

From Knowledge to Wisdom



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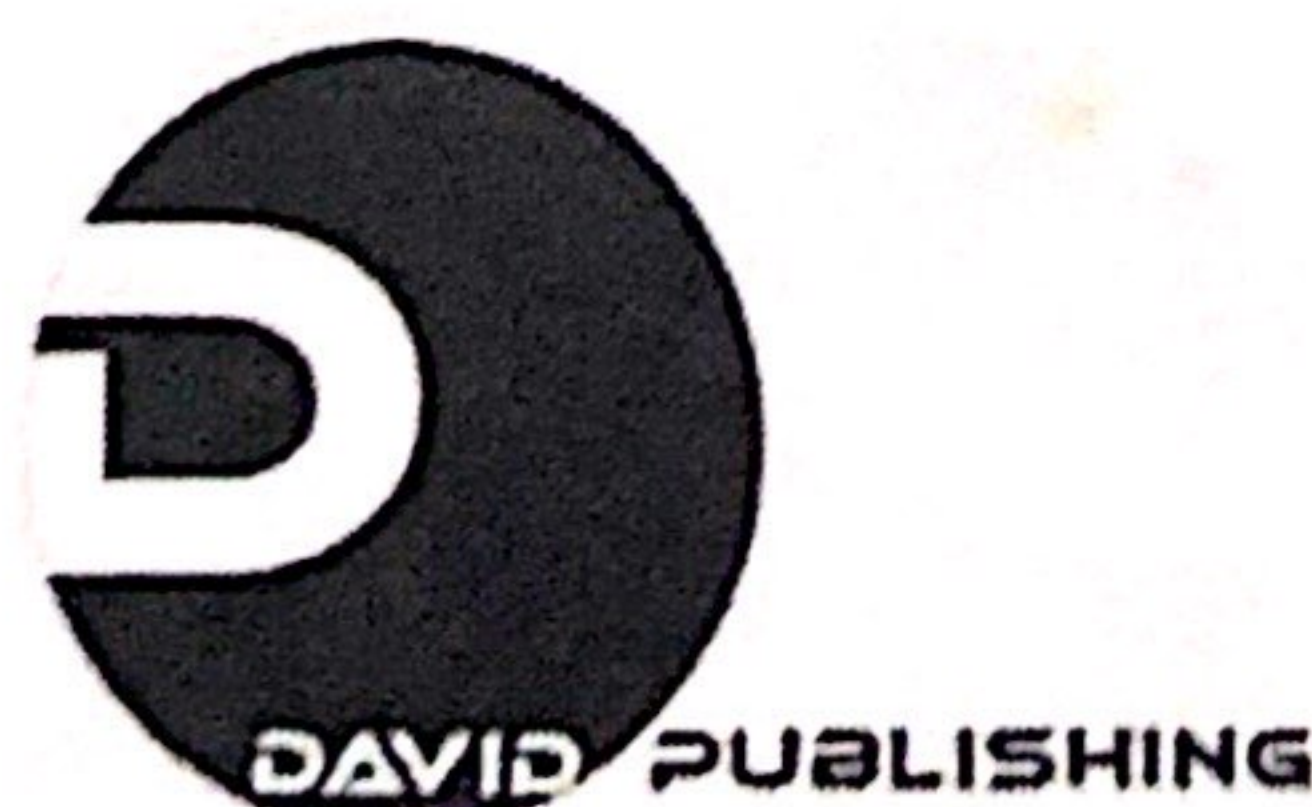
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Preface from the Convener



Olu Obafemi, PhD
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University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

When the Professor Olu Obafemi International Conference on African Literature and Theatre, christened **ObafConfab**, was announced in May 2009 to celebrate the 60th Birthday of Professor Obafemi, it was with deep and firm conviction that the subject of the conference has made immense contributions to literary studies and theatre practice in Nigeria and deserves a gathering of eggheads, in his honour, to discuss his passion on literature and theatre. The positive reception the idea to celebrate this Bunu-born scholar received across the globe is a product of this journal, which is the first in three volume editions arrangement from the stable of David Publishing Company in the United States of America on the platforms of their journals: *US-China Foreign Language* and *Sino-US English Teaching*.

The theme of "Cultural Construction and Re-invention for Global Peace Agenda" for the Conference was conceived to interrogate the intricate nexus of culture and peace through literature and theatre. These are two artistic enterprises that have positive bearing on societal transformation. From orature to literature and theatrical elocution, the values of virtues, justice, equity, liberty and fairness are extant in the African worldview. It is the subversion of any of these values that threatens peace and thus becomes a crisis worthy of literary and theatrical explorations. For what is literature or theatre without a crisis to resolve? This is why real and imaginative scenarios are created to address human issues within plausible contexts. Literary and theatrical elements are then deployed to construct a resolution for the prevailing crisis. In Africa today and indeed the entire globe, there is socio-economic and political instability as a result of the erosion of social security, justice, equity, fair play and liberty. Prevalent everywhere, even in unsuspecting guises, are cultures of oppression, exploitation, corruption, agony and the tyranny of exclusion—marginalization. All of these conditions are inimical to peace. It is against this background that the ObafConfab was convened not only to celebrate a distinguished national of world literature and theatre, a humanist and profound social thinker who personifies and embodies peace, but to also use our critical and creative proficiency to construct new cultural pathways and reinvent existing ones to get out of the labyrinths of social dislocation and to engender peace globally. In order to encourage varied and multidisciplinary contributions, sub-themes were introduced to cover range of discourses in literature and theatre. All of these are reflected in the contributions that make up this volume of the journal and the subsequent volumes.

For us, this set of journals is an enduring legacy of ObafConfab which is envisioned to live and grow addressing cultural, peace and strategic matters through literature, theatre and allied disciplines. This journal is also a fulfilment of our commitment for participants to have a post-conference peer-reviewed publication to reflect the texture and concreteness of the scholarly contributions of the ObafConfab. To arrive at this point, unfortunately not all the papers presented passed through the peer-reviewed process successfully; quite a number were rejected. For those who scaled through, we say congratulations! And for those who could not, we appreciate your enthusiastic participations.

Let us seize this medium to express our profound gratitude to all the members of the Local and National Organising Committees headed by Prof. Charles Bodunde and Prof. Duro Oni respectively; all the friends, associates and colleagues of the subject for their varying degrees of support; the keynote presenter, Prof. Tanure Ojaide, whose sense of friendship and scholarly commitment was impeccable; Prof. Martin Banham who at very short notice insisted to make a contribution in honour of his former student at Theatre Workshop in Leeds; Prof. Kurt Eisen, Associate Dean at Tennessee Tech University and a friend of the subject who got personal sponsorship to come and present a lead paper and also be a part of the experience. We appreciate all the corporate institutions and individuals that identified with ObafConfab; my dear wife, Mrs. Monica Sunnie-Ododo, who found time to leave the domestic frontiers to join us on the field to play a role; Prince Dayo Akanmode who committed time and resources for grassroots/funds mobilization; the mama of the house, Mrs. Grace Dupe Obafemi who sat at the background with the LOC to ensure that all went well; and importantly Prof. Is'haq Olanrewaju Oloyede, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, my Alma Mata, for his goodwill and practical involvement to assist us host the world conference. We are immensely grateful to David Publishing Company and their editorial team for the remarkable interest shown in publishing the conference papers and the smooth working relationship we had to get this volume out. Peace!

Dr. Sunday Enessi Ododo,
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5th December, 2010

Language and gender portraiture in Obafemi's *Wheels*

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Abstract: This paper examines language and gender portraiture in Obafemi's novel—*Wheels*. The author's interest is to show how Obafemi combines his professional leaning as English language teacher with his literary worldview as a radical feminist to portray women. The paper has 4 sections. Section 1 introduces the key concepts in the paper and justifies how literature could be used as a tool for language teaching/learning. Section 2 reviews and appraises earlier works on the subject matter. Section 3 analyzes the use of language and other linguistic elements for gender portraiture in the novel. Section 4 is the concluding remark on the findings of this paper. The author's conclusion is that Obafemi's use of language has been very helpful in the way he positively portrays his women characters, unlike many other male creative writers. It is, therefore, imperative for the creative writers to give special attention to positive portraiture of women and also focus attention on writing in indigenous languages to re-construct African cultural values for the global peace agenda. The conceptual orientation for this study is stylistics. Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics that has a special bias for both descriptive and analytical approaches to the factors of language use.

Key words: language; gender; stylistics

1. Introduction

Language and gender are viable areas of academic concern in linguistics, literary studies and other allied disciplines. In this paper, the author will discuss how language and other linguistic elements found in literary discourses have been used for gender portraiture for cultural construction and re-invention to attain global peace agenda. Obafemi's (2000) novel *Wheels* is used as an example. The key concepts that stand out in this paper for definition to benefit readers are language, gender, and stylistics.

Language, which has been variously defined by many scholars (Sapir, 1921; Chomsky, 1968; Essien, 2003; 2006), is known to everybody and every human community. According to Essien's (2006) study, language is:

a system of structured vocal symbols by means of which human being makes meaning and communicates and interacts with each other in a given community. Put more simply, language is a system of rules and principles in which sound, structure and meaning are integrated for communication (p. 6).

The above definition clearly shows that language is primarily vocal or spoken, and it is the most crucial means of communication for human beings. In addition to this, human language possesses the quality of creativity, which enables people to use language to express anything that they wish to express, thereby, enriching it. Literature can play a preponderant role in language teaching and learning. It is an explanation of the various possibilities of language use. Arowolo (1998, p. 65) also asserted that, "the child's word power could be built and be greatly reinforced through the teaching, learning and reading of literary works". Hence, literary studies enhance

deep understanding of language.

Gender is a socially constructed phenomenon that is brought about as society ascribes different roles and duties, behaviors and mannerism to the 2 sexes. According to Okereke (1998, p. 133), "Gender is a constructive element in social relationship based on perceived differences between sexes, and it is a primary way of signifying relationship of power". Gender theory gives opportunities for the potentials of women to be analyzed and compared to those of men in various disciplines, like art, film, architecture, theatre and related studies from a feminist perspective. Thus, the theory emphasizes "the co-existence of both male and female without anyone gaining ascendancy over the other in order to enhance the growth of the society" (Joseph, 2004, p. 180). This is the perspective from which the novel under study is examined.

Stylistics has been defined by different scholars and linguists who have viewed the concept from diverse dimensions. For instance, Lawal (2003, p. 26) defined stylistics as "the study of style", as he views style as "crucial and central to stylistics". He drew an analogical statement of what the position of style is in stylistics. According to him, "style is to stylistics what language is to linguistics". Thus, without style, there is no stylistics, because the fundamental concern of stylistics is style.

Oladosu (2003, p. 217) maintained that "stylistics is the art of using linguistic rules and regulations to characterize a literary output". From the above definitions, the author may summarize that stylistics is the aspect of linguistics which deals with occasions of distinctive language use by providing both the literary and functional interpretation of such usage in literary and non-literary discourse.

The awareness of the role of language in literature and gender portraiture are studied in the paper. In doing this, the author attempts to situate language use in Obafemi's first novel—*Wheels*—within the foregoing context in order to assess the way women are portrayed by the novel's author. The novel is a fictional dialectic of awareness and consciousness of post-war Nigerian children in search of harmony and transformation in a world torn apart by inequality and social injustice. In the novel, Obafemi combined simple, lucid and lyrical style of expression with the intriguing picture on the cover to relive the experience of post-colonial Nigeria. But people want to ask at this juncture whether the advocated changes had taken place between 1997, from when the novel was written till date? If the answer is "No", then what has gone wrong? What needs to be done? May be, the option of adapting the novel for the most popular culture—video production, would be considered!

2. Review of earlier studies

Creative writing in Africa in general and in Nigeria particularly has a long history. Many Africans and people of African origins have distinguished themselves in various literary traditions. A few of them are Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Zaynab Alkali, Flora Nwapa, Stella Ify Osammor, Akinwumi Isola, Ola Rotimi and Olu Obafemi. Works of these creative writers have been studied by previous scholars. A review of some of these studies that are related to the present study is therefore imperative at this juncture.

Joseph (2004) investigated gender roles in two novels of Flora Nwapa. She explicated with the women characters in the novels to show Nwapa's advocacy for gender equity. Gender is construed as a theory that debunks sexual inequality between male and female sexes. She observed that in the two novels, the coexistence of both sexes is portrayed in a way to show that one cannot oppress or subjugate the other. The female characters in the two novels are created to be economically independent despite the fact that they are illiterates. This is to show their importance to societal growth. Joseph's study establishes the values of female gender to assert that "there is no specifically male or female way of doing things since human beings are the same except for the genitals" (p. 180).

Jegade (2009) also contrasted the portraiture of women by two female writers: Aminata Sow Fall and Stella Ify Osammor. Aminata's "The Beggars Strike" and Osammor's "The Triumph" were her selected texts for the study. Jegede observed that in "The Beggars Strike", Aminata, in an attempt to counter previous misinterpretations of women, re-emphasizes female stereotypical portraits while Osammor's "The Triumph" puts women in positive light. While explicating with the selected novels, she condemns writings which demean the value and intelligence of women and calls for more positive portraits which will counter misinterpretations of women.

The present paper is an attempt to contribute to these studies from a different perspective. With the novel being studied, Olujide's (2000; 2004), Oyebanji's (2002) and Nwodo's (2010) studies are existing. Olujide (2000; 2004) studied *Wheels* from the stylistics and lexico-semantics viewpoints respectively. In these studies, she analyzed the meaning of lexical items, lexicalized phrases as well as compounds in the novel with a view to show how Obafemi uses the categories to paint a particular portraits of the only 2 female characters, Abeke and Kemi. In one of her comments about Obafemi's linguistic competence, she noted:

Obafemi displays a remarkable ability to manipulate language to elicit a variety of responses from his readers. He exhibits a unique ability to describe people, scenes, events, etc. with so much clarity, precision and vividness that, what is described is usually brought into very sharp focus... through his picturesque, imagistic use of word (Olujide, 2003, p. 194).

In addition to this, Obafemi's lexico-semantic selection for the positive portraiture of women in *Wheels* was analyzed. Olujide observed the collocations in bold type below among several others, as being used in the novel to describe Abeke, his major female characters: (1) "She waited, patiently waited; she waited for me" (p. 14), (2) "Radiant, long-hidden beauty" (p. 15), and (3) "Pretty, angelic face" (p. 15).

According to Olujide, the collocation and the repetition of the verb "wait" in (1) are meant to emphasize Abeke's long suffering. While in (2) the co-occurrence of "radiant" and "beauty", highlights Abeke's delightful look and "long-hidden" implies that the good look was not acknowledged until the husband gave a second look. Lastly, the item in (3) is used to depict Abeke's beauty. Indeed, the novel is replete with positive portraiture of the women characters as if Obafemi is set to pursue the cause of women. The other works reviewed confirmed this view.

Oyebanji's (2000) study also noted that *Wheels* is like a direct response to Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, one of the feminists' call to men to join forces with women to deliver the African women from the bondage of imperialism and embark on social transformation. This is why the author, through the characters of Abeke and Kemi in the novel, showed that women can participate significantly in the task of nation building. The author uses this to stress the participatory and complementary roles of all members of the society including women and children. For instance, in an attempt to resolve the conflict created among the people of Giroland by inequality and injustice, all members of the society try to make their contributions. Abeke was not left behind as she proffers her own solution along with others. Similarly, Kemi also contributes her quota to the effort of conflict resolution by playing the role of organizing secretary of the Christmas party, organized for that purpose.

* Nwodo (2010) viewed peace building through *Wheels*. She observed that the atmosphere in *Wheels* is fully charged with situation capable of generating conflicts of unimaginable magnitude and consequence. Obafemi averts the near occasions of conflicts to prove that literary works are instruments of peace building. She opines that "literature reconciles groups of people" using events created in the novel as her justification. Thus, Peace building is demonstrated in the novel when students, despite the rift between their parents, show a model of what life should be by coming together to condemn that which is evil in their society "without bothering about whose ox is gored". *

The present paper looks beyond the above use of the categories. It examines the combination of these element and other linguistic devices in the novel, such as, code switching, use of Pidgin English and Obafemi's dialect.

3. Language and linguistic elements for gender portraiture in *Wheels*

In this section, the author examines the use of language and other linguistic elements by Obafemi for gender portraiture. Specifically, the author examines the language use by the main characters in the novel, the relationship between the book cover, the title of the book and the prologue. It is observed that there is no adequate link between the book cover and the storyline in the novel, although the lyrical style of the prologue paints the storyline clearly and prepares the reader for the content of the novel.

Generally, language is flexible and it has elastic edges which provide the users the opportunity to maneuver in order to interpret their psychological states of thoughts. Stylistics as a theory of language use is characterized by a greater freedom of selection or variation with lesser conformity with established rules. The literary writers have always harnessed this opportunity. For instance, on the prologue page, people also note that Obafemi deliberately spices the poem with his mother tongue, thereby, using code switching as a style to drive home the points he wants to emphasize in the book—"heavens help those who helped themselves". This also shows that Obafemi actually knows the importance of his language and wants to show it. He could have translated the stanzas, but for stylistic purpose and language loyalty, he chose the expression. People believe that he means to achieve some purposes, one of which might be the projection of his culture, since language is a means by which cultural values are transmitted. Please consider the prologue from the novel as following.

Eni m'ayé je
 Èè ní gun gi Àgbon o...

Life's a wheel, they'll say,
 A circle,
 Which little children weave
 For moonlight play
 Around the luring caress of the moon...

As the elders return
 From the harrowing taunt
 Of the harsh sun's sweat
 Mostly, from labour lost, with neither love nor care.
 ...
 Who says
 That those who clamber the hedgy crown of the coconut
 Cannot dress their glands and guts
 With the tasty liquid of their sweat?

Eni mo 'sé se
 Yio m'omi Agbon o (Obafemi, 2000, pp. 5-6).

From the prologue, Obafemi has offered a good "aroma" of the food he has cooked to such an extent that people's mouths are watered and salivated, and eager to have a taste of the pudding. People can see the author's expertise in display here. In a novel, he employs not only the interplay of poetry but even code switching, yet the storyline is unbroken.

Code switching is a phenomenon that is central to bilingual discourse as a number of studies have shown. It refers to the successive, alternate use of two different codes or even variety of the same code. Many outsiders who do not really know why people switch between languages see the phenomenon as a sign of linguistic decay, which is the unsystematic result of not knowing at least one of the languages involved very well. However, the opposite turns out

to be the case as the examples from the novel under study showed. The author's dialect and English language are involved. We can say without fear of contradiction that he is really a true bilingual and language loyalist!

3.1 The book cover as symbol of communication

In communication, meanings and intents are conveyed not by words alone, but through other forms of communication, such as, signs, symbols, gestures and pictures (graphics and photography). According to Adewoyin (1991, p. 60), the book cover's illustration is a form of communication by which information, knowledge, ideas and messages are quickly conveyed or transmitted to intended readers. The book cover is the outer part of a book designed to provide some forms of information about the content of the book. It is usually beautiful and attractive, first as a market strategy, and second for aesthetic purpose. The picture(s) or illustration(s) in the cover of the book also aids the understanding of the title of the book at a glance. That explains the use of the picture on the cover of Obafemi's *Wheels*.

Even though browsing through the contents of a book will enhance its understanding, the cover illustration of such book also goes a long way in speaking about or for the book (Folaranni, 2008, p. 121). The kind of relationship between the illustrator and the author determines how the book would be enjoyed and understood by the readers. It is the process that culminates in the completion of the transfer of information or communication. Obafemi has achieved this in his novel *Wheels*. The following is the reprint of the book cover (see Figure 1).

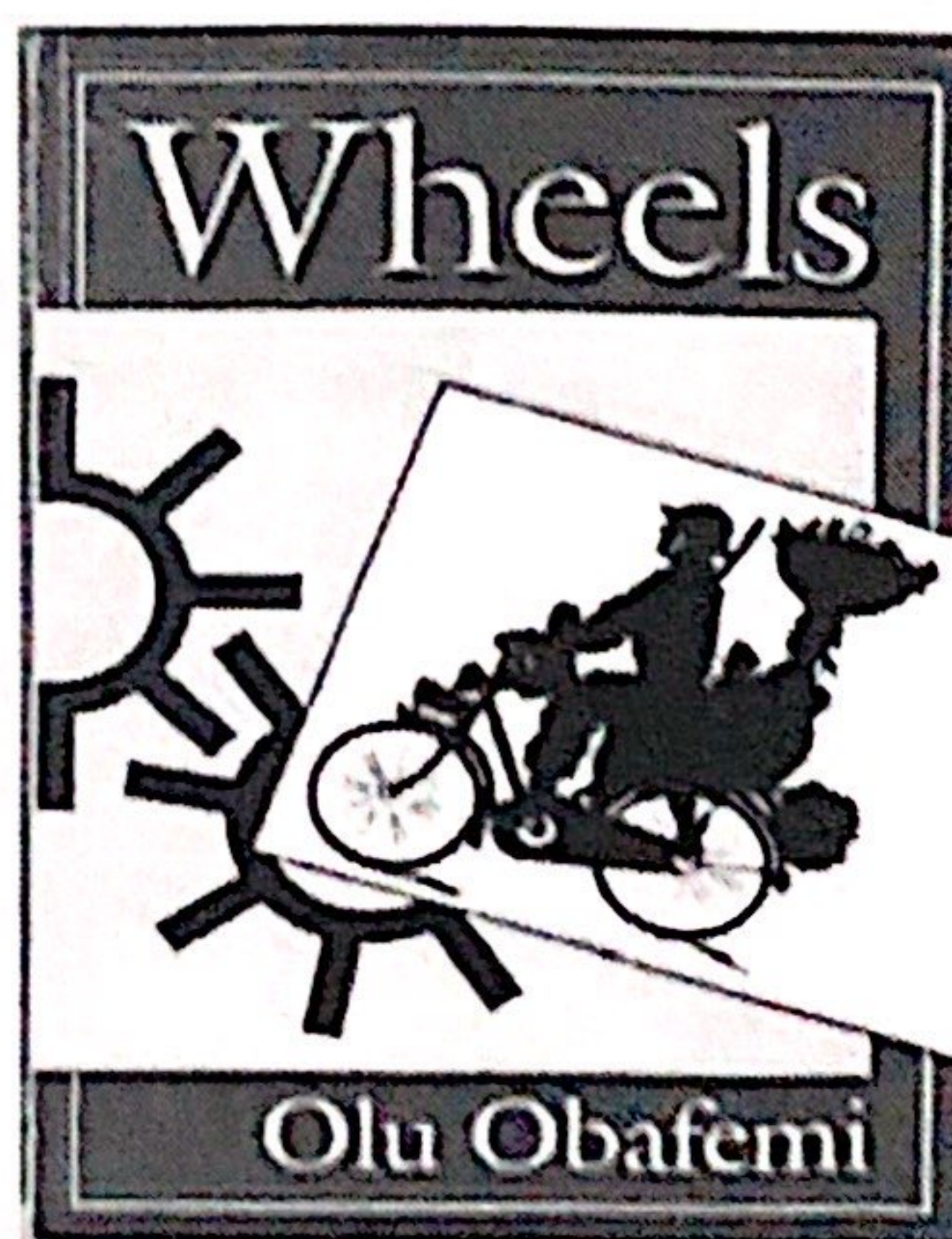


Figure 1 The book cover

This is the book cover of *Wheels*. On it, the artistic illustration gives a true representation of Obafemi's interest and storyline. The language used by Obafemi to portray his woman characters however contradicts the picture on the cover. This is because the "tenderness in expression", according to Olujide (2004), does not match the image as depicted by the woman found on the book cover. This no doubt might be Obafemi's way of achieving "style". And in fact, it also serves to depict the state of economy of Sonja:

For all the years of fighting for my country, leaving my newly married wife Abeke behind with no child, no house, no money, no food, no family, they gave me retire benefit of thirty pounds ... This is all the money I brought to my faithful wife after three years. I started trading as I can no longer go to the farm; I managed to save little of this money to buy this my machine. It is not new o... I carry my beautiful wife Abeke and since our little child Ebaje Kofo is so small to live at home, I carry my whole family on our long trading journey... I pack my family and we start to return home (Obafemi, 2000, p. 12).

3.2 Pidgin English as linguistic feature

Another linguistic feature that is stressed in the novel is the use of Pidgin English. Pidgin language is one which has a drastically reduced or limited in grammatical structure and vocabulary. It has relatively few grammatical structures and reflects sub-standard usage in the European language from where it is derived. The use

of this linguistic form by the major male character, Sonja is stylistic. This is clear as its use in the novel to contrast with the female character, Abeke, who is made to speak "correct" English on every occasion of the dialogue between both of them show. The extract below is illustrative.

... I paid for it. No be me wan marry educated person when na only three I reach, and no be say na my fault. Na me say make my father no get plenty money but marry many wives and each mother must to provide for im pikins? If she no sabi call me Olowo Ori mi, dat one be say the owner of the money on my head, which I be, can't she no fit call me Musa, my original name instead wey she dey shout Sonja Sonja wey efery son of a local farmer dey call me... (Obafemi, 2000, p. 14).

4. Conclusion

The modern age of science and technology which Nigeria and indeed most African countries aspire can only be attained through logical thoughts. "Artistic creation in literature has fostered this quality of mind from time immemorial" (Arowolo, 1998, pp. 64-65). Hence, the teaching of literature to the Nigerian child at all levels of education and through readers, and interactive fora becomes imperative. This will help to shape the child's thought process and re-awake the reading culture that is almost dead. African creative writers in English medium should use the language effectively and also consider the use of the indigenous language for cultural re-construction of the images of Nigeria and Nigerian women for re-invention in the global peace agenda. A consideration of adapting the novel *Wheels* for film/home-video is suggested to give it a wider audience.

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