early Hausa poems which were copied by pupils and disciples. But with the publishing houses, the tedious and arduous task of copying which in some cases, may not be copied accurately, is removed the copied materials have shorter life spans as they could easily be destroyed or lost.

#### **Publishing helps writers in three major ways:**

- First, quality, economy and posterity. Good publishing was encouraged; usually companies ensure that before they publish a particular work, that it has met a certain acceptable standard. They sent the manuscripts for evaluation, the evaluator assessed the work and made a recommendation if he/she recommends that the work be published, the publishers also have in-house editors who would help to ensure that the work, to a large extent is error-proof. This is why students

are encouraged to read good literary works especially novels and plays to increase their proficiency of the language. After the evaluation of a particular manuscript, the recommendations of the evaluator are incorporated by the writer before the final publication.

- Secondly, publishers help to widen the scope of the market for the author. Publishers invest in the publication of a book with profit-making intent. They therefore devise strategies for marketing as many copies of the book as possible to ensure high profit margin. In doing this they are circulating the work to a wider audience and popularizing the work and the author. For instance, Chinua Achebe is known all over the world because his early novels were published by Heinemann, a publishing company that was able to market the novels all over the world. If *Things Fall Apart* remained as a manuscript, like some poems of the early Islamic scholars, may be some of us will not know anything about the novel today. In fact, without the publishers, we would not have been discussing the Nigerian written literature.
- Finally, publishers help to elongate or even perpetuate the life span of a book. Publishers print a certain number of a particular work and depending on the sale, the work is reprinted as many times as possible depending on the demand. Other publishers could obtain the copyright from the original publisher and continue the publication of the works even long after the demise of the writers. In Nigeria, writers like Fagunwa, Cyprian Ekwensi, Flora Nwapa, Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola and Ezenwa-Ohaeto are dead but we are still reading their works. Publishers ensure that literary works outlive their writers and the works are preserved for posterity. We still read Shakespeare's plays that were written in the renaissance England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Early publishing companies in the country include Faber and Faber, Heinemann, Longman and many others.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

The development of Nigerian literature was influenced by external forces, mainly colonial education and religion. These missionaries established Quranic and Christian schools. Such influences from the Christian and Muslim missionaries helped Nigerians to read and write. Thus they were able to read the works of classical literary writers. This education aided the reading of foreign literatures and the writing of indigenous ones. The publishing houses also had a tremendous positive impact on the development of Nigerian literature.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit which is a bit historical, one has taken you through the coming of early missionaries Moslem and Christian to Nigeria and how they contributed to the development of Nigerian literature. Their major contribution as you have seen is the establishment of schools and the education of Nigerians among whom were literary artists.

#### 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List and discuss the contribution of the publishing houses in the development of Nigerian literature.

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**UNIT 4 THE RISE OF NIGERIAN LITERATURE****CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
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    - 3.1.3 Yoruba Literature
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  - 3.3 The Writings of Amos Tutuola
  - 3.4 The writings of Cyprian Ekwensi
  - 3.5 The writings of Chinua Achebe
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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

We have seen from Module One that Nigerian literature began with the oral tradition because oral literature is the root of African literature. The oral literature as the name implies was rendered orally by the unsung heroes of our literary past like the bards, story tellers, griots, priests and many others.

In this unit, you will be introduced to the works of early Nigerian writers in both indigenous and English languages. These writers are all novelists. You will see that their works were derived from the basic element of oral literature. Although one could claim that the dramatic genre was popular in the Onitsha Market Literature as you will see in the next unit, the novel as a full-fledged literature developed before drama. These novels depicted the preoccupation of these early writers.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the early Nigerian novelists;
- Identify the thematic preoccupations of these writers;
- Trace the gradual evolution of the novel in Nigeria; and
- Identify the influences and aims of these writers.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

The early Nigerian writer wrote mainly in the prose form. Their works range from personal accounts which they started with could be classified as fantasy and developed to the realistic mode of the novel.

### 3.1 Writings in Vernacular

Whenever we discuss the Nigerian novel, the focus is usually on the novels written in the English language. Little or no attention is paid to the novels or other forms of literature written in the Nigerian indigenous languages. Sometimes, we learn of such works in the secondary schools when we offer subjects like Igbo, Hausa or Yoruba. These are the officially recognized languages in Nigeria consequently, they are the ones taught in the secondary schools and in some department in the tertiary institutions.

However, literature also abounds in other major Nigerian languages. For instance there are many literary artists who wrote in the Efik language but E.N. Amaku towers above the rest. The Efik fiction evolved from the oral literature of storytelling. In *Edikot Mbuke* which is regarded as his “greatest prose work” (*Babalola, 50*) he uses animal characters like Ekpe (Leopard) who is famous for his agility and the Ikut (Tortoise) who is notorious for his craftiness to tell interesting stories that intermingle fantasy with reality. These novels in the indigenous languages help to improve the vocabularies of, popularize and perpetuate such languages. They also contribute to the linguistic development of the languages.



Literature in local languages occupies a very important position in the development of Nigerian literature but Nigerian literature in any foreign language had its roots in the oral heritage of the writers' traditional background. In the words of Ernest Emenyonu, "every Nigerian who tells or writes a story today in whatever language, is reflecting consciously or unconsciously something of his past, something of his people's or community's heritage. An authentic study of Nigerian literature must, therefore, begin by examining and appreciating the origins and development of literature in Nigerian indigenous languages", (34).

### 3.1.1 Hausa Literature

The development of the novel in Hausa is influenced by the Hausa folklore and Arabian tales. The written tradition was introduced to northern Nigeria in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Arab scholars and traders. The Hausa folklore is unique in the sense that it is prominently, though not exclusively, peopled with animals who have human characteristics and tendencies. "These tales are in fact a significant reflection of human society in which seniority is determined not by age (as in real Hausa society) but in most cases by sheer physical size" (*Babalola: 57*) and strength. In such stories, the tiny animals survive through their wit and greater intelligence. In most cases, they outwit the more powerful animals. In the human tales, the weaker people use certain qualities like "keen and upright moral conscience to overcome their adversaries". Another prominent stereotyped figure in Hausa literature is the Ogre which is usually an incredible gigantic man-eating monster who hoards wealth and keeps a young beautiful woman hostage as a maid or wife in his solitary abode. Usually a human hero fights him and eventually overpowers him and sets the hostage free. This hero is usually endowed with courage, strength, fatal sword or arrow and other charms that aid his victory. Another human stereo-type from the political point of view is the figure of Waziri who is usually very wicked, cunning, disloyal and power-hungry. These are reflected in many Hausa fictions from the earliest period. As discussed in unit, the rise of Hausa fiction was facilitated by the establishment of elementary and provincial schools in the northern parts of Nigeria between 1909 and 1928, as well as the interest of the government in the development of books (especially in literature).

The first set of literature were translations from Arabic to Hausa by the translation Bureau set up by the government. The bureau was later renamed Literature Bureau to accommodate works by indigenous authors. This bureau organized fiction-writing competitions in Hausa encouraged indigenous author to write literary works. Many writers entered for the competition but only five outstanding entries were selected and published. They were *Ruwan Bagoja* by M. Abubaka Iman, *Shehu Umar* by M. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, *Gandoki* by Bello Kagara, *Idon Matambayi* by M. Mohammadu Gwarza, and *Jiki Magayi* by M. Tafida. These were the first Hausa novels which are still published as classical Hausa literature” (Yahaya 15).

These authors made use of the oral traditions in the form of story-telling especially in their use of the narrator. However, some of these novelists made use of historical facts, while some of them historical facts with fantasy. A good example is Shehu Umar who starts his novels with a story-telling session in which the narrator recalls past historical events, based on reality of life of the people to his audience. According to Yaro Yahaya, *Gandoki* also starts with the narration of past events concerning the wars of British occupation of Hausa land. From real life situations, he plunges into the world of fantasy as *Gandoki*, the hero engages in “skirmishes with djinns and other supernatural beings.” *Ruwan Bagaja* is pure fiction that depicts a hero, Iman who sets out in search of healing water. He succeeds in getting the healing after overcoming all the obstacles, and forces in the wonderland of djinns in the East. In appreciation of the literary quality of Abubakar Imam’s work, the government employed him to work with the literature Bureau where he produced his *Magana Jarice* in three volumes. In this work, he adopted the style of the Arabian Nights but the sources remained the Hausa folktales. He also fused the tales with the English Grimm’s *Household Tales* and the Arabic *Khalila wa Dimna*. He fused them with “drastic touches of originality, by giving the narration of the stories a unifying theme through key recurring figures (Yahaya 16). Thus Abubakar Iman became the first prolific Hausa novelist.

In 1953, the North Regional Literature Agency (NORLA) was set up to augment the activities of the literature Bureau. Through these agencies, the Government helped to accelerate the growth of Hausa literature.

### 3.1.2 Igbo Literature

We saw in the last unit that the missionaries encouraged the development of indigenous languages. These missionaries needed to study these languages to aid their evangelization mission in Nigeria. The origin of Igbo literature could be linked with the beginnings of formal studies of the Igbo language in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the efforts of the missionaries to develop the indigenous language. The development of Igbo orthography propelled some Igbo men to write in their own language. According to Ernest Emenyonu, The Rev. J. F. Schon's publication of *A Grammar of the Ibo Language* in 1840 aided the development of Igbo literature. Rev. Ajayi Crowther and other missionaries also helped to collate the unwritten Igbo materials and to put them in the written form.

Other publications followed but the *Isoama-Ibo Primer* published by William Baikie was a turning point for literature in Igbo. This work contains a translation of the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, Igbo alphabets, words, phrases, sentence patterns, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. It also contains some extracts, which according to Emenyonu, "became the first literary creative in Igbo written literature". The book was revised and enlarged in 1927 to include more essays on religious and secular topics and a long narrative riddle about the sun and a folktale. After the revision, the title was changed to *Azundu* and it remained the major work in literature in the Igbo language for nearly a century. This and other such publications eventually served not only the primary religious purpose of evangelization but also as a sound foundation for the written indigenous literature in which folktales and other genres of oral tradition were recorded and woven into poetry, short stories and novels in Igbo language. In addition to textbooks in Igbo, literary texts were also written. The development of this literature like the development of the Nigerian literature, is based on oral narratives and the portrayal of life, traditional values, proverbs and other aspects the Igbo culture.

Pita Nwana's *Omenuko* was the first full-length literary work in Igbo. *Omenuko* contained a lot of "wit, volatile humour and insistent moral overtones" (Emenyonu). The sayings of *Omenuko* the major character is likened to John Ploughman's talks as *Omenuko* remained the dominant literary piece in Igbo language for about three decades.

F. C. Ogbalu contributed immensely to the development of Igbo literature. Apart from his own writings and efforts to promote the language, his Varsity Press, Onitsha helped in the publication of Igbo literature and other literary works. This publishing house helped to encourage and revitalize the Igbo literature. Subsequently, Leopold Bell-Gram's *Ijeodumodu Jere* and D. N. Achara's *Ala Bingo* were published in 1963. D. N. Achara also published *Elelia Na ihe Omere* in 1964. These novelists made significant use of the repertoire of Igbo oral heritage in the form of proverbs, riddles, and other unique nuances of the language.

### 3.1.3 Yoruba Literature

It is said that Yoruba Literature may have pre-dated the 19th Century because of Northern Yoruba's contact with the Islamic religion. This presumption is based on the fact that Islam is associated with learning. However, after the fall of Oyo empire in early nineteenth century, Ilorin became a centre of learning because of its close contact with Islam. Yoruba Imams and teachers then must have written literary works but there is little or no evidence to authenticate this fact. Again, if such works existed, they may have been written in Arabic.

Later in the 19th century, with the return of liberated slaves and the establishment of Christian mission schools in Yoruba land, efforts were made by scholars to write both in English and Yoruba languages. However, Samuel Ajayi Crowther's *A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (1843) laid a solid foundation for the written literature in the Yoruba language. Another major influence on the development of Yoruba literature was the cultural nationalism in Yoruba land that started at about 1880s. The Yoruba elite tried to rekindle their customs and institutions and this gave rise to an agitation for the teaching of Yoruba history, in schools. Consequently, some of the educated ones with creative

abilities started writing Yoruba literature which they hoped would help to document their cultural and social norms so that their traditional forms of folklore, legends, histories, and parables will not get into oblivion or extinction. Moreover, the schools needed these texts in their curricula.

The pioneer Yoruba literary scholar is E. M. Lijadu. He was a school master and catechist for the Anglican mission in Ondo. His works were mainly in oral literature and religion. They include *Ifa: Imole Re Ti Ise Ipile Isin Ni Ile Yoruba* (1887); *Orunmila* (1908) and a book on poetry *Kekere Iwe Orin Aribiloso* (1886). A romantic fiction in pamphlet form *Dolapo Asewo Omo Asewo* was written by an anonymous writer in 1890. The work presented a story in a plot that followed a logical sequence though it contained some obscenities. *Alo Meje*, a pamphlet, a collection of short stories was published in 1893. Many imaginary stories were also published in Newspapers.

What could be regarded as the first novel in Yoruba is *Itan Emi Segilola* by I. B. Thomas which was published in 1930. It was serialized earlier in 1929 in a newspaper, *Akede Eko*. This was followed seven years later by Daniel Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*. Fagunwa has remained an outstanding Yoruba novelist. He uses allegory that is based on Yoruba folktale tradition in which "every event can be used to teach a moral" (Isola, 79). His novel is presented in an episodic plot that usually revolves around the adventures of a brave hunter on a dangerous journey. It contains some popular Yoruba tales that are loosely strung together. However, he invents some of the stories and borrows some from Christian religious literature and other literary sources. The hero encounters some difficulties but in the end, he surmounts the obstacles and accomplishes his task triumphantly. His successful attempt inspired other writers like Ogundele who published *Ejigbede Lona Isalu Orun and Ibu Olokun* (1956); Omoyajowo who wrote *Itan Odeniya – Omo Odeleru* (1957); Fatanmi's *Korimale Ninu Igbo Adimula* and others wrote like what could be regarded as fantasy like Fagunwa though they were not as successful as him.

One of the first attempts at the writing of a realistic novel in Yoruba was made by Delano who wrote *Aiye D'aiye Oyinbo* (1955). It is based on the story of Babalola, an Oba who resists the incursion of the colonialists in his territory. Like many other traditional leaders, he fails because he could not match the superior arms of his adversaries.

### 3.2 The Writings of Olaudah Equiano

Before the written tradition developed in Nigeria, a Nigerian, an ex-slave, Olaudah Equiano had published a book in Europe. He became the first African to write a literary work in the English language. The novel entitled *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Vassa Gustava, The African: Written by Himself* was published in it in 1789 marked a significant point in the development of Nigerian literature.

The novel contains an account of how he was kidnapped as a boy of 12 from his village of Essaka, near Benin and sold to a white slave trader. He recounts how he eventually got his freedom. The novel is presented in the first person point of view. He states clearly in the novel that he is an African and that the story was written by himself.

He describes with nostalgia his African home. The novel is divided into three sections. In the first section, he gives an account of his country and the way he was sold into slavery. The second section is an account of his various adventures and his personal achievements. Finally, the last section presents his involvement in the anti-slave movement and his attempt to get the British government to develop other forms of trade in Africa.

In this brief description above, one would be inclined to think that this is an autobiography but it is not. He may have presented a personal account but this is imaginatively presented and it cleared the path and led the way for not just Nigerian literature but laid the foundation for the contemporary protest literature in Africa.

### 3.3 The Writings of Amos Tutuola

The real indigenous Nigerian literature in English was pioneered by Amos Tutuola. His work, *The Palmwine Drinkard* is famed to be the first Nigerian novel, having been published in 1952. This novel is seen as a link in the transition of Nigerian literature from vernacular to the English language and to the western literary tradition. It preceded Cypria Ekwensi's *People of the City* which is regarded as his first novel though he started earlier. The original title of Tutuola's novel was the *Palm-wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm wine Tapster in the Dead's Town*.

The novel is presented in an episodic plot technique but the loose episodes are bound together by the quest motif which is central to the novel. In it, the palm wine Drinkard loses his tapster and because he could not live without drinking palm wine, he goes to the land of the dead in search of the tapster and to bring him back to earth to continue tapping wine for him. On reaching the land of the dead, he is told that once some one has been certified dead in the land of the living, the person cannot be resurrected. However, he is compensated. His tapster gives him a magical present that would help him cope without him when he gets back. This novel like Fagunwa's, is a fantasy.

The novelist draws extensively from the story telling, myth, legend and other forms of Yoruba and Oral traditions. The major critique of the novel is on the language. The story is presented in a language that could be called a transliteration of the story-teller presentation in Yoruba. Perhaps, like Coleridge in "Kubla Khan", Tutuola recorded his story as the inspiration came to him. His proficiency in English language is very low and this could be attributed to the death of his father that made him drop out of school in primary five. However, this shortcoming could be over-looked given the manner in which he captures the English language spoken by the ordinary people in his community. In spite of this apparent flaw, the novel was a huge success. It brought him to the limelight and instantly an international fame. He followed it with the publication of other novels like *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1952), *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955) *Ajaiye and His Inherited Poverty* (1968). *The Brave African Huntress* (1958) *The Witch Herbalist of the Remote Town* (1981). He died in 1997.

### 3.4 The Writings of Cyprain Ekwensi

Cyprain Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954) is regarded as the first West African novel in modern English. His first creative work was a collection of short stories *Ikolo the Wrestler and other Igbo Tales* published in 1947 and *The Leopard Claw* also in 1947. In 1948, he published his first pamphlet in the Onitsha Market Literature tradition. His other works include *The Passport of Mallam Illa* (1960), *Jagua Nana* (1961), *Burning Grass* (1962) and many others. He has about twenty six novels and novella and could be said to be the most prolific novelist in Nigeria.

Interestingly, Cyprian Ekwensi studied forestry and pharmacy. He later studied broadcasting. He worked and retired with the media where he rose to the rank of the Federal Director of Information in 1961. This does not mean that he did not practice his original profession but he seemed to have been involved in a lot of professions and excelled in all. He was a teacher, a journalist, a pharmacist, a diplomat, a businessman, a company director, a public relations consultant and a writer. A writer summarized his personality thus:

*There are two Cyprian Ekwensis. Cyprian Ekwensi, the Nigerian novelist, broadcaster, short story writer, the man who lives in the world of ink and Literature – and Cyprian Ekwensi, the pharmacist, the man of the white coat, dispensing medicine, sterilizing injections and controlling drugs (quoted in Emenyonu 22).*

His most controversial novel was *Jagua Nana* which has been the only novel that was debated upon by Nigerians in the house of parliament. This was when a foreign company's proposal to adapt the novel for the celluloid was stopped. The novel uses the heroine, Jagua Nana, a prostitute to satirize the Nigerian Society especially politics. Jagua was an Igbo lady who abandoned her husband in Enugu, went to Lagos and became a superlative prostitute. Through her profession, she got involved with all sorts of men from the top civil servants/politicians to rogues and armed robbers. In her encounter with



these men, Ekwensi explores the theme of corruption in the Nigerian Economic and Socio-political system. The political story in the novel is that of “exploitation of the people, fraudulent abuse of power, reckless embezzlement of public money and ultimate forfeiture of public trust” (Emenyonu 24).

The issues raised in the novel though published more than four decades ago, are still relevant to our contemporary experiences --- rigging of election, assassination of political opponents, misuse of public funds, the existence of the suffering people who are in the majority and many other social vices are still burning issues in contemporary Nigeria. Jagua Nana’s only regret is that she could not bear a child of her own. However, she ended as a very wealthy woman because one of her customers, a top politician left a lot of money that belongs to his party with her. When he died, nobody could claim the money. It became Jagua Nana’s money. Cyprian Ekwensi died in the year 2000.

### **3.5 The Writings of Chinua Achebe**

Chinua Achebe has remained a household name all over the world because of his novel *Things Fall Apart*. In his early novels, Achebe addressed basic African problems like colonialism and propagated African values to the world. His emergence in the Nigerian literary scene marked a milestone in the Nigerian literary scene. It is difficult to discuss Nigerian Literature without mentioning *Things Fall Apart* which is said to be a reaction to Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* which we discussed in the last unit.

In the novel, Achebe presents a once peaceful and harmonious Igbo society that was torn apart by the exploits of the colonial masters in Igbo land. His early works focused on the invasion of Igbo land by Europeans, and the subsequent imposition of their laws, customs, government and religion on the indigenes. This imposition succeeded mainly because they condemned the existing culture, religion and socio-political institutions of the people. The Christian religion was the most potent tool, so with it, the converts were brainwashed and they turned against their own people. This divide and rule tactics helped to destroy society.

In *Things Fall Apart*, this theme of clash of cultures is presented through Okonkwo who is a successful man, hardworking, honest, courageous and brave. He however acts irrationally at times because he does not want to be termed weak. Unfortunately, he destroys himself in the process of fighting the colonialists. Apart from *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe has published other novels like, *Arrow of God*, *No Longer Ease*, *A Man of the People*, *Anthills of the Savannah* and others that include novelettes, collection of short stories, and poems.

In his novels, Achebe is noted for his brevity and simplicity in his use of language. In *Things Fall Apart*, he captures an ideal Igbo society, their government, religion, festivals, rituals and other ceremonies. He uses the Igbo proverbs, riddles, folktales and other forms of the Igbo oral tradition to stamp a mark of uniqueness in his novels.

Chinua Achebe remains the most read African author in the world. His successful first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, first published in 1958, has sold millions of copies and has been translated into numerous languages. Like many African writers, Achebe's primary focus has been African identity. In particular, he has been highly critical of the way that Western literature has portrayed native Africans. His work also explores the many detrimental effects of centuries of colonialism on the African continent. In his fiction, essays, criticism, poetry, and even children's literature, Achebe has questioned not only how the West views Africa but also how Africa views itself. Achebe's potent social commentary has earned him worldwide acclaim.

Chinua Achebe was born into an Igbo family on Nov. 15, 1930, at Ogidi in Eastern Nigeria. He was educated at a government college in Umuahia, and he graduated from the University College at Ibadan in 1954. He worked for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation but he spent greater part of his life as a lecturer in various universities in Nigeria and abroad. In 1990, Achebe was involved in a serious car accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Nigerian novels are written in both English and local languages. In the Northern part of the country, the government encouraged and supported the writings in Hausa. In the east and the west, individual writers wrote as inspired. However, in Western Nigeria, there was an agitation and movement against foreign culture and literature. This, directly or indirectly affected the literary productions in Yoruba. In all the cases, education was a propelling factor as tribes wanted their children to also learn through the local languages. Christianity also played an important role in the development of Nigerian Literature as church leaders needed to communicate with the indigenes. Consequently, they encouraged and indeed, pioneered the development of some Nigerian languages.

The Nigerian novel in English language started with fantasy that presented some loosely-strung episodes of fantastic incidents. Novels in both languages drew a lot of materials from the oral tradition especially that of story-telling (folktales).

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

We have seen in this unit that the Nigerian novel grew out of the peoples oral literature. We have also learnt that novels were written in both indigenous languages and English. These novels present fantastic tales with didactic motives. They also presented the Nigerian societies before the advent of colonization, during the colonial period and the effect of the encounter between Nigerians and Europeans. Social ills in the society are also reflected in these early Nigerian novels. Some of the novels are based on historical events.

#### **6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

List and explain briefly, the focus of Nigerian early writers in English language.

**7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING.**

Emenyonu, Ernest “The Rise and Development of Igbo Novel” in Ogunbiyi, Yemi (ed) (1988) *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature 1700 to the present. Volume Two*. Lagos: Guardian Books.

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**UNIT 5: THE PIONEER NIGERIAN POETS****CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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    - 3.1.1 The Hausa Poets
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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Poetry is a genre of literature which is also written in English and vernacular. It is a mode of expression in forms of praise, songs, dirges and other forms of rhythmic expression. It is important to note here that poems are not presented because of beauty alone but like other literary artists, poets express their feelings, their concerns on issues and also use it to satirize and criticize institutions or social ills. In the last unit we discussed the emergence of the Nigerian novel and the thematic pre-occupation of early Nigerian novelists. In this unit we will learn more about the early Nigerian poets and their preoccupations. We will concentrate on the writers like we did in the last unit and will not go into an indepth analysis of their works. The most outstanding poets are Dennis Osadebe, Christopher Okigbo, Gabriel Okara, John Pepper Clark and Wole Soyinka.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify some early Nigerian poets;

- discuss their medium of expression;
- identify their thematic preoccupations; and
- list some poems in other Nigerian languages.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Poems in Nigerian Languages**

Like we did in the last unit, we will concentrate on poets who wrote in Nigerian languages and also those who wrote in English language.

##### **3.1.1 The Hausa Poets**

Some Islamic scholars wrote poems in both Arabic and Hausa, some of those who wrote in Hausa and their poems include Wali Danmasani whose poem “Wakir Yakin Badar” presents a description of the Islamic war of Badar. Another poet of this period were Mallam Muhammadu Na Birnin Gwari and Mallam Shi’itu Dan Abdurra’ufo who composed five poems each. These poets wrote in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

Usman Dan Fodio was reputed to have composed about four hundred and eighty (480) poems out of which twenty five (25) were in Hausa. One remarkable feature of the literary composition of this period is that in the absence of a printing press, the poems were written by these poets on plain sheets of paper from where they were recited by the students after they had copied them. Also, blind beggars memorized the poems and recited them to willing audiences on streets, market places and in front of mosques after the prayers, poetry composition was popular and preceded compositions in other literary genres: Amino Kano was another prominent poet in Hausa and he wrote from 1920 – 1950.

##### **3.1.2 The Yoruba Poets**

We saw in the preceding units that the Christian missionaries were instrumental to the development of the Yoruba orthography which made writing in Yoruba possible. The Yoruba poets started with the recording of the oral poetry of their people. However, a missionary, Henry Townsend’s “Yoruba Hymns” (1848) is said to be the first attempt of

writing a poems in Yoruba. Moses Lijadu helped to popularize the oral poets who could not record their poems in form of writing because of their level of illiteracy. He collated and documented some of them. Many of these early poems were presented in the form of the traditional *Orinarungbe*, a poetic form that is associated with the *Oro* cult in Egba land. Josiah Sowande (Sobo Ariobodu) was a very popular poet in this group as about ten (10) volumes of his poems were published between 1902 and 1936.

Some poets of this period who were Christians, adapted the traditional poems to suit their Christian perspectives. Others wrote protest poems in which they criticized some aspects of Christianity which they felt, threatened the Yoruba traditional institutions. The most popular poet in this group was Denrele Obasa. These earlier poets influenced modern Yoruba poets who are writing both in Yoruba and English.

### 3.2 Dennis Osadebe

Dennis Osadebe from Delta State, studied law in Britain and was called to the English bar. He was one of the pioneers of independence and was a former premier of Western Region. He was a politician and a poet. He was one of the earliest poets in Africa. Being a politician involved in the nationalist struggle for Independence, his poems have political undertones as they also serve as tools for the movement of national liberations.

While he was in England, he suffered racial discrimination from the Whites, who saw him as unintelligent, so treated him with contempt. His popular poem ‘Young Africa’s Plea presents according to him “the urge in the heart of the African to be free” (Roscoe 15). This poem presents an appeal that Africa’s custom should not be preserved as curious for the western world. This reveals the poet’s nostalgic attachment to a heritage he believes to be vanishing; hence, his plea for “untrammelled growth” and a request to those who doubt his talent to show their own nobility in their actions towards others.

This poem seeks respect for African customs and tradition. It is written in the concept of African personality which is a nationalistic ideology of the Anglo-phone West Africans while the Franco-phone countries talk of negritude. This ideology propounded by some

English speaking scholars of West Africa argues that African tradition is noble and not primitive. The African is an honourable, respectable man and not a savage. The African is well brought up, has dignity, has history and has culture. So in another poem “Arise Africa”, Osadebe calls on his brothers:

*Ye noble sons of Africa, rise and shine,  
Show forth your courage and your strength;  
Lift up your banners, raise your great  
And let your trumpets peal at length ensign,  
To tell the world your day is come at last...*

This poem typifies the perspective of Osadebe’s poetry as a tool for nationalistic movement and the struggle for independence.

### 3.3. Christopher Okigbo

Christopher Ifekandu Okigbo was born in Ojoto, Anambra State, in 1932 and died in 1967. He was a Nigerian Poet who died for the independence of Biafra. He is acknowledged today as one of the outstanding postcolonial poet in the country. Within his short lifetime, he established himself as a central figure in the development of modern poetry in Africa and as one of the most important African poets in English. He saw poetry as a profession and was dedicated to this profession. Okigbo excelled more in sports than in academic work during his youth. He attended Government College, Umuahia, in the late 1940s then went on to study Western classics at the University of Ibadan, where he received his B.A. degree in 1956. After graduation from the university Okigbo held various jobs in business and government. He taught in secondary school from 1958 to 1960, and then worked in the library at the University of Nigeria Nsukka, from 1960 to 1962 before becoming a representative for Cambridge University Press in West Africa.

The two collections of verse that appeared during Okigbo’s lifetime established him as an innovative and controversial poet, although his poetry also appeared in the important West African cultural magazines *Black Orpheus* and *Transition*. The two collections—*Heavensgate* (1962) and *Limits* (1964)—reveal a personal, introspective poetry informed



by a familiarity with Western myths and filled with rich, startling images. In one of his poems, he sees Idoto as a goddess like the Muse who inspires him. He returns to the goddess for poetic inspirations and his nakedness shows his total surrender. Water is also a source of inspiration but the Christian religion and education separates him from the goddess. The poem is in the African personality mode. He intermingles Christianity and traditional images and feels that he needs to go back to his traditional religion. As a writer he wears a mask which separates the artist in him and his true person. Some critics refer to him as an obscure poet, his poetry is demanding and allusive. It draws freely from the Roman Catholic religion of his family in Ojoto. Okigbo maintained that his poetry should be viewed as an organic whole as it expressed his coming of age as a poet.

Okigbo moved to the city of Enugu on the eve of the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), he set up a publishing house, Citadel Press with Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe. When war broke out Okigbo joined the Biafran forces, who sought to secede from Nigeria and was commissioned as a major. In August 1967 he was killed in action at Ekwegbe, near Nsukka. His last poems, published posthumously with much of his earlier work in *Labyrinths; with Path of Thunder* (1971), shows a new focus on the impending civil disturbance in his country.

An outstanding personality, Christopher Okigbo tells everyone not to be confined by their cultural, political, artistic, creative and humane limits. Chinua Achebe refers to him as “the finest Nigerian poet of his generation as his work becomes better and more in the world, he will be recognized as one of the most remarkable anywhere in our time”. (Achebe ix).

Christopher Okigbo’s poetic career was short lived. His first publication was in 1962 and the last one in 1966. Within this very short period, he composed and published poems the poems though presented as separate entities, they are linked as they chronicle the historical events in the country from the colonial period to the civil war.

In the poems, he presents his people’s cultural and historical experiences. Romanus Egudu, opine that Okigbo’s poetry is distinct. It is characterized by an “artistic excellence that is firmly rooted in his own indigenous cultural tradition” (60).

“Heavensgate” (1962) and “Limits” (1964) present the estrangement which the people suffered as a result of their contact with the Europeans. However, Abdul Yesufu views these collections from the ritualistic perspectives. He observes that they are “...essentially ceremonial poems that celebrate, in turns, the fragmentation and restoration of a psyche and the cultural matrixes within which it operates” These poems are replete with “ritual utterances, symbols and movements” which present a picture of “...a great preparation for and an engagement in a life journey undertaken in order to recover the fragments of a person, of his people and of his culture” (236) The dilemma of some people who could not reconcile their alliance to the traditional religion and Christianity is therefore highlighted.

He presented the Christian foreign missionaries as birds of prey that swooped on the traditional gods and destroyed them. He presents his return to his cultural roots in an attempt to fuse his dismembered identity together. He sees himself as a prodigal son who returns to seek forgiveness and reunification with his family and community. In the traditional society, such return is steeped in a ritual that is expected to cleanse him and set him free from the taints of the foreign culture. He therefore announces:

*BEFORE YOU, Mother Idoto,  
naked I stand;  
before your watery presence,  
a prodigal” (3)*

In “Silences” (1963 – 1965) he presents the politics of the post independent Nigeria that was characterized with rigging, confusion and purposelessness which led to the disillusionment of the people. His poem “The Path of Thunder” depicts the military coup of 1966 in Nigeria which he applauded and foretells the civil war and consequence of the coup. His prophesy became a reality as the crisis after the coup culminated in the civil war of 1967 in Nigeria. Unfortunately, he was killed in that coup.

### 3.4 Gabriel Okara

The Nigerian poet and novelist **Gabriel Imomotimi Gbaingbain Okara** was born in Bomoundi in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, in April 1921. He has written many poems, the

most famous of which is "Piano and Drums". He may be described as highly original poet and uninfluenced by other poets. He has been extremely successful in capturing the moods, sights and sounds of Africa. His poems show great sensitivity, perceptive judgments and a tremendous energy. He also shows a concern for what happens when the ancient culture of Africa is faced with modern Western culture, as in his poem "Once Upon a Time".

Okara belongs more to the pioneer fictionalist Amos Tutuola than the so-called modern novelists. His novel *The Voice* has been acclaimed to be one of the most memorable works of fiction by African writers because of the uniqueness of the language used in the novel. We are concerned here with Okara as a poet. The poems present issues that border on colonization, post independence disillusionment, the events of the civil war and the reconstruction and rehabilitation that followed the civil war. Like some of his contemporaries such as Cyprain Ekwensi and T. M. Aluko, he went through secondary school preparing for a profession and like them, he eventually turned to writing. He was first published in the late 1950s, so belongs to the first generation of Nigerian writers.

### **3.4 John Pepper Clark**

J. P. Clark is one of the early poets in Nigeria. He studied English and worked as an Information Officer, Journalist and retired as a Lecturer. He is also a playwright as you will see in Module III. He is Ijaw by tribe so imageries from the creek and the riverine areas of Nigeria abound in his poems. He studied English and pay attention to forms and techniques in his works. He expresses personal emotions, ideas and observations in his poetry. His poetry is not anchored on politics. He is a very conscious poet who says many things in a few words. His style is therefore compact.

Clark relies a lot on images in the presentation of his ideas. His most popular poems are "Abiku" and "Night Rain". In the two poems, he makes elaborate use of visual imagery. He presents human imagery of poverty and human suffering. His poems are sensuous; they affect our senses and by cumulative effect of imagery he is able to relay his message.

His other poetry collections include *Poems* (1961), *A Reed in the Tide* (1965) *Casualties: Poems 1966 – 1968* (1970). *A Decade of Tongues* (1981) *State of the Union* (1981) *Mandela and Other Poems* (1988). There is a mark of originality in his poems and some of the themes he treats are poverty, the beauty of the landscape, colonialism, the inhumanity of the race corruption and so on.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit we presented some early Nigerian poets who wrote in local languages and in English. Like the novelists, the poets are influenced by their oral tradition and the historical development in the country. We have not tried to analyze any particular poem since we are concerned mainly with the subject matters of the poems.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit you have learnt more about early Nigerian poets and the focus of their works. You learnt also that these poets exerted tremendous influence on the contemporary poets.

#### 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List the major historical developments in the country that influenced the early Nigerian poets?

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**MODULE 3: THE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN DRAMA**

- Unit 1 The Development of Drama from Alarinjo Itinerant Theatre to the European Concert Parties
- Unit 2 The Popular Traveling Theatre Movement
- Unit 3 Nigerian Drama I: Onitsha Market Literature and Ene Henshaw
- Unit 4 Nigerian Drama II: First Generation Playwrights
- Unit 5 Protests and Politics in Nigerian Drama

**UNIT 1: THE DEVELOPMENT OF DRAMA FROM ALARINJO ITINERANT THEATRE TO EUROPEAN CONCERT PARTIES**

**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
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- 3.0 Main Content
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    - 3.2.3 Saro-Elite Concerts
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  - 3.3 Indigenous Plays
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- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment
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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, we discussed the Nigerian pioneer poets and their contribution to the development of Nigerian Literature. In this unit we will learn more about the development of Nigerian drama from the traditional itinerant dramatists to the plays written in the western literary tradition. We have itinerant dramatic and theatrical groups or performances in other parts of the country but the Alarinjo will be used here as a representative study. We will also see the influence of the Lagos concerts in the development of Nigerian drama.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this, unit you should be able to:

- discuss the itinerant theatre;
- discuss the contributions of the Alarinjo to the development of the Nigerian literature;
- list the contributions of the Saro-Elites to the development of Nigerian Drama;and
- identify the earliest Nigerian plays on stage

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

We will try to trace the development of Nigerian drama from the itinerant drama groups through the concert parties to the European concept of proscenium stage plays.

### **3.1 Alarinjo**

The Alarinjo is regarded as the first professional traveling theatre among the Yorubas. This theatre group evolved from the Egungun cult in Yoruba land. According to J. A. Adedeji, the Alarinjo was originally part of the Egungun Society, the ritual of ancestor worship at about the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. It transformed into a court entertainment due to an aborted plan by some of the members to prevent an Oyo king, Alaafin Ogbolu on exile from going back to his home land. It happened that a member of the King's council the Oyo – Mesi, who was a representative of the Egungun Society initiated a dramatic strategy to foil the move because many of the people have acclimatized and settled in exile so they do not want to go back to the old Oyo.

Usually, before a king goes back to an abandoned home, he sends emissaries to inspect the erstwhile sites which may have been in ruins and determine the level of security there. It is expected that they must “propitiate the gods, and make sacrifices before the final move in took place” (Adedeji, 222). The dramatic strategy devised by the councilors was to use some ghost mummies (masked actors) to scare the emissaries. The intent perhaps, was to create a seemingly state of insecurity.

The actors were made up of six stock characters, each representing a councilor, the hunchback (Bashorun), the albino (Alapinni), the leper (Asipa), the prognathus (Sanu), the dwarf (Laguna) and the cripple (Akiniku). Initially the plan seemed to work as the emissaries were frightened and went back. However, through another strategy by the Alaafin, the actors were captured by six brave hunters. The King’s Ologbo (Ologbin) was instrumental to the capture of the actors. He was a member of the Egungun cult, so was aware of their plans and revealed it to the king who sent the six hunters to capture them. The ghost-mummies were taken to the king as court of entertainers and placed them under Ologbin Ologbo. They were made to entertain the councilors who masterminded the plan. They enjoyed the entertainment but never forgave Ologbin. The drama became known as the “Ghost” and was managed by Ologbin. It was later presented publicly though the councilors invoked rain to stop the performance but the king stopped the rain and the performance went on. The councilor later poisoned Ologbin and he died but the king honoured him by burying him in the court when they settled finally in the old Oyo.

Meanwhile, the story of the “Ghost Catcher” became a state performance that was re-enacted three times a year – during the Orisa Oko (farm god) festival, during the festival of Orisa Mole, and during the Oduduwa festival. It was also enacted during the installation of a new Alaafin. The theatre became permanent part of court entertainment in old Oyo. Ologbin before his death, got a wooden mask and costume for the group while he coordinated the improvisations.

The Alarinjo, thus, was founded by Ologbin Ologbojo and it became a family affair, members formed a guild. When he died, his maternal relation, Esa Ogbin took over his



position as the head of court entertainment. He improved on his predecessor's art and popularized the theatre. It flourished but among the lineages who were members of the guild. Gradually, many guilds emerged but each guild guarded its secrets very well. Competition set in, consequently specialization and professionalism became inevitable. The desire for excellence by individuals helped to promote their style and later the actor without a mask emerged as they travelled from place to place to perform. Thus just like the medieval drama moved from the church to open spaces, the Alarinjo moved from the court to open spaces where their performance evolved from the "Ghost Catchers" to other forms of dramatic and theatrical performances.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Link the "Ghost Catcher" episode to the development of Nigerian drama.

## **3.2 Concerts**

As we said earlier, the Europeans came to Nigeria with their religion, education, government and culture. They had a culture of going to the theatre to watch musical concerts and this was introduced in Nigeria. Also in schools, some dramatic skits were referred to as concerts.

### **3.2.1 Foreign Concerts**

The missionaries, the colonial administrators and other foreigners who worked in Nigeria were used to concerts as forms of entertainment and relaxation in Europe. Sometimes, especially during the visit of an important personality from Britain they tried to organize a ball and other forms of entertainment.

The missionaries and teachers in particular tried to influence their parishioners and pupils with the European civilization. This includes European forms of entertainment which was of course regarded as being superior to that of Nigerians. The European concerts therefore became one of the "steps of doctrinal and cultural indoctrination" (Gbilekaa 3) Professional artists were not there to present the kind of concerts that obtained in Britain but they entertained themselves one way or the other.

### 3.2.2 Academy Concerts

The Academy was a socio-cultural club that was concerned with the promotion of arts, science and culture in Lagos. They organized social activities like debating, singing, poetic recitations, classical music and staging of concerts. The first patron of the Academy was Bishop Ajayi Crowther and his sons were members. Other members were drawn from the Lagos elite group. Some of them were J.P.L. Davis, Robert Campbell, J.A. Otunba Payne, Charles Foresythe and many others. Their first concert was like a variety show that featured songs, recitations, music and drama sketches.

The majority of Nigerians living in Lagos at this time were illiterates so they had nothing to do with the concerts which were European in terms of form and content. However the Saro-elite who were slaves who returned from Europe and; the emigrant communities made up of mainly Sierra Leonians and Brazilians patronized the concerts. The slaves felt superior to the indigenes since they regarded themselves as civilized black-Europeans. Ironically the indigenes looked down on them because they were slaves. This slave emigrant community and the Christians regarded the Nigerian traditional entertainment as heathen and uncivilized so focused on the foreign forms of entertainments.

Unfortunately, the Academy was short-lived as their building was regarded as a brothel. People though members of the elite class who felt that they were responsible gentlemen in the society stopped patronizing them on moral grounds.

A member of the Academy, Otunba Payne founded Philharmonic Society to continue the entertainment tradition of the defunct Academy. Their philharmonic hall at Tinubu Square was later changed to Phoenix Hall. The society organized concerts, songs and music also but later evolved as a band that performed at occasions and in their own concerts. Another prominent band group later was the Lagos *Espirit de Corps* who performed at important occasions for the colonialists and local chiefs.

### 3.2.3 Saro–Elite Concerts

The Saro–elite saw the European concerts as forms of status symbol and patronized them. By attending such concerts, they felt that they had high Victorian tastes and were enjoying the European style of leisure and recreation. As we said earlier it was ironical that while they regarded themselves as being superior to the natives, the natives looked down on them and despised them. They are regarded as slaves and in the society, the slave has no worth, no status in law and in the society. The Europeans were not particularly liked by the people so these ex-slaves were seen as fake Europeans who were neither Nigerians or Europeans so has no *locus standi* to make contributions on important issues in society.

The feeling of arrogance and superiority of the natives became so manifest that the Saro elite did not only notice it but it affected them. The natives felt that they could not condescend to attend concerts that did not reflect the Nigerian culture. This disdainful treatment they receive from the natives deflated their ego, affected them morally, socially culturally and psychologically.

They were discriminated against in almost every fact of life-schools, churches, and the civil service. The Saro elite abandoned the Brazilian and Sierra Leonean emigrants who were still Eurocentric in their attitudes to life and started staging their own concerts which infused indigenous Yoruba materials. These concerts could be appropriately labeled “a theatre of protest, discontent and disillusionment” because they were mainly “a reaction by these elites against discrimination in the church and in the colonial service” (Gbilekka 9). The mixture of traditional Yoruba materials or presenting the concerts in Yoruba was a way off seeking acceptability and integration by language.

Some of the concerts were adaptations of bible stories which were presented with a mixture of songs and recitations., some of the titles were “Cornelius Agrippa” “The Seven Champions of Christendom” and “the Raising of the Dead”. Some of the concerts were presented in Yoruba language. The concerts were criticized by the foreigners and

their allies. The critics regarded the concerts as sacrilegious and blasphemous especially for the use of indigenous musical instruments, dance and language.

Many of these concerts were presented in school or church halls. The Europeans were disappointed that the educated Nigerians could support the “desecration” of schools and churches. However, they knew that they could not stop this form of entertainment so they decided to build a hall that people could hire for secular or religious shows. Consequently, the Glover Memorial Hall was built in 1899.

The negative attitude of the Europeans against the indigenous culture jolted some educated Nigerian who started to view Christianity with skepticism. They regarded Christianity and colonialism as collaborators, so, decided to study and reflect their own indigenous culture. This led to the establishment of the Bethel African Church. Gradually members of the European churches seceded to form their own churches, where they could infuse traditional materials, especially music and dance, in their worship and performances. The secession of these churches was influenced by the nationalist movements.

#### **3.2.4 Schools/Churches Concerts**

Missionary schools contributed a great deal to the development of drama in the colonial era. They had dramatic clubs or entertainment societies that organized concerts at the end of their school calendar or during festivities like Easter and Christmas.

The Catholic Church was by far the greatest producer of drama during this period. Drama, being a concrete art, is usually used for entertainment, information and education. This church therefore utilized the dramatic medium to teach English Language in order to enhance the communication between the foreigners and the indigenes. Drama also facilitated the teaching of local language schools. The church founded more secondary schools and this contributed immensely to the growth of dramatic presentations. The French priests who founded St Gregory’s College in 1818 organized grand concerts where drama sketches and plays by playwrights like Moliere were staged. The Reverend

Sisters who founded St Mary's convent were not left out of these performances which were usually parts of Easter and Christmas festivities. These dramatic presentations were so effective and popular that the "Catholic Church built a hall that could sit about 800 (eight hundred) people for perhaps staging of concerts" (Gbilekaa 6).

Gradually, other associations in the Catholic Church like the Catholic Young Men Association also presented dramatic performances on their founders/feasts and other significant feasts in the liturgical calendar. The dramatic performances were so popular that they became household issues in and outside Lagos. One prominent feature about the dramatic presentations of the Catholic Church was that they deal with both religious and secular issues. They staged classical plays and musical renditions. Their plays therefore attracted audience from every facet of the society. The popularity of these dramatic performances became so high that the Church Missionary Society (CMS) accused the Catholic Church of using the performances to lure converts to their own denomination. This is an indication that the concerts were very important to the church.

The secular nature of some of the concerts influenced non-Catholics and led to the establishment of other entertainment societies and clubs like The Rising Entertainment society, Brazilian Dramatic Company, The orphan club; the peoples union, and the Lagos Glee Singers. Also individuals like Robert Coker and Nathaniel King also organized concerts.

These individuals, groups and churches organized the concerts for entertainment and for economic reasons. Like in the Western tradition, tickets were bought by members of the audience. Tickets for the performances by the Catholic Church were very expensive. Sometimes, some youths who could not afford the tickets threw stones at the roofs of the buildings where these shows were held. The exorbitant rate for the tickets excluded majority of the people who could have attended the shows. Thus the colonial theatre in Nigeria was not as popular as expected because it catered exclusively for "only a section of "Victorian" Lagosians. A majority of the "natives" who were illiterate were "uncultivated" and quite naturally cut off from this cultural life which the elite group

promoted and acutely supported (Ogunbiyi 20). In spite of the exclusion of a particular section of the Lagos Community in Grand and public performances, pupils and students in schools presented concerts and dramatic performances as part of the school calendar.

### **3.3 Indigenous Plays**

The secessionists churches multiplied rapidly. One common feature of these churches is their tilt towards cultural nationalism. They exploited indigenous forms of expression and communication in their mode of worship. They infused traditional music and dance into their liturgy. The Aladura's exploited the traditional medium spirit (divination) for their prophecies and healing. All these reflected in their own dramatic performances. Theatre groups started emerging and some of them were supported by the church. Some of the groups started writing their drama scripts.

*King Elejigbo and Prince Abeje of Kontagora* by D. A. Oyedele was the first Nigerian play. It was performed by Egba Ife drama group, but was jointly sponsored by Bethel African Church and the St Jude's Church Ebute Metta. It was presented in the Glover Hall and the success recorded propelled the group to stage other plays. Other dramatic groups joined in writing and performing indigenous plays but as time went on vulgarity and out-right profanations found their way into these plays. More people criticized the plays and their presentations. This, the outbreak of the first world war and other historical, religious and cultural issues led to the decline of these productions. The Church in particular in their protest against this form of drama, banned their performances from their premises.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The Alarinjo theatre evolved from the Egungun masquerade group. It started with the re-enactment of the plot by the Oyo-Mesi to prevent Alaafin from going back to old Oyo from exile. The initial actors were made up of six stock characters whose subsequent performances contributed to the development of Nigerian drama.

Lagos concerts at the onset was modeled after the Victorian England forms of entertainment. The theatre was then elitist and geared towards conversion and indoctrination. Christians, Schools, Churches, groups and individuals were involved in the concerts. Consequently, they produced different forms of concerts. The Catholic Church played a prominent role in the evolvement of drama from these concerts. The secessionist churches contributed immensely to the development of indigenous plays as they injected the indigenous language and the African concept of Total Theatre into the performances and were responsible for the staging of the first indigenous plays.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

We have seen in this unit how Nigerian drama developed from the Egungun Masquerade cult through the Alarinjo theatre. Nigerian drama also developed from the Lagos concerts of the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Originally, the concerts were elitist and the intent was for winning more souls by Christians. Gradually the concerts moved from the religious to the secular, and evolved into full-blown drama.

## 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Trace the development of the Nigerian drama from the perspective of the secessionist churches.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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**UNIT 2: THE POPULAR TRAVELING THEATRE MOVEMENT****CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Operatic Theatre
  - 3.2 Hubert Ogunde
  - 3.3 E. K. Ogunmola
  - 3.4 Duro Ladipo
  - 3.5 Moses Olaiya
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, we treated the influence of Lagos concerts on the development of Nigerian drama. In this unit, we will study other influences as we move from folk opera to the written plays.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- List some of the Yoruba Travelling Theatres;
- Identify the preoccupation of each group;
- Identify the link between the popular theatre and the written plays; and
- Distinguish between folk opera and drama.

**3.0 MAIN CONTENT****3.1 The Operatic Theatre**

Opera is a musical drama. Operatic theatre here refers to the drama that combines acting with an extensive form of music and dance. It is like dance drama. However, dance drama is usually without verbal dialogue but the dialogue in opera is sung. A very good example of opera is found in most Indian films. In this unit operatic is used to describe the performances presented in pidgin or Nigerian languages that evolved from Christian



concerts but which are based “structurally and thematically on traditional performed art” (Obafemi 13). It means that this type of theatre made use of themes, materials and the form of traditional drama with elements from western dramatic forms. This theatre was therefore influenced by the colonial experience through education, Christian religion and other socio-cultural experiences that were imported to the country. In Yoruba land, this theatre was very popular because of its roots in the traditional oral literature. The practitioners of this theatre mixes different foreign musical forms and instruments with the traditional forms and instruments.

We saw in the last unit how the Methodist Church banned concerts from their premises. The Aladura church went a step further by banning the use of Yoruba talking drum in their church during worships as these could be linked to traditional Yoruba religion. However, they could not expunge the Yoruba idioms and strains from the lyrics of their songs and hymns. The Yoruba operatic theatre later copied this style.

### **3.2 Hubert Ogunde**

Hubert Ogunde worked as a teacher and later as a policeman. He was the son of a Baptist clergyman. He was a devout Christian and an initiate of the cults of Oshogbo and Egungun. He started his theatre career, under the patronage of the church. He was an organist and composed many songs for the Aladura Church of God to which he belonged. This church favoured the use of Yoruba cultural forms in their worship. He joined the Native Air Opera which existed at the time and his theatrical talents were made manifest. He injected beautiful Yoruba songs, music and dance into the performances of the group and later the group left the church and went into professional theatre practice. His first opera, “The Garden of Eden” and “The Throne of God” was commissioned by the church to help it raise funds for the building of the church. The performance was a huge success and launched him to the limelight. He resigned from the police force, founded a theatre company called The African Music Research Party and went into full professionalism in the theatre. He employed actors and actresses to act on full time basis. With this, Ogunde laid the foundation for the modern professional theatre in Nigeria. Ogunde’s company was the first to engage professional actresses. His employment of “paid actresses”

marked the first time in Yoruba theatre that woman were appeared in a play as professional artists in their own rights. (Ebun Clark 296).

Ogunde treated social and political issues apart from the early religious themes. His plays were used to satirize social vices. For instance, “Human Parasites. A Tragedy in Two Acts” was a satire designed to expose the vulgarity and ostentatiousness of the ‘Aso Ebi’ Craze, which is presented as a social vice in the play.

His plays justified the dictum that drama mirrors the society because he presented the socio-political issues of his time on stage. His plays “Yoruba Ronu” (Let the Yoruba Think) and “Otito Koro” (Truth is Better) launched him into comments on political issues. The plays were based on the political upheavals in the then western Nigeria, the consequence of which was the declaration of the state of Emergency in that part of the country. The government banned him from performing in the Western region.

Initially, due to financial constraints Ogunde could not perform his plays outside Lagos but later he was able to tour Western and Northern Nigeria. In Jos, he was arrested, detained, tried and found guilty on the charges against him on public provocation. He was fined and released. The play he staged that put him in trouble was “Strike and Hunger”. His play improved with each new performance by the addition of the new elements he learnt from his tours. For instance, his first tour of Ghana was not successful. He came back and fused more music to his performance to meet the taste of the audience there. Thereafter, he undertook another successful tour of the Gold Coast. He also travelled abroad to learn more about acting and stagecraft.

Like the concerts of the earlier period by the Christian missions, Ogunde’s theatre was profit oriented. He charged exorbitant gate fees, married all his actresses and his children were incorporated into the cast to save cost. From Opera, Ogunde started staging plays based on folklore or mythology. The first of such plays was “Half and Half” which was based on the old Owo myth of Igogo. Gradually, Ogunde moved from partly sung and partly spoken lines to an all dialogue play. The first play in this mode was “Princess

Jaja". Ogunde also produced plays with Islamic themes. He wrote and presented many plays in Yoruba and English but unfortunately none of them was published for posterity. However, he has remained the most popular and acclaimed dramatist of his time. He is also acclaimed the father of Nigerian theatre.

### 3.3 E. K. Ogunmola

E. K. Ogunmola was another prominent dramatist of his time. He founded the Ogunmola Travelling Theatre. Like Ogunde, he started with staging religious themes in the operatic mode. His plays were presented in Yoruba. Like Ogunde, he produced and directed his plays. He also acted in the plays. He was initially dwarfed by the colossal figure of Hubert Ogunde in the profession as the audience compared the two constantly. He moved later to Oshogbo from Lagos.

Luckily, he got his breakthrough with the appearance of Robert July, a foreigner, in Osogbo. He watched Ogunmola's performance and obtained a grant for him from the Rockefeller Foundation for a six month study in the Drama Department of the University of Ibadan. The grant also aided Ogunmola's acquisition of a lorry, a generator, other necessities and a revolving production fund. All these were to enhance his professionalism in the theatre. His stay in the University helped him to produce an adaptation of Amos Tutuola's *Palmwine Drinkard*. He produced other plays and toured many parts of the country with productions. He became very ill at a stage but contrary to expectations, he recovered and went back to the stage. During the period of his ill-health, his wife managed to keep his theatre company going. When he recovered, Hubert Ogunde helped him financially to re-launch himself on stage.

### 3.4 Duro Ladipo

Duro Ladipo founded the Duro Ladipo Theatre Group. Unlike Hubert Ogunde who dominated the Yoruba traveling and operatic theatre for some decades, Duro Ladipo theatre was short lived. As the director of the company, he was the son of an Anglican clergyman but was a Sango novitiate.

He started his theatrical productions by adapting biblical stories for the stage. He performed at the Mbari club in Ibadan and later founded the Mbayo Club in Osogbo. He had three major plays “Oba Maro” that premiered in 1962, “Oba Koso” in 1963 (The King Never Hangs) and “Oba Waja: (The King is Dead) in 1964. His plays were mainly historical though he was not concerned with the historical accuracy but with the impact of the plays on his audience. Duro Ladipo retained Oshogbo as his base though he went on tours within the country and overseas.

Duro Ladipo consulted widely, was open to criticisms and incorporated suggestions of knowledgeable people in his art. He later transformed the Mbayo-Mbayo into a cultural centre, an Arts Gallery and a meeting point for young artists who seek to develop their talents. The centre also hosts the performances of these budding artists.

In his performances, he used traditional musical instruments, chants, music and dance. Apart from stage plays and Operas, Ladipo also wrote TV plays in which he acted. Prominent among them was the “Bode Wasinmi”, a monthly series that was shown on the Nigerian Television, Ibadan.

His most popular play “Oba Koso” was performed in more than fifteen countries abroad, for countless audiences at home and won the first place at the Berlin International Theatre and cultural festivals in 1964. He also represented the country with the play at the Commonwealth Arts festival in Britain. In 1965 Duro Ladipo was seen as an ambassador of Nigerian Culture.

### **3.5 Moses Olaiya**

Moses Olaiya (Baba Sala)’s theatre company, the Alawada Group was unique in its own way. Its entertainment was farcical and therefore seen as an unserious theatre. He has been variously described as thriving on “vulgarity” and “triviality”. It was seen as being “Socially irrelevant”. It is said to have lacked the “profundity” of the late Ladipo; lacks the political commitment of Ogunde (Obafemi 55). Yet he remains the most popular entertainer and the most commercially viable professional theatre practitioner in his time.

Olaiya presents his plays as forces that makes use of exaggerations incongruities to teach and entertain through laughter. He adopted the Yeye or Efe tradition of Yoruba (fun making) to treat social issues. The main function of the Yeye concept is to provide fun and laughter.

Originally, the traditional artist has a day off from dealing with rationally with serious issues and is free to ridicule groups, individuals, laws, institutions and even gods. In doing this, he suggested ways of ameliorating the anomalies or ills in society. In satirizing his targets, he provides entertainment for the audience. This “*Yeye tradition*” is found, according to Adedeji , in most traditional performances like Egungun (masquerades) Gelede (the Mother Earth entertainment) and festivals. Other performance groups also make use of Yeye to satirize social ills.

Olaiya adopts this satiric tradition and treats serious issues humorously as he ridicules social ills and deviant behaviours in the country publicly. Some of his plays include “Dayamondi” (Diamond) in which he ridicules the desperate and inordinate chase and acquisition of wealth. The play encourages honesty, sound moral judgment and hard work. The Director directs the satirical butt on company executives and top civil servants who employ people based on bribery and corruption instead of merit.

In some of his presentations, he switches from Yoruba to pidgin to provide hilarious entertainment. And like his predecessors his theatre is a mixture of dialogue, music and dance.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The popular traveling theatre was indeed popular while it lasted. This theatre started with the establishment of Ogunde’s Theatre Company. This theatre like contemporary literary drama, integrates themes and forms of the Western theatre with the form of traditional drama. The theatre was however rooted in the oral tradition of the people. Other common factors of this theatre are the use of vernacular with the interjection of pidgin sometimes; the use of music, songs and dances; and a heavy reliance on improvisation. This theatre was basically for entertainment but at the same time, topical issues were treated.

Ogunde's commitment stood out as he satirized even the Government and oppressive policies. It was itinerant in nature so most of the plays were not scripted. The theatre, like the Western theatre was profit oriented so gate fees were charged. Most of the theatres were family ventures as the directors acted and married the actresses. In some cases, the children were drafted into the company.

Some of them started from the church, dramatizing religious themes and stories from the bible but eventually concentrated on historical, mythological and others contemporary issues of their times. Their influence on contemporary playwrights is enormous as the later still rely heavily on oral tradition for materials; draw themes from myth; history; and relevant socio-political issues of their times. Contemporary playwrights also juxtapose vernacular with English and sometimes with pidgin, which are all legacies of the operatic theatre.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have seen the contributions of the popular traveling theatre to the development of Nigerian drama. This star theatre started in the colonial period through post colonial Nigeria to the modern period. The advent and proliferation of the celluloid, Television plays and Home Videos have affected the continued existence of the traveling theatre, and stage plays.

## 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List the contributions of the traveling theatre to the development of Nigerian drama.

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**UNIT 3: NIGERIAN DRAMA I: ONITSHA MARKET LITERATURE AND ENE HENSHAW****CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Onitsha Market Literature
    - 3.1.1. Theme
    - 3.1.2. Audience
    - 3.1.3. Style
  - 3.2 Ene Henshaw
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Studies

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, we witnessed the birth of indigenous drama in Nigeria. In this unit we will see how it blossomed through the Onitsha Market Literature and the efforts of the first educated playwright in the Nigerian dramatic scene. You may wonder why we have decided to include Onitsha Market Literature here since the writers in this tradition wrote essays and novelettes too. The reason is that *Veronica My Daughter*, a play, by Ogali A Ogali towered above other works of the period. It was adjudged the most popular. Published in 1956, it hit a record sale of 250,000 copies. Honestly, the publishers (or pirates) of the play are still smiling to their bank as it is still being studied.

We have also decided to bring in here the foremost Nigerian playwright, Ene Henshaw whose play *This is Our Chance* is also very popular among students in the secondary schools.



## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define the term Onitsha Market Literature;
- identify some writers of that tradition;
- identify some plays written then;
- link the tradition to modern plays;
- identify the foremost playwright in Nigeria; and
- identify his plays.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

We will start our discussion of Nigerian literary drama here with the earliest written dramatic tradition in Nigeria.

### 3.1 Onitsha Market Literature

The *Onitsha Market Literature* refers to a number of pamphlets, books and other publications sold at the Onitsha Market in Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, a vibrant literary genre emerged in Onitsha, the commercial nerve centre of the eastern Nigeria and now Anambra State. Much of it was written in *pidgin* and *Creole* varieties of English. This form of literature is now interesting to researchers as a secondary source of information about social conditions of the time. General readers can appreciate it for its creative use of colorful, non-standard English as well as its often racy plot lines. The obvious characteristics of Nigerian literature here is that most of the writers were amateur and of modest educational background. The books were in the form of novelettes, plays and inspirational materials. They were mainly pamphlets.

Onitsha Market Literature consists of stories, plays, advice and moral discourses published primarily in the 1960s by local presses in the lively market town of Onitsha. In the fresh and vigorous genre of Onitsha Market Literature, about twenty-one pamphlets were produced from Onitsha Market and they exemplify styles of expression found in this intriguing form of African popular literature. Some of the popular titles include:

- *How to Write Love Letters*
- *How to Become Rich and Avoid Poverty*
- *My Seven Young Daughters are after Young Boys.*

Scholars acknowledge the important role of Onitsha Market Literature. In his contribution, Chinua Achebe describes the literature of that tradition as embodying the "social problems of a somewhat mixed-up but dynamic, even brash, modernizing community." (Chinua Achebe in the preface to Obiechina's book on Onitsha Market Literature). The works were written by school teachers and civil servants and others with modest education. Their works include stories, plays, advice and moral discourses that were all published by local presses. Emmanuel Obiechina, a prominent scholar of Onitsha market literature, argues that this African popular literature is "an integral, if unique and startling, part of the West African creative scene". (Obiechina 65) and as a matter of fact became a springboard for the development of written literature.

Among the most prolific of the writers were Felix N. Stephen, Speedy Eric, Thomas O. Iguh, and O. Olisah, the latter two having also written chapbook plays about prominent literary figures. Ogali A. Ogali seemed to be the most popular through his best seller, *Veronica My Daughter*.

### 3.1.1. Theme

It is unfortunate that this vibrant literary tradition fizzled out after the civil war in Nigeria, and the books except one or two have gone out of publication. However these voices from the bookstalls of an African market enhance our understanding of the cultural contexts in which they were written and provide valuable perspectives on a wide range of themes.

We do not know how many libraries in Nigeria have a catalogue of these publications but The Kansas State University has one which consists of an array of popular literature collected in 1966 by Thomas R. Buckman, former Director of Libraries in the University. Buckman described the works as representing "a unique form of popular literature in Africa" that reflected "the serious concerns and social tensions of many of the people" in newly-independent Nigeria. Many pamphlets were handbooks offering advice in the face of adversity--grave or light (*Trust No-Body in Time Because Human Being is Trickish and Difficult*). Much of the literature focuses on love relationships and illustrates a moral as the drama ends in disaster (*About the Husband and Wife Who Hate Themselves*). Some of the

booklets detail trials and tribulations that a protagonist must overcome to achieve success in the fast-paced urban environment of West Africa (*No Condition is Permanent*). Buckman noted that the popularity of the works was an evidence of the “great thirst for general reading matter among the growing literate population in that part of the country”(Internet).

Onitsha market literature made a significant contribution to resources exemplifying this genre and to the general development of Nigerian Literature. The Onitsha market bookstalls were destroyed at the outbreak of the Biafran War.

### **3.1.2 Audience**

Onitsha market literature is grounded among the masses, and it is their voices that we hear in this amazing collection. The works were aimed at the new literate class of Nigerians such as taxi drivers, mechanics, white-collar clerks, primary school teachers, small-scale entrepreneurs and traders. In all the books were highly patronized by the youth. They were written in simple English and presents basic concerns about sex, money and their style enthralled a vibrant cross-section of Nigerians. Local publishers supplied creative and enticing reading material to a public with a literary appetite that in turn gained confidence in the local uses of English. Scholars hail this popular literature, in part conditioned and compromised by the marketplace, as a major impetus for an eager literate public to experiment with more serious and dynamic works of creative writing.

Although Nigerian literary artists such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Zulu Sofola hold well-deserved positions of honor as the creators of beautiful and exceptional literature, most of the authors of popular market literature remain unknown and unseen beyond the market. Cyprian Ekwensi, as noted earlier started his literary career with the Onitsha Market Literature. The Kansas University has taken an initiative to document the achievement of these obscure authors and their works. This initiative is highly commended as it introduces these ‘invisible’ authors to the widest audience possible through the Internet, and provides a context to fully understand and appreciate this literature for the masses.

### 3.1.3 Style

The style of the market literature is firmly grounded in African oral traditions with plays, riddles and jokes as common features. Thus, the Onitsha pamphlets reflect earlier African oral texts and their rich histories. The main preoccupation of these writers was to communicate their ideas, to send a message, to educate, inform and entertain their audience. So little or no attention is paid to aesthetics, the artistic excellence of the works technical channel. Just as eager readers purchased Nigerian market literature 40-50 years ago, this initiative makes Onitsha pamphlets accessible once again to a wide-ranging readership on the Internet.

## 3.2 Ene Henshaw

Ene Henshaw straddled the worlds of medicine and literature so well at the same time. He studied and practised medicine and also wrote literary works.

In humility, he effectively impacted on his society with his great love for the arts and through his medical practice. In both vocations he distinguished himself as a selfless patriot; indeed, an icon. He delved into the world of literature because of his desire to preserve the good African tradition but at the same time, his plays were not only recommended text in Nigerian schools, they also had electrifying effect on the young and impressionable minds of Nigerian youths.

In plot and style, Henshaw's works are quite simple, yet evocative. He wrote with such hilarity that many would have thought he was a comedian. His flagship drama *This is Our Chance* drips with so many medical terms. It is not difficult to see that the author had something to do with medicine. He was indeed a physician. The impact of the slim drama is such that decades after many people had read it; they can still recall vividly its main characters like Bambulu (the class teacher), Chief Damba and the bashful Princess Kudaro.

Henshaw's use of language in that drama is so engaging that students invariably find it necessary to read the book a second time. The bombastic eloquence of Bambulu, the imperial sagacity of Chief Damba and the angelic mettle of Kudaro all combine to make the book a memorable piece of literature. *This is Our Chance* mirrors the condition of most Nigerian rural

communities at the time it was written. Teachers were top of the ladder in terms of western knowledge. Some of them, however, over reached themselves. It is still easy to hear Bambulu, the big-talking, love-struck school teacher, telling Princess Kudaro, Damba's daughter, of his so-called medical invention which he described as "the child of my brain, the product of my endeavour and the materialization of my inventive genius." He makes further claims about the invention when he says: "It is an anti-snake bite vaccine. Western science has not succeeded in producing anything so potent. But I, Bambulu, have, without laboratories, without help, produced this medicine from herbs of this village."

Such superfluous claims by a school teacher make the book a delight to read. The playwright captured the true state of things at that time. Here was a teacher wooing a pretty princess by making claims that few people in the village could contest, no matter how spurious it might have been. The author wrote other equally successful plays.

In the medical field, Henshaw was no less successful, having risen to the position of Director of Medical Services in the defunct South Eastern State. He later became a Chief Medical Adviser to the Rivers State government in the area of tuberculosis control. His public service went beyond medicine and literature. He also served as a member of the 1989 Constituent Assembly where he chaired the committee on human rights. In that role, he equally distinguished himself as one of the most respected members of the Assembly. An Efik by birth, Henshaw made friends across the nation. He was awarded the national honour of Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON).

His works include: *Children Of The Goddess, Companion For A Chief, Dinner For Promotion, Enough Is Enough, Jewels Of The Shrine, Magic In The Blood, Man Of Character, A Medicine For Love, Song To Mary Charles, Irish Sister Of Charity, This Is Our Chance*

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Onitsha Market literature refers to a number of pamphlets, books and other publications written by people with moderate education and sold at the Onitsha Market in Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s. Much of it was written in *pidgin* and *Creole* varieties of English. The

obvious characteristics of Nigerian literature here is that most of the writers were amateur artists. The books were presented as novelettes, plays and inspirational materials and published as pamphlets. However, a great Nigerian, writer Cyprian Ekwensi emerged from that unique tradition

## 5.0 SUMMARY

We have seen in this unit the emergence of a group of literary artists who wrote in moderate English language. While they sought to entertain their audience, they made some money. We also considered the first Nigerian dramatis, James Ene Henshaw .

## 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Who were the writers of the Onitsha market literature and what was their major thematic preoccupation?

## 7.0 REFERENCES /FURTHER STUDIES

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**UNIT 4      NIGERIAN DRAMA II: FIRST GENERATION PLAYWRIGHTS****CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1. John Pepper Clark (Bekederemo)
  - 3.2. Wole Soyinka
  - 3.3. Ola Rotimi
  - 3.4. Zulu Sofola
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit we introduced you to the first indigenous drama written in English found among Onitsha Market Literature pamphlets. We also saw the first real full-fledged play in English pioneered by James Ene Henshaw. In this unit, you will be introduced to a stage in the development of Nigerian drama. This generation of playwrights is also referred to as the tragic aesthetic school.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be in a position to:

- Identify the first generation playwrights
- Ascertain the main pre-occupation
- List some of the plays in this category

**3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

The dramatic literature of each period at any stage of development is a reflection and a criticism of the societal values prevalent at the time. In this section, we will start out

discussion of sophisticated dramatists all of whom are university lecturers. We will concentrate on their earliest preoccupation. Each play reflects the playwrights background though some of them treated nationalistic themes in their works.

The playwrights that we will discuss in this unit fall under the tragic aesthetic school. They present plays in which the burden of the society “is placed upon a few to accept” that fate has determined a tragic path for them, in order that others may live” (Benham and Wake 20). The tragic character accepts the burden even at the expense of his life willingly. This willful sacrifice is found in plays like *The Gods are not to Blame* and *Death and the Kings Horseman*

Other themes found in these plays are celebration of culture, culture conflict, conflict between the old and the new system. However in all these, the gods or supernatural forces play important roles in the affairs of men. According to Chidi Amuta, the earlier works of drama of these period were dominated by “...a certain preoccupation with the metaphysical and the supernatural (154). They propose a tragic vision which hails individual heroism.

### 3.1. John Pepper Clark (Bekederemo)

Kalu Uka’s introduction of J. P. Clark appears to be the best so far written about about him. It is therefore quoted for you here. Obviously, since Prof. Uka is a playwright and a poet, he seems well positioned to give a good introduction of a fellow poet. As a poet, he conveys so much within such a small space. J. P. Clark, according to him

was born in the eastern Ijaw area...  
of what is now called Delta State in Nigeria in 1935 out  
of the mixture of rain forest, delta jungle, riverine  
mangrove and water-spirits culture of Warri, Clark (Bekederemo)  
clearly brings a philosophy of man and his environment which  
informs his theatre. The sagas and epics of the Ijaw, the festive  
Ekine drama and its conventions, as well as the borrowed elements



of classical western European drama...have all been, in one form or another, fused into prevalent themes, techniques and tone of J. P. Clark's plays. (75)

J. P. Clark retired as a professor from the University of Lagos. He set up a theatre group with his wife, Egun Clark, who is also a dramatist. Our discussion on Clark here is strictly on his theatre.

It is difficult to say that this particular play is set in the colonial, pre-colonial or post independence Nigeria. The physical setting is always clear. The plays represent an overlapping of the past into the present. In *Ozzidi* for instance, Ozzidi is both the actor and narrator. The narrator exists in the modern era where cars and national politics exist but the hero, Ozzidi himself is a legendary hero who lived with his exploits in the past. However, by the end of the play, the past and the present are blended as Ozzidi and the narrator emerge triumphantly in the end.

His first play is *Song of a Goat* (1961) which appears to be the most popular. In this play, through certain allusions, one could say that it is set in modern Nigeria of the 60s. The actions of the characters which reflect a village that has not been touched by any element of modernity contradicts the seemingly contemporary setting of the play. This ambiguity helps the playwright to achieve his purpose of evoking his traditional background, their norms and taboo.

Incest is a taboo in this culture that requires atonement. Although Zifa is impotent and hides it from his wife, his wife Ebieri should not have had a sexual intercourse with his husband's younger brother, Tonye. She should have realized that in their culture that any "sexual intercourse under deviant conditions requires propitiation if the families involved are not to be cursed" (Wren II).

Some of these early plays adopt the five act structure. The hero Zifa is a wealthy man in his society. Unfortunately, he is impotent and also bears a family curse. His wife as stated

earlier takes in a lover. Zifa discovers the pregnancy. But his aunt Orukokere who has the gift of prophecy foresaw the tragic end of the play but nobody listens to her.

In his proud rage (tragic flaw) instead of calling his brothers to resolve the issue by offering the right sacrifices for propitiation and atonement, he slaughters a goat as he asks his bother to force the head of the goat into the pot (error of judgment) which is an impossible task. Like the classical Oedipus, he allows pride to rule his life so he defies the gods, the seer and indeed the clan.

The slaughtering of goat in this play for sacrifice has terrible consequences because it is done for the wrong reason. So symbolically, it indicates his unacceptability of his brother, his wife and their illicit relationship. Tonye hangs himself while Ebriere collapses and Zifa leaves the compound apparently to kill himself because a neighbour describes his suicidal strides to the sea.

Clark does evoke traditional ways of life of his people. He makes use of riddles a lot, and draws images from his surroundings. The image of a house is used by Ebriere to present to the Masseur her husband's refusal to have sexual intercourse with her

...it is not my fault. I keep my house  
 Open by night and day  
 But my Lord will not come in  
 Why? Who bares him?  
 I do not hinder him...  
 My house has its door open I said (Clark)

Masseur later confronts Zifa but with riddles and the image of farmland. Zifa who comes from the same cultural background understands easily.

Masseur: ...you have allowed the piece of  
 fertile ground made over to  
 you to run fallow with elephant grass

Zifa: ...what do you mean

Masseur: ...anyone can see the ears and the  
Tassels of the grass from afar off

Zifa: ...has she told you something

You can see that not only novelists draw from oral literature, playwrights also do. Other plays by J. P. Clark are *Ozzidi* (1966), *The Raft* (1964), *The Masquerade*.

### 3.2. Wole Soyinka

Akinwande Oluwole (Wole) Soyinka was born in Abeokuta, Ogun State. He is a novelist, a poet and a playwright. He is also a lecturer who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986, the first African to be so honoured. He is acclaimed ambassador for the promotion of African culture, human rights and freedom of expression. He has been playing an active role in the political history of Nigeria. In 1965, he seized the western Nigerian Broadcasting service studios and demanded for the cancellation of the rigged western Nigerian Regional Elections, after which he was arrested and arraigned but freed later.

He was also arrested and put in a solitary confinement by the then Head of State, General Gowon for his attempts at brokering a peace between the warring Nigerian and Biafran sides. While in prison, he wrote poetry on tissue paper which was published in a collection titled *Poems from the Prison* when he was released twenty two (22) months later, he recounted his experiences in prison in his book *The Man Died: Prison Notes* 1972.

Despite his detentions and imprisonment, he has remained a consistent and outspoken critic of bad leadership in his country and other countries. His play, *A Play of Giants* is a satire on tyrannical leadership especially in Africa. He discovered his flair for creative writing early in life. In his secondary school, Abeokuta Grammar School, “he won

several prizes for literary composition” (Internet). After his studies at the Government School Ibadan, he secured an employment as a Clark during which he wrote some radio plays, and short stories that were broadcast on Nigerian radio stations. It is not surprising then that at the University College Ibadan, he studied English Literature, Greek and western history. He gives a detailed account of his early life in his book *Ake: The Years of Childhood*.

In 1964, he was admitted to the University of Leeds, England to continue his studies in English Literature under the supervision of his mentor Wilson Knight. There he met some talented British writers and before he defended his B. A. Thesis he has successfully engaged in literary fiction publishing several pieces of comedic nature. He also worked as an editor for *The Eagle* an infrequent periodical of humorous character.

On completion of his first degree, he remained in Leeds where he wrote his first major play, *The Swamp Dwellers* in 1958. In his plays, he attempts to merge the European theatrical traditions with those of his Yoruba cultural heritage. In 1959, he wrote *The Lion and the Jewel*, followed in 1960 by *The Trials of Brother Jero*. This last play brought him to limelight which established his fame as Nigeria’s foremost dramatists.

In 1960, he received the Rockefeller Research Fellowship from University College, Ibadan and returned to Nigeria. It was after that he produced his play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*. His play which won the contest as the official play for Nigerian Independence Day is *A Dance of the Forest*. The play is a biting criticism of Nigeria’s political elite and his prophesy in that play is still being fulfilled as the country drifts aimlessly due to the activities of the political elite. The play premiered in Lagos performed by the theatre group that he established was titled *The 1960 Masks*. Soyinka has contributed immensely to the development of Nigerian literature especially the dramatic genre.

With the financial gains from the Rockefeller Foundation for research on African Theatre, Soyinka bought a Land Rover and traveled throughout the country as a

researcher with the Department of English Language of the University College, Ibadan. It was at this time that he published his famous criticism of negritude championed by Leopold Senghor. It described it as a nostalgic and indiscriminate glorification of the Black African past that ignores the potential benefits of modernization. He insists “A tiger does not shout its tigritude...it acts”. In 1963, he produced his first feature-length movie *Culture in Transition*. In April 1964, he published his famous novel, *The Interpreters*.

Soyinka is both a creative writer and a critic of both literature and society. He does not hesitate to criticize the cult of personality and government corruption in African dictatorship and this is reflected in most of his later plays. His other literary works include:

### Plays

- *The Swamp Dwellers, The Lion and the Jewel , The Trials of Brother Jero*
- *A Dance of the Forests , The Strong Breed , Before the Blackout*
- *Kongi's Harvest, The Bacchae of Euripides The Road, Madmen and Specialists, Camwood on the Leaves, Jero's Metamorphosis, Death and the King's Horseman, Opera Wonyosi, Requiem for a Futurologist, A Play of Giants,*
- *A Scourge of Hyacinths (radio play), From Zia, with Love,*
- *The Beatification of the Area Boy, King Baabu, Eteki Revu Wetin*

### Novels

- *The Interpreters*
- *Season of Anomie*

### Memoirs

- *The Man Died : Prison Notes*
- *Aké: The Years of Childhood*
- *Isara: A Voyage around Essay*

- *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years: a Memoir 1946-65*
- *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*

### Poetry collections

- *A Big Airplane Crashed Into The Earth* (original title *Poems from Prison*)
- *Idanre and other poems*
- *Mandela's Earth and other poems*
- *Ogun Abibiman*
- *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known*
- *Abiku*
- "After the Deluge"
- "Telephone Conversation"

### Essays

- *Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Transition*
- *Art, Dialogue, and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture*
- *Myth, Literature and the African World*
- "From Drama and the African World View"
- *The Burden of Memory The Muse of Forgiveness*

### Movies

- *Culture in Transition*
- *Blues For a Prodigal*

He established other theatre groups and won many awards. Soyinka is a theatre practitioner, a producer and a director. He directs virtually all his plays and presents them to local and international audience as he performs them in Nigeria and abroad.

### 3.3. Ola Rotimi

Ola Rotimi, a playwright and director was born in Sapele to an Ijaw mother and a Yoruba father. He studied in the United States of America and later returned to Nigeria. He taught as a lecturer mainly in Awolowo University and University of Port Harcourt.

Many Nigerians today remember Ola Rotimi mostly for one thing he is the author of *The Gods are not to Blame*. Since it was performed by the Ori Olokun Theatre in 1968, the play has become a household name as it is widely-read and performed, either as prescribed texts for students of literature in secondary schools/tertiary institutions or in performance in locations that range from school halls, arenas, proscenium stage in theatres or on the screen.

With a Nigerian government scholarship, Rotimi studied Fine Arts at Boston University and writing at the school of drama at the Yale University. He wrote his first two plays, *To Stir the God of Iron* (1963) and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1966).

Ola Rotimi's greatest contribution to the development of Nigerian drama is in his use of language, and the use of oral tradition and history. Although he was trained in the western theatre tradition, he incorporates his traditional Nigerian cultural forms, ethnic dances and indigenous language into his predominantly English language plays. In his plays, he often presents figures or incidents of historical importance in Nigeria in an effort to highlight the relevance of the past to contemporary issues.

Ola Rotimi is concerned, primarily, with reacting to the "Nigerian audience at whatever level of competence in the English language in which they operate" (Obafemi 89). This explains the level of language he uses in his plays. His need to reach his audience and infuse the traditional forms in his plays, he prefers to produce them in the round, (see your course material on Theatre Workshop to remind you of the theatre in the round/arena), rather than on the proscenium stage. According to Rotimi "the arena setting is the only formation that approximates aboriginal theatre arrangement, at least in Africa. That is why I prefer to use it (Rotimi 60).

In terms of the language he uses, he explains:

English, you know, is the official medium of communication in Nigeria. Inevitably I write for audiences who are knowledgeable in this language. However, in handling the English language in my plays, I strive to temper the phraseology to the ear of both the dominant semi-literate classes, as well as the literate classes, ensuring that my dialogue reaches out to both groups with ease in assimilation and clarity in identification. (62)

This is evident in most of his plays, especially in *Hopes of the Living Dead* and *If* where different Nigerian ethnic groups are represented in the play. In these plays pidgin is used freely for effective communication because Rotimi realises that “Nigeria is a multilingual nation but that this cannot hinder national unity” and also “the futility of trying to unite peoples who do not understand themselves” (Iwuchukwu 290). Effective communication helps in the reduction of “instances of mistrust and suspicion which breed rancor and misunderstanding among people (Iwuchukwu 291).

Ola Rotimi’s other plays include:

*The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1968), *Ovonramwem Nogbaisi* (1971) *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1985) *If* (1990), *Man Talk*, *Woman Talk* (I have seen the manuscript but not the published version).

Ola Rotimi died on August 18, 2000 at the age of 62.

### 3.4 Zulu Sofola

Onuekwuke Nwazuluoha (Zulu) Sofola was born in Isele-Ukwu, Aniocha, Delta State. She had her early education in Nigeria and a first degree in English and Masters degree in Drama at the Virginia Union University and Catholic University of America, Washington respectively. She worked as a lecturer mostly at the University of Ibadan, U.S.A. and University of Ilorin.



Zulu Sofola was the pioneer female dramatist in Nigeria and for a long time, one of the prominent female dramatists in Africa, alongside Ama Ata Aidoo and Efua Sutherland. She was not just the pioneer female playwright in Nigeria but for more than a decade she dominated the Nigerian dramatic scene as the only important female playwright and theatre practitioner.

The major criticism against Zulu Sofola is that she upholds tradition, thereby maintaining the status quo. She is accused of not using her plays to uphold the feminists ideals, especially in *Wedlock of the Gods* and *The Sweet Trap*. Mary Modupe Kolawole does not agree with this view. She believes that:

Zulu Sofola lived as an epitome of the dynamic African woman achiever who negotiated a space that corroborated her philosophy which maintained that African women should assert themselves positively instead of lamenting her marginalization (4).

Zulu Sofola herself corroborated this view when she asserts in an interview with Ezenwa-Ohaeto that the educated was clamouring for rights and privileges which the traditional woman has already and that what in the *Sweet Trap* for instance, what the educated woman "...was asking for, could not make sense. We do not know what the woman in our tradition has and that is where our problem lies" (80).

Zulu Sofola contributed a lot to the development of Nigerian drama. She wrote and directed many plays. Her most popular plays are *The Wizzard of Law* and *The Wedlock of the Gods*. Her other plays are *The Sweet Trap*, *Memories of Moonlight*, *King Emend*, *Old Wines Are Tasty*, *The Disturbed Peace of Christmas*, *The Song of a Maiden*, *The Love of Life*, *Queen Omar Alike of Limbo*, *Fantasies in the Moonlight*, *The Operators*, *Game*, *The Showers*, *Lost Dream* and *The Ivory Tower*. She died on September 7, 1995 a few months after her husband's death.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

We saw in the last unit that the earliest form of literary drama in Nigeria is found among Onitsha Market pamphlets of the 1940s and 1950s. The playwrights of that era like Ogali A Ogali and Okinawa Elisa were men of modest education. They were joined later by the educated dramatist, James Ene Henshaw who was the first educated playwright. In this unit, we have introduced the educated Nigerian foremost playwrights. These are J. P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Zulu Sofola. These playwrights treat issues of social concerns in their plays with materials drawn from mythology, legend, history and other forms of oral tradition. In many of the play, gods and the supernatural played important roles in the lives of the characters. Many of their plays supports individual heroism as against the collective heroism of the revolt playwrights as you will see in the next unit. Ola Rotimi qualifies to be treated among the revolt playwrights but since he is one of the pioneers, I decided to treat him along his contemporaries.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been introduced to the earliest educated playwrights in Nigeria. We have not treated any of their plays but inform you that the gods and the supernatural played important roles in the lives of the characters. They draw the materials for many of their plays from oral tradition of their people though they adopted the western theatrical modes. This is understandable because of the influence of western education. Many of them also studied abroad.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List the four pioneer playwrights and at least three plays written by each of them.

#### 8.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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Rotimi Ola (1974) in interview with Bernth Lindfors in *Dem Say: Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers*. (University of Texas at Austin,)

**UNIT 5: PROTESTS AND POLITICS IN NIGERIAN DRAMA****CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1. Revolt in Nigerian Drama
  - 3.2. Femi Osofisan
  - 3.3. Bode Sowande
  - 3.4. Tess Onwueme
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, we introduced the first generation Nigerian playwrights and listed some of their plays. In this unit, we will introduce some playwrights who are tagged the second generation Nigerian playwrights, and their preoccupation.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this unit, you should be in a position to:

- identify some of the playwrights in the protest tradition;
- discuss the cause(s) for their revolt posture;
- list some of their plays; and
- state what they are revolting against.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1. Revolt in Nigerian Drama**

Drama mirrors the society in very concrete terms through the interaction of actors on the stage or on the screen. The playwright therefore records the social realities in his society and presents the same on stage. Drama is therefore a product of the society since its conceptualization is usually ignited by the socio-political issues of a particular society. The first generation playwrights except for Ola Rotimi, did not dramatise revolt in their plays.

Revolt is an act of protest against or a rejection of an existing authority, concept or an idea. To revolt against something is to oppose or refuse to do or accept that thing. It involves a break-away from or to rise against constituted authority. It could be violent, or non-violent, in form of mild protest.

The revolt dramatists refer to those who use their works to urge the oppressed to revolt against their oppressors. They use their works not just to protest against inequality, injustice, or oppression in the society but insist on a revolt against the perpetrators of injustice. Their aim is to correct the imbalance for the emergence of an egalitarian society.

Revolt in drama is a product of man's discontent with his world and the desire to create an enabling environment for the realization of a perfect society. Revolt in drama seeks socio-political changes that would reverse adverse situations of modern life which perpetuate the "...disintegration of the traditional world order" (Brustein 5). Revolt in Nigerian drama was therefore born out of dissatisfaction with the leadership and the way socio-political issues of the nation are handled.

Many scholars believe that revolt in Nigerian drama was rekindled and sustained by the Nigerian civil war and the oil boom. The war was said to have radicalized the minds of many Nigerians while the oil boom created and intensified class stratification and intense capitalism (Obafemi 120). The new upper class accumulated wealth to the detriment of

the working class and other citizens. This deepened the gulf between the rich and the poor Nigerians. The rich get richer while the poor get poorer. The political class is more interested in self-aggrandizement than in the wellbeing of the electorate. The government concentrates on self-enrichment instead of on the provision of basic amenities for the people.

At the intellectual level, a new set of radicals emerged who are very critical of the government, the political class and the socio-political events and situations in the country. Among these radicals were a new crop of playwrights whose “writing skills were sharpened by events into instruments to declare the personal and social trauma they receive from the war” (Obafemi 120). Their plays deal with contemporary social problems in order to raise awareness among the people and advocate revolutionary alternatives as remedies to the situation.

Nigerian playwrights like Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Esiaba Irobi, Tess Onwueme and a host of others reject the recourse to gods for solution to societal problems. They insist that man is the originator of his own problems. So, the solution to these problems lies within the scope of man.

Through their play, they try to influence the “...people’s consciousness and social attitudes” (Gbilekaa 2). They insist on a restructuring of the society from a capitalist structure to a socialist one that is expected to produce an egalitarian society.

However, this seems to be an impossible task since the power elite seems willing to entrench social justice or relinquish power. In this case, the only option left for the people, according to these playwrights is to destroy the self, greedy and oppressive individuals and structures through a collective action. This insistence on revolutionary alternative has given rise to concepts like radical theatre, protest drama, theatre of commitment, political theatre, theatre of revolt, and revolutionary aesthetics in Nigerian dramatic literature and criticism.

It is important to specify that a playwright like Wole Soyinka is very radical and critical of the government whenever it errs, and issues and other abnormalities in the nation. He is not regarded as a revolt playwright because he does not seem to subscribe to the dramatization of revolt on stage.

### 3.2. Femi Osofisan

Femi Osofisan was born in a little village near Ijebu Ode. He lost his father very early in life. However, he managed to complete his primary and secondary education with the help of his relations. He proceeded to the University of Ibadan with a government scholarship. His first degree is in French. He also studied at the University of Dakar and Nouvelle Sorbonne, Paris and back to the University of Ibadan where he obtained his Ph.D. He was been a lecturer for the greater part of his life and has taught in many universities here in Nigeria and abroad.

Osofisan's first literary work *Kolera Kolej* (1975) is a novel but he is principally a playwright. He has been an editor of many literary journals, was a founding member of the Editorial Board of Guardian Newspapers. He has also been the General Manager and Chief Executive of the National Theatre, Lagos. Osofisan who also writes as Okinba Launko is an outstanding poet, a translator, critic and theorist of literature. He "features as one of the longest-running columnists in Nigeria's leading newspapers (he) has written over fifty plays" (Blurb. *Women of Owu*).

Osofisan is best known in the theatre where he has acquired a solid reputation as an actor, playwright, director, and songwriter. His plays have been performed in various parts of the world. Femi Osofisan is regarded as the father of revolt theatre in Nigeria because his plays are about the first body of literary drama that devotes their themes to the problems of the peasants and the working class – the oppressed class. In his plays he "seeks to arouse his audience into critical awareness of the prevailing social decadence and thus move them into taking appropriate action...His plays consistently attack all forms of corruption, oppression, injustice and tyranny. He is a social crusader with an optimistic view that through the collective action of the people, a better society could emerge.

Osofisan like his predecessors utilizes myth and history but he is not concerned with mere recreation of myth and history but subverts and reworks them and other forms of oral tradition to suit his ideological perspective. In his plays he urges the people to take up arms and “undertake a complete overhaul, of the political structures that oppress and dehumanize them (Gbilekaa 75).

Osofisan’s posture of revolt in his plays stands out. The plays present “a restless search for fairness in a world of abandoned justice”, (Awodiya 13). Social revolt dominates his themes as his characters revolt against their oppression to reflect the playwright’s vision of a better society. He enacts myth of rebellion in these plays to confront the “betrayal of aspirations, pervasive squandering of human and material resources and widespread corruption that has accompanied Nigeria’s independence since 1960”. (Awodiya 13).

Osofisan uses his character Leye and Sontri to revolt against the oppressive and tyrannical leadership of Alafin Abiodun, the King in *The Chattering and the Song*; in *No More the Wasted Breed* Osofisan insists that accepted norms and values can be challenged, rejected and reformed. This explains why the belief in the infallibility of the gods is rejected in that play. Similarly, he argues in *Restless Run of Locusts* that there must be a radical rejection of retrogressive and outmoded values for the entrenchment of a viable social transformation and in *Moruntodun*, Marshal, Bogunde and Baba lead the peasant farmers in a revolt against injustice, exploitation and the oppressive system of taxation. His plays dramatize issues of social concerns in the contemporary Nigerian society and most of the characters are drawn from the middle class and the peasants.

Another significant aspect of Osofisan’s dramaturgy is that women assume control roles in the plays. Osofisan does not seem to subscribe to the dictum that women in the traditional Nigerian society are supposed to be seen and not heard. The female characters, lead or join others in revolutionary actions for positive changes in the society.



Osofisan advocates a radical alternative to present capitalism in the Nigerian society which encourages individuals to enrich themselves at the detriment of the suffering masses, and protects the greedy, selfish, corrupt and vulgar acquisition of material wealth. He is acclaimed to be the "...most articulate, and the most ambitious in his use of the subversive potential of the theatre to shape the audience's perspective of the social revolution which they find inevitable in the country" (Obafemi 174).

Some other plays by Femi Osofisan are *Who's Afraid by Solarin?*, *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Red is the Freedom Road*, *No More the Wasted Breed*, *Midnight Hotel*, *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*, *The Oriki of a Grasshopper*, *Altine's Wrath*, *Esu and the Vagabond*, *Minstrels*, *Another Raft*, *Birthdays are Not for Dying*, *Fires Burn and Die Hard*, *The Inspector and the Hero Women of Owu* and many others.

### 3.3. Bode Sowande

Like Osofisan and other radical playwrights, Bode Sowande is concerned with the use of theatre as a weapon for mass mobilization of the oppressed poor for a mass revolution which he finds inevitable in society. He uses his plays to present the political and economic contradictions in Nigeria especially through the presentation of the suffering majority and their exploitation by the privileged minority.

He maintains a socialist stance and believes that capitalism which supports materialism is the main cause of social ills, marginalisation and depravity in the country. He therefore uses his plays to attack these ills and insists on a revolutionary alternative as a panacea for societal conflicts. His most popular play is *Farewell to Babylon*. In this play, there is a revolution and as overthrow of the despot, Field Marshal.

His other plays include *The Night Before*, *Sanctus for Woman*, *Tornadoes Full of Dreams*, *Flamingo*.

### 3.4. Tess Onwueme

Osonye, Tess Onwueme came to limelight as a Nigerian female playwright in 1985 with her award winning play. *The Desert Encroaches* (ANA Prize for Drama). Her plays show that “both powerful and powerless people, regardless of gender, exist in society (Evwierhoma 5).

Tess Onwueme was born in Ilah, a village near Ogwashi Uku in Delta State. After her primary school, she attended the Mary Mount College, Agbo, Delta State and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, where she obtained a degree in English/Education and a Ph.D from the University of Benin. She got married at the age of 19 and has five children.

Tess Onwueme, with about sixteen plays, is considered the most prolific African female playwright. As a woman, she is expected to use her works to champion mainly the cause of women’s emancipation and empowerment but she goes beyond that. Onwueme concerns herself with the plight of the oppressed in society, irrespective of gender.

Revolt resounds in almost all the plays written by Onwueme. Revolt provides the motive and material for her plays. In some of the plays, the revolts are radical as we see in *The Reign of Wazobia* and in others, the revolt takes the form of protest or firm rejections of authority. In *The Broken Calabash*, she presents a revolt against parental authority with its fatalistic consequences. In the play, Ona revolts against her parent’s insistence that she marries in the family. She also presents a total revolution, an organized opposition to constituted authority. In *The Desert Encroaches* where a group wrests power from leadership. Then she said it, the poor exploited, oppressed and dehumanized men and women of the oil rich Delta region of Nigeria revolt against the government, the foreign oil companies and other government agencies.

Onwueme’s dramaturgy is unique in her portrayal of female characters. In her plays, she presents very strong female characters who champion the cause of the oppressed, and initiate revolutionary changes for the progress of society. She presents women as role

models but at the same time, presents women who indulge in despicable acts. By this portraiture, we find prostitutes, lesbians, drug traffickers and other women with ignoble characters.

In some of her plays, she condemns women who indulge in crimes to make money and admonishes the younger girls to listen to good counsel from their parents. It also emphasises the need for the education of the girl-child, if the women in the plays especially in *Shakara*, *Dance-Hall Queen*, were educated they would have fared better in the society.

In her plays, Tess indeed revolutionised female creativity. As a woman, many people expect her to present mainly the positive images of women as they struggle for power, identity, self-esteem, assertion, emancipation and empowerment with the attendant conflicts in a patriarchal society. She is expected to present only decent women who triumph despite obstacles and stumbling blocks set by men and tradition. She presents instead, progressive women who pursue their hopes and aspirations in honest ways and overcome their trials in the end. She also presents those women who are overwhelmed by the society because they are egoistic, greedy and corrupt. She goes further to expose the intra-gender battles and conflicts that endanger the total emancipation and progress of African women.

Onwueme encourages the oppressed person to revolt against his/her misuse by any body, institution or society. Tess Onwueme won the African Literature Association's prestigious Fonlan-Nicholas Award. This award is given annually to an "African writer" whose works have demonstrated commitment to democratic ideals, humanistic values and literary excellence in Africa. In her acceptance speech Tess contends.

Now that you have hired me to follow  
The footsteps of Fonlan-Nichols in their  
Irrevocable advocacy for the rights of the  
Many who have no power, no place, and no

voice to claim/assert their dignity and identity  
lost, stolen or denied, I accept... to serve  
this role of solicitor and advocate for the  
oppressed. <http://www.uwec.edu/newsreleased/09/ap/042/Onwuemeaward.htm>

This award confirms Onwueme's position as a revolt playwright, who uses her works to speak for the voiceless.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

This module presents a brief survey of dramatic literature in Nigeria since the 1940s and 1950s. The Onitsha Market dramatists of this period portray the problems of a changing society as a result of its contact with the Europeans. Their plays reflect the poor educational background of the writers. After that educated graduates like Soyinka and his group emerged in the Nigerian dramatic scene. This first generation playwrights in their plays propose a tragic vision which supports individual heroism. The revolutionary aesthetic school of the second generation playwrights treated in this unit believes that social change can only come when people are made aware of their problems and incited into action. They insist that the oppressed should not accept their lot meekly but to end their oppression through mass action. Another group of the second generation playwrights use their plays to lay bare, the ills of the society and destroy the system through their actions but do not propose a revolutionary alternative for the amelioration of the social ills. Many of them present such problems and allow the audience to take a decision. In all these, the dramatists try to act as the conscience of the nation.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we have presented to you some of the dramatists of the revolutionary aesthetics school of Nigerian dramatic literature. Only three playwrights are presented here but there are many more. The unique feature of the revolt plays is that they urge the oppressed to revolt against their oppressors. The playwrights condemn the injustice, inequality and the marginalization of some members of society by the privileged few. They insist that the problems of the society affect everybody so, all those who are

affected by the problem should unite and collectively overthrow the initiators and perpetrators of such problems.

#### **6.0. TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

State clearly why Femi Osofisan is regarded as the father of radical theatre in Nigeria.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

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