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English

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Perspectives

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ONYEMAECHI UDUMUKWU

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Oral Traditional Performance and Its Implication for Nigerian Literature in English

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IT IS OBSERVED that during the residual time of literature, various creeds in Africa built upon the entertainment and moral values of the theatre and therefore created works based on both passion and morality. The very serious works, of Ekwensi, Achebe, Ngũgĩ, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi's adaptation plays are focused on mysteries, beliefs, and the cultures of the different settings they represent. Records of cultural values, aesthetics are extensively given by these exemplary writers among other writers of prose narrative and poetry. Deviations from the expected codes of conduct of some gods and societal rules and regulation lead to tragedy and violence. All works of art are required to make some kind of meaning, no matter the age or period of their production. At the same time the meaning of literature is audience-based. All practical works especially those categorized to be designed for modern times use approaches that deviate from the known practices of the people i.e. the expected norms, rules and regulation of the people. And these deviations from societal expectations are what help to raise a number of questions, challenges, doubts, opinions and suggestions for improvement along the line. Modern literature cannot claim the exactitude and muteness of modern science. All literary works across settings and over periods need the crucial raw materials of tradition to absorb some of the teachings of modern science. The writer's explanation of new methods and new standards of living can only be better understood through logical explicitness of both new standards and the existing 'dead' standards. Modern writers are

therefore larger parasites feeding on the native rhythms, imageries, weight of words, context, content, pre-knowledge of the existing culture and tradition. It is only through a regeneration and reconstruction of traditional substances that the modernist and non-modernist can make a head-way. Besides the conscious adaptation of elements of the oral tradition is a potent means of sustaining the identity of our national literature. Muiyiwa Awodiya (1992, 105) sums up this in the following utterance: "certainly, the most dominant trend in contemporary African Literature is that of writers going back to enrich written literature."

Introduction

Nigerian writers generally appear to be more interested in recreating in the reader's mind, a whole traditional way of life, that help to bring out better, varying degrees of man's realities. In this regard they make use of frequent allusions to their people's customs and tradition. They use the medium of literary expression in order to recreate communal activities such as festivals, ceremonies, ritual practices, beliefs, occupations and the co-existing nature typical of Africans. The purpose of doing this is to bring literature very close to the ordinary people and also to enhance its mass appeal. Hence, all writers have their foundations in the cultural heritage of their respective ethnic groups. Ernest Emenyonu rightly puts it as follows:

In a multi- ethnic nation like Nigeria, it is imperative that the culture and life- ways of the component units be given full airing, so that national sentiments could be built upon the foundation of understanding. (Emennyonu, 2000:xx and 393)

In the same vein, Emmanuel Obiechina asserts that "it is only by incorporating Nigerian tradition in our writings that the writings, can be referred to as Nigerian writings". (Obiechina, 296-298) As has been argued earlier in the introduction, it is through such processes of incorporation that the writer can show his sensitivity to the nation as borne out of shared assumptions.

Much attention is given to oral literature in the analysis here because it is also the literature of today and as such shares an important relationship with the written literature. Classification of oral forms into myths, legends folktales, poetry etc help to indicate the function and relevance of the various sub-genres to the different ethnic groups for whom the Nigerian writers write. Physical audience interaction quality of oral literature aids the improved dynamism of oral literature and makes it a more complicated genre. Stephen J. Salm observes that:

It is erroneous to view oral literature simply as part of a preliterate culture, a primitive precursor to written literature, for oral literature is neither less structurally complex than written literature, nor is it inferior in artistic value. (Salam,285-301)

He argues that the literature of a people can be either written or oral. He cites *The Random House Dictionary* in its definition of what literature generally means. Thus:

Literature is writings in expression and form, in connection with societal ideas, which are of permanent and universal (adaptable) interest and are of communal characteristic or essential cultural features.

The later part of the above definition of literature signifies the inevitability of oral contents in written literature. The definition can thus be slightly moderated to say that, literature involves both the writings and speech of a set of people in their practical existence. And this is why even the contemporary Nigerian literature, for instance, is influenced in fundamental ways by the long standing tradition that preceded it before the print media, in its paralinguistic and verbal forms i.e. the performance features. The existing historical valuable elements became useful for the recording of the people's written literature. Dominant themes, narrative methods, and poetic styles of African literature serve as the basis for the plot intrigues of literature, the time of writing notwithstanding.

It is glaring that the first major concern of African literature from the post-colonial period was the rehabilitation of the cultural damage caused by colonialism. And writers have succeeded in giving an air of cultural authenticity to their writings and also improved literally in establishing cultural values and consciousness. Harold Barday (1986) also adds that the concept of *life*, should not be misconstrued to mean, the human soul, but "the people's collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment, the sum of their art, their science and all their social institutions, including their system of beliefs and rituals". (Barday, 18-21)

Literary Authentication of Traditional Beliefs and Communal Relationships

As we can observe the discussion in this chapter is based on the abstract reasoning of Nigerians which serve as the basis for the origin of creation and also serves as a guide to the nature of existence. Besides since literature is an integral aspect of society it implies that literary creativity will serve as an index for apprehending the effect of such abstract reasoning on society. In the traditional life of most Nigerian societies, there is the general belief in the most high and some supernatural forces.

The Igbo people, as exemplified by Chinua Achebe, believe in a Supreme Being whom they refer to as *Chineke* or *Chukwu* meaning 'the creator'. Apart from this Supreme Being, there are smaller deities on earth. Among these deities is *ana* – the mother earth who is the custodian of morality and conduct. This earth goddess is also said to be the source of all fertility.

Another deity is *Agbala*, the oracle of the hills and caves who looks after the welfare and the health of the people. *Ifajioku/Ifajioku* is also another earthly god who is specifically responsible for the goodness of yam. Next in the hierarchy of gods from above are the ancestors. Below the ancestors, the Igbo people believe in spirits, some of who are malevolent while some are benevolent. Among these spirits is *Chi* known to be the individual's personal god. (Achebe, "Chi' in Igbo Cosmology")

And apart from *Ogbanje* - the water spirit that is known to go into children, there are also some other farm spirits. These spirits are believed to be numerous in number and are always around the whole Igboland to affect human activities. There are also the *Dibias-priests* and fortune tellers. The *Ndichies* are next in rank in this society. They are the decision makers of the village, the Lords of the clan, so to say. At the base, is the Igbo man who appeases these supernatural powers above him through the worship of rivers, plants, animals and trees and he uses these elements for sacrifices to the powers that be?

And these beliefs are clearly reflected in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* when Anyika the village medicine man carries out divination in order to discern the cause of Emenike's sickness. Anyika breaks the nuts, cuts them into pieces and threw them outside. He pours out some gin as libation and mutters as each:

drop reached the ground." God of the night, take this; gods of the earth take this; *Ojukwu* the fair, take this *Amadioha*, king of skies, this is yours And you ancestors, small and great, guardians of this compound, take this. (*The Concubine*)

The gods of the Omokachi community are *Ofo* and *Ogu* the watchful gods of retribution. *Amadioha* is represented not to only as in charge of the sky and the rain, but also as the god of thunder and an equivalence of the Yoruba *Ogun*, while *Ojukwu* is the Yoruba *sanppona*. *Ojukwu* is the one in control of small pox. We should note that one's personal god in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* is referred to as *Agwu*.

Okachi's assertion conveys the existence of a world of double significance which is both human and spiritual. Accordingly, Okachi commands Ihouma thus "you have done well. I am sure Emenike will bless you and keep watch over you from the spirit world". (*The Cocubine*.) This statement comes at the heels of the death of Emenike. Although Okachi and Ihuoma are alive, he (Okachi) shows awareness of a link between the world of the living and the dead.

The sea king is another super force in the novel. This is why the author perhaps makes him paramount but unseen, manipulating Ihuoma's life and that of her suitors on earth. Ihuoma herself is a goddess operating as a human in the Omokachi community. Man as it is presented in the novel is like a toy-gun in the hands of these forces, both seen and unseen ones.

We have the *Wankachis* in the novel being referred to as the world of the dwarf spirits. And apart from Anyika, another medicine man is called Ndalù. He is a native child expert. He is the one that pronounced Adaku's (Ekwueme's mother) mysterious pregnancy. *Mini weku* is a stream being worshipped jointly by the two villages of Omokachi and Omigwe because of the belief in this great *mini weku* river. The people's belief in earth is further indicated when Nkechi asks her brother Ekwueme to add anti-fever leaves into his bathing water. Ekwueme also bathes with buckets of water full of protective herbs. The protection is against evil spirits, because it is thought more logical for a person's illness to be caused by the wrath of the spirit of an ancestor.

In the same vein, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Obika laments:

"All our gods are weeping. *Idemili* is weeping *Ogwugwu* is weeping. *Agbala* is weeping and all the others. Our dead fathers are weeping because of the shameful sacrifice they are suffering and the abomination we have seen with our eyes".

We witness a dialectical contiguity between the Ikwerres of Omokachi and the Igbos of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*. This is exemplified in the fact that the characters from Umuofia refer to their god of Iron as *Amadiora* instead of *Amadioha* as we have it in *The Concubine*. Otherwise a common belief seems reigns among them. Umuofia is said to be very powerful in magic and its priests and medicine men are feared in all the surrounding countries," The priest of *Agbala* is *Chielo*, who is half human and partly inhuman in her behaviour, perhaps because she is not 'an

ordinary human being. Oyanwa is a child specialist in *Things Apart*. He discovered Ezinma (*Ekwefi's Ogbaje*)'s *iyiwa* and destroyed it, breaking the link between the child and the spirit world and thereby forcing her to stay in this human world. The oldest woman in the village became a legendary figure within the society. She is known as *Agadi-mwayia* and is accorded the greatest reverence. The woman is one-legged and nobody knows how old she is. For these reasons, she is worshipped because she is regarded as the first Umuofia being. The ancestors' presence is also represented on earth by the *Egwugwu masquerades* that appear during the *Egwugwu* festivals.

An iron gong sounded, biting up a wave of expectation in the crowd. Everyone looked in the direction of the *Egwugwu* house, come, gene, *Gome, gome* went the gong, and a powerful flutes blow the high-pitched blast. Then came the voices of the *Egwugwu*, guttural and awesome. *Aru Oyi* defiled the air as the spirits of the ancestors just emerged from the earth; greeted themselves in their esoteric language.

The *Egwugwu* is the secret cult of the clan, it is to help settle serious family problems and ensure that peace reigns among the people. The importance of the ancestors to the *Igbo* is further reinforced by the fact that the name *Igbo* itself is said to mean 'forefathers'.

In Bayo Adebawale's *The Virgin*, the two conflicting villages are Orita and Agbede. While Orita is ready for change, ready to accept cultural assimilation, the Agbede village is uncompromising. Orita in the Yoruba cosmology symbolizes, spell as *esu* (satan is believed to be constantly based at Orita). Since myths and beliefs are very much established among the people. Dauda, the village boy trying to imbibe the idea of urbanization is seen in a conflicting situation as the idea of his homogeneous culture comes in. The complexity of city life is juxtaposed with the simplicity in village life. These two ways of

life, Dauda compares and contrasts when he is "out of his mind". The Yoruba belief in the supernatural is reflected in Awero's soliloquy:

You used Juju on me Dauda, to have your way,
before nine days, Sango's thunder will strike you
dead, Ogun will chop your flesh and drink your
blood.

There is the reference to Juju, Sango and Ogun as the highest authorities to which Awero can hand Dauda over, for judgement. Awero gets married, the spirits of the ancestors are called to go long with her to her matrimonial home, live there with her and keep watch over her.

Kaka in Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* is said to visit the herbalist whenever he is sick. This is an indication of the belief in traditional medicine and the existence of native doctors among the people. Kaka views the hospital as follows:

How can a stranger know the diseases of the
People? What does he know about the wrath? Of
the gods of my ancestors? Let those that are
Beginning to go funny in the head, swallow white
clay for medicine and have their stomachs slit open
for a cure.

Kaka, who is Li's grandfather, condemns the modern treatment and refers to those who go to hospital for treatment as mad men and refers to the act of operation or surgery as a mere slitting and opening of the human stomach? Kaka's strong belief and reliance on his gods and forefathers can be further seen in the fact that, in the privacy of his room, he worshipped his gods; behind the hill station, among the hills, he sacrificed to the gods of his ancestors. There is the fear of the hills and the sacred rock which symbolises the balancing of the most high on three lesser object. The popular belief is that the gods of the village are housed there. Allah is very frequently praised in the novel and is referred to as "the great". Kaka also prefers to use the natural water from the river either for drinking or bathing rather than the

man made well water. There is the belief in witchcraft. The villagers generally refer to grandma as a witch within household. Li also reinforces the people's belief in 'disco spirits' who according to her makes them to know the don'ts of the society.

It becomes evident that it is man's life that make unique among other creatures in the animal kingdom. And the Nigerian point of view: It is much more meaningful to culture as embracing the total way of life, rather than see it in a restricted sense. Since it involves a person and the social, political and metaphysical existence.

In the Yoruba setting presented in Adebowale's *The Virgin*, there are two co-existing villages of *Orita* and *Agbede*, under the same *Erin* district. These villages have common communal values. Awero is from *Orita* village, while Odeji is from *Agbede*. Both of them are however, allowed to marry each other. This situation is a mirror of the strong unity that exists among the people. Similarly as presented in Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*, which gives a picture of life in northern Nigeria, the village head has ward heads with whom he works collectively in taking decisions that affect the village. Children fetch wood in groups. The type of setting we have is a polygamous one. We are told that "seeing her numerous brothers and sisters, made Li want to clap and sing with others." However,

Large and unequally cleft into two by a long narrow stream, almost hidden by its bushy banks. It consisted of farmland and a few scattered mud huts which appeared quiet, and deserted...Further down the village laid spread in clusters of thatched mud huts.

The spirit of togetherness is also expressed when the whole village even the *talakawas* contributed from 3 pence to 2 shillings towards Awa's journey to the city. There is complete hospitality among the villagers of the difference settings. Within and outside the immediate families themselves, there also complete families

themselves; there is also a complete blood covenant, to Knitt communal ties.

We are further told in *The Stillborn* by Alkali that there is a chief in the village. We also have elders such as Kaka and Grandma who reinforce tradition in the novel. Traditional dances take place in front of the house of the ward heads. Then we have Li's age group and children, seen either fetching water or wood for making fire. Most of these instances are nothing but placement of traditional ways life for literary authentication.

Adaptational Transference of Festivals and Traditional Activities

Omokachi village life in *The Concubine* is full of morals, customs and in fact decorum. The wrestling match is enough to show the liveliness in the culture of the people. People move round swaying to the rhyme of the old drum in a half-stop. On great Eke market days, they bring out their good for sale. In their households, they lie on bamboo beds with their oil lamps on at night. A peaceful existence on the day of general worship several villagers troop towards the shrine carrying "bright red cocks and yams" for their offerings. Before they leave their homes, they scrub their walls and decorate them in preparation. They beautify themselves by drawing and painting camwood on their stomachs and backs. Children's hair are shared into beautiful patterns. In *Things Fall Apart*, apart from the *Egwugwu* festival that we have already highlighted under African beliefs, there are other activities such as burials, marriages and the new yam feasts.

a. Burials:

Burials among the *Igbo* are counted very important and it is an obligation for the family of the deceased.

Ezeudu's funeral ceremony shows the proceedings for the burial of a man of title in *Igbo*land like *Ezeudu*. It begins with the gathering of the villagers and the beating of drums in death beat, shooting guns and cannons into the air. This is a way of saluting the dead. Mock wrestling are staged. They reflect the deceased's profession by appearing in wardresses, and coming into the

compound in fierce looks. This is followed afterwards people feasting and drinking as the case is during the burial. Emenike in *The Concubine* where full eight days was used. Funeral dances are also organized during the burial of elders in the Hausa community. Pa David's funeral dance in *The Stillborn* exemplifies this fact. As they lay to rest the ghost of the ancestor, drummers beat drums and people dance:

As the drums throbbbed and the dancers sang the old man's praise and swung their hips in frenzy the family converged in the largest room in the house

b. The New Yam Festival

It is a celebration done by the *Igbos* with great preparation as can be seen in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Every grown up who can discharge a gun is required to offer seed yam annually. The festival is a great ritual. Feasts are prepared in heavy quantities. The people offer their first and foremost produce to the provider, the god of yam tubers in appreciation for their good harvest which they believe the deity has enhanced.

During the celebration, twelve yam tubers are selected by the elders, which are used to represent the moons of the year, after which rams that have been brought to the ritual ground are slaughtered with the rams' blood touching the ground. Dinner follows with the drinking of palm wine at every corner of the market ground until the *Ikolo* is sounded, the usual signal for departure, is given.

c. Marriage:

Marriage negotiations in most of the tribes of Nigeria take at least a whole year. For example, Ahurole became engaged to Ekwueme in *The Concubine* when she was only eight days old. Supernatural sanctions are also usually sought before the commencement of any marriage ceremony. The laid down marriage proceedings are usually completed before the marriage ceremony no matter how long it takes the suitor to meet the requirements of the tradition. At divorce, the paid bride price

The Implicit Use of Native Chants

Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* is a play based on events, which took place in Oyo, ancient Yoruba city of Nigeria in 1946. According to the tradition, the king's horseman is supposed to be buried after the death of the king and this means a kind of the marking of the transitional passage.

The colonial master - Mr. Pilkings interferes in such 'barbaric' tradition in his own terms. This could be seen as "cultural intervention" and it created forms for chaos and violence, as there resulted a kind of metaphysical confrontation in the play, involving the use of metaphysics, spiritual magic and incantations. Soon, in the dialogue between Elesin and Mr. Pilkings Elesin Oba poeticizes:

I feel my spirits eagerness. The kite makes for wide spaces and the wind creeps up behind its tail. Can the kite say less than - thank you, the quicker, the better but wait a while my spirits. Wait for the coming of the courier of the king

A communication with the unseen forces around man is evident in Nigerian drama. The idea of fate being unchangeable is also most glaring. In this type of drama, man is seen as being responsible for his misfortune and therefore man must seek for a dynamic change. This is why there is usually a dialectic and radical posture involving use of chant lines. It is a kind of man's struggle against man in the immediate environment in which man finds himself. The Soyinka does not look at the society from a historical viewpoint. His drama is not a mere metaphysic record but one that deals with fresh and emergent topical problems. While other Aristotelian drama is therefore, full of cultural ideology, making history its theme, epic drama deals with contemporary common themes. His drama is faced with the issue of rapid human developments and the need for radical social change, within the cultural frame.

Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* can be grouped under a critical realism mode. This is because he prepares the

atmosphere for the physical death of the Elesin Oba before the interruption of the white man. There is therefore a practical violent confrontation between the Elesin and Mr. Pilkings. At the end of it all, we envisage real bloodshed. Elesin's son Olunde dies and the Elesin himself commit suicide. But typical of most dramatists, the actual physical damage is excluded from the actual audience. Unlike the various views of the entire group which Soyinka classifies as tragic drama, Soyinka moves a step still further to give a specialist's presentation of realism instead of just being critical. He does not only look at the contents of the world but goes further to re-create it on stage in a more rational manner. He makes act his primary role and come up with physical theatrical performance to effect change. It is perhaps because of the more powerful theatrical posture of his drama that his play is generally referred to as popular theatre or political theatre and is also known as agitational propaganda. The inter-textuality of drama and theatre is more evident in epic theatre and this is for a significant difference between other forms of drama and Soyinka's radical dynamism in culture.

At the beginning of each act, there is a stage direction. This is perhaps why one can look at Soyinka as having diverted from the totally classical trend to a naturalist form of action. He should therefore be viewed as a writer who although has drawn from the traditional ideology by basing his themes on cultural inference, at the same time, he sees drama not as a mere imitation of life, but also as critical realism of human existence. He makes oral performance elements functional for contemporary literature.

For instance, though in the use of the ritual, both the praise singer and Iyalaja uses the images of *alari*, familiar images of the anthill river, *olotan-iyó*, *sigidi*, palm wine and palm-wine taper, *opolo*, *etutu*. His theatre does not base its performance on these cultural elements that do exist in the society, but on their use for result yielding. Their dramaturgic use is arbitrary but very appropriate to the context. Thus, Soyinka points directly at the

must be returned to the bridegroom as Wagbara, Ahurole's father did when Ekwueme divorces Ahurole.

According to belief and as in Bayo Adebowale *The Virgin*, a bride within the Yoruba setting:

... who is found unchaste, is rather hardly used and some severely punished to the extent of having her tied and severely flogged, thus compelling her to name her violator so as to have him severely fined too.

Virginity is therefore a very important issue in the Yorubaland Awero in Bayo Adebowale's *The Virgin* is presented as a breach of the cultural norm. She is said to be insincere, worthless and a disgrace to her village community. The extent of her offence is right at the beginning of the novel and in Odejimi's room, she is said to have a *broken pot* - symbol of the absence of virginity. Bayo Adebowale is a Yoruba village recorder. With the issue of virginity, he presents a clear picture of the beliefs, norms and practices of *Elerin* district. He symbolizes absence of virginity with a stinking odour and also refers to it as a 'broken pot'. A clearer picture of this is enhanced by the use of the numerous semantic features such as *aaro*, *sekere*, *etikeli*, *gbandikan kekema*, *kusimilaya* and *bata* dances. We see Awero on her wedding day not in a gown but in *sanyan* and *aran* dresses with *Iyun* beads on the neck and *ladidigba* beads on her hips. Awero's room is referred to as *yara* with only a mat and a lamp in it. The bride also had *laali* on her feet and palms. Beside the use of local diction, Adebowale successfully uses descriptive language, to carry his message home.

The bride in the Hausa community is very much loaded with household materials. On Li's departure to the city to meet her husband in *The Stillborn*, Li is provided with, among other things wooden stools, mats, calabashes, clay pots, wire net for smoking meat and fish, stone grinder, etc. The African institute of marriage is also very much respected among the Hausa. That is why the villagers frown against *Habu* (Li's husband) leaving Li

behind in the village while he is busy in the city. When she tries to get involved with Alhaji *Bature*, her mother was against the tribal implications and the villagers equally gossiped about this societal wrong. Anyika in *The Concubine* is seen invoking the spirits of the gods and at the same time, pouring some gin as libation before bringing out the divination cowries to consult the gods and spirits. It is only by doing this that he pronounced the required sacrifice to Ekwueme's parents. Ritual is action and action is ritual. It is a marriage proceeding usually full of certain dramaturgies for actualizing ritual. The act of the presentation of gifts to the gods is known as scarification. Scarification is an important element. And the place of ritual is usually a shrine where the religious offering, usually takes place. Dance is indicated in the following sentence. Awa was intoxicated by the drums, the full moon and the freedom of the night

Naming ceremonies as in Amadi's *The Concubine* also usually involve ritual actions but in this case the ritual is performed in the outskirts of the household of the parents of the baby. For example certain processes are followed by the *dibia* (herbalist) before breaking Ezinma's (the *Ogbanje* child of Ekwefi) tie with the other world.

All the funeral proceeding explained here under burials are as well ritualistic. The kind of ritual under burials however, is performed in the deceased's household and does not involve any form of sacrifices, rather it involves praise poetry. The sacrifice involved in the ritual during the new yam festival celebration in *Things Fall Apart* is the killing of rams and red cocks and the offering of *Ekwes* of yam tubers.

These proverbs point at some of the acceptable norms of the people's life; they summarize the effect of the action that occurred prior to their saying, thereby giving us a clearer picture of the situation.

situation of the Nigerian society and presents in the way he thinks it can best move the spectator into action.

Conclusion

Oral forms: themes, patterns, and practice, according to E. Adegbija, (1999) is the social relationship that obtains between them participants in communication and the linguistic elements used in performing the illocutionary acts”⁷ In literary studies, it is an approach that, accentuates the primary of the socio-cultural values of the audience in any given performance in addition to the audiences intuitive knowledge of the situational context much needed for decoding the meaning of actions and renditions. The life context of any African activity, festivals and ceremonies is very crucial to its overall realization. Without the context, any form of literary writing will be meaningless and lifeless, since it is suppose to involve instant stimulus and response of the audience, to whom the entire celebration means a lot. The socio-pragmatic relevance of oral literature can be better realized from Harold Scheub’s summation thus:

Materials and methods of composition and images from past and present representations, of fantasy and reality, worked together and artfully crafted into rich metaphorical parallels in performances that enlist the emotions of the members of audiences.... That past, the paradigm of the culture continues to exert its influence on the shaping of the present, giving it a mythical heart, a traditional context and a nascent form

Scheub specifically reinforces the fact that oral narrative tradition is a repository of emotions that are regularized and controlled for effective communication, in written work. However, apart from the social communication function of oral literature, it serves as a moral edification entity a judicial and legal dictator in terms of the enactment and dispensation of justice, in modern world of complexities requiring cultural adjustment.

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Fear of Dying: Culture, Continuity and Discontinuity in Enuani Proverbs

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Introduction

ANY DISCUSSION of the factors that have shaped Nigerian literature will be incomplete, indeed irrelevant, if it does not conversely give adequate attention to the *oral* literatures of the country. Several scholars of *modern* African literature tend to overlook the crucial fact that this literature hardly stands alone, but remains inextricably linked with the different Nigerian oral literatures. Still, African oral literature can be said to have taken its proper place as a viable discipline or field of study, whether in African universities or other universities worldwide. There is thus a substantial body of scholarly literature on both its driving force (*performance*), and its different genres.

More specifically, it can be asserted that the proverb genre is one that has been accorded considerable scholarly attention regarding a number of Nigerian societies (see, for example, Finnegan, Nwachukwu-Agbada, Ojoade, Olatunji, Chukwuma, Penfield). Regarding the Igbo, for example, the Achebean maxim about proverbs being the "oil with which words are eaten" is well known. But while this "accurately captures a *pan-Igbo* artistic truth," we conversely underline "the profitability, practicality, indeed validity, of studying *single* Igbo communities". (Okoh, "Commentary" 465) Indeed, we consider such profusion of studies, in other words, even more explorations of the artistic conventions of several *sociocultures* a major trend or focus which Nigerian oral literature scholars in the 21st century should pursue.

In this paper, then, we focus on the Enuani, whose "culture in general and oral literature in particular have been grossly