

IRONY AS NARRATIVE TOOL IN UWEM AKPAN'S SAY YOU'RE ONE OF THEM AND WALE OKEDIRAN'S AFTER THE FLOOD: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT : *The study decries violence in all its ramifications including that perpetrated by nature and its elements, or that inflicted on one another by the characters in the works, or that unleashed on the audience by the authors who appear to be insensitive to readers' psychology in the fictionalization of violence. It argues that the relationship between art and reality is not imitation which argument the Baroque model sustains, but distortion. And the failure to realize this robs art of its intrinsic value and presents nearly one to one correspondence. The study is somewhat hypothetical and somewhat theoretical in its espousal of the technique of irony, stating that the two works in analysis are shrouded in ironies. It postures that irony has both literary and social functions. The literary function is demonstrated in open contrasting and antithetical phenomena, whereas the social function is manifest in social criticism in which it uses other devices, especially satire to accomplish. In the course of performing this second function, the study shows that the authors have deployed irony in these works to reveal hypocrisy in religious/ethnic ideologies, corruption and quackery, ignorance and primitiveness.*

KEYWORDS: Religious and Ethnic Violence, Flood, Baroque, Imitates, Distorts, Irony, Hypocrisy, Quackery

INTRODUCTION

One significant development is no doubt taking place in Africa's literary process. The emergence of new writers is not without strong penchant and passion for great events and great names hitting the scene in spectacular manners. Artists as witnesses to unfolding realities which characterize the becoming of society are fundamental. However, in Africa, we as scholars look up to the day a generation of artists will begin to prophesy dooms ahead of their times apart from fictionalizing tragedies that take tolls on our collective psyche. Such generation of writers should be able to harvest overwhelming intellectual powers and clarity of vision as could forestall the damning reverse consequences of one being tagged a prophet of doom and build upon that to present supposedly dire predictions in a manner that the wise will welcome them and work hard to avert calamities. Without this serious and committed approach, society will surely trivialize such predictions or make them look like trite commonalities. Unfortunately, African writers have not directed their creative energies to such task. This is where African literature is mostly deficient, probably the predicament of always having rearward outlook to natural or man-made catastrophes. The Argentine writer Jorge Borges was able to, through a kind of unprecedented fictional permutation, foretell the apocalyptic holocaust that engulfed humanity. And before long this weird cloud of fiction dispersed and fleshed out into the reality

of the WWII. Even though no measure was taken to avert this, the prediction had taken place and it is on record. Djalel Kadir in one of his essays writes about this phenomenal event:

In the last century, the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges dramatized a similar predicament in his uncanny fictions. At a historical moment on the verge of an eschatological nihilism whose deadly delusions soon overtook Europe, he wrote ‘*Tlon, Uqbar Orbis Tertius* (1940)’, a narrative of a spectral vanishing point and ubiquitous totality. Ten years later, Borge’s monitory dramatization of that delusional ambition would echo as death rattle in Hannah Arendt’s now classic treatise *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in (1951)(125).

Nigeria and Africa would have witnessed a new dawn in their literary creations if they had so far been able to produce indigenous types of Jorge Borges. With Uwem Akpan and Wale Ogediran, African literature still fawns at the embers of post-mortem dissections in the form of fictionalized realities quite far from engaging in anticipatory predictions of traumatizing holocausts that prey on human beings. In their category one finds also Africa’s greats such as Ahmadou Kourouma, who fictionalized the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars and that of Ivory Coast in his novels *Allah n’est pas obligé* and *Quand On Refuse On Dit Non* respectively. Isidore Okpewho’s *The Last Duty* and Festus Iyayi’s *Heroes* are also post-crisis novels of the Nigerian civil war. These works could not be forgotten in a hurry for the gory physical and psychological accounts into which they dig. Now cut off from gargantuan predictions of serious dimensions, African literature could not as such serve as preventive medicine to social upheavals and so protect society from impending rabid human and natural convulsive hiccups of the eschatological order. So, until our writers realign and redirect their creative powers toward forecasting disasters through powerful creative intuition and observation of societal evolution and dynamics, until African writers become watch-men stalking the covert gathering of natural and artificial catastrophic forces via literary preview, and unless they develop strong pro-active vision, mishaps may, perhaps, continue to befall our nations, continent and peoples. This very default should therefore be the first thing any critic should point out in the event of *Say You’re One Of Them (SYOOT)* and *After the Flood (ATF)*.

Summary of *SYOOT* (360 pages)

Uwem Akpan’s *SYOOT* is a collection of five stories which include *An Ex-mass Feast (AEF)*, *Fattening for Gabon (FFG)*, *What Language Is That (WLIT)*, *Luxurious Hearses (LH)* and *My Parents’ Bedroom (MFB)*.

it is a literary tour of Africa in which the author portrays the most gruesome murders of innocent and defenseless people in Africa under the guise of ethnic and religious provocations based on misguided, uncompromising ideologies of exclusion. In *AEF*, the narrator’s (Jigana’s) mother, Mama, in a bid to trace the genealogy of the family, informs us of its history and the crisis that swallowed her father: “she began with her father, who had been killed by cattle rustlers, before she ran away to Nairobi and started living with Baba. She called Baba’s mother, who came to Nairobi when her village was razed because some politicians wanted to redraw tribal boundaries”(18-19). In *FFG*, Fofu Kpee reneges the agreement entered into with child-traffickers, Big Guy and Ahouagnivo and he is killed. Kotchikpa, his nephew, victim of the agreement notes: “The other three descended on Fofu with sticks. The blows rained on him until he fell, his hands wrapped around his head, which was almost in between his legs. He writhed and took the beating without a sound, except for an occasional groan. Yewa and I did the crying” (141). *WLIT* deals with Christian and Moslem conflict in Ethiopia. This is another

event in the story that indicates the strained relationship between Muslims and Christians in the country. The reader notices the muffled expression of grief for the continent in the narrator's address of Haddiya, who is reading a map: "Your eyes came to Africa, our continent" (182). In *LH*, the fictitious town of Khamfi ruptures into religious violence as Muslims move in to enforce *Sharia* law. Jubril, the narrator whose right wrist is chopped for stealing a goat narrates: "In this part of Khamfi, it is not even permissible for a man to carry his wife, daughter, or sister on his *okada* or bicycle" (194). Referring to passengers in the bus who are watching TV images, Akpan declares:

The Khamfi they saw that evening was the corpse capital of the world. Churches, homes, and shops were being touched. The sharp unblinking eye of the news camera poured into images into the darkening bus, bathing the refugees in a kaleidoscope of color. Jubril could sense this effect behind his eyelids as the camera zeroed in on charred corpses sizzling in electric blue flames. Cries of fury poured into the bus from the TV screens heightening the agitation of the refugees (235).

The author yet reserves the main shock of this story in the buses coming down from the north to pick other passengers stranded half-way to the east:

When the door opened, a low cry emanated from the crowd. What they saw jolted them, pushing them back. Apart from a few front seats, the bus was full of dead bodies, and there was blood everywhere. The seats were strewn with corpses of every shape and size: children, women, and men. The aisle was impassible, with bodies piled high as the seats. It was as if someone had gassed a crowded bus. Most of the bodies had wounds, and some were burned. There were also body parts (305).

Akpan's collection ends with *My Parents' Bedroom (MFB)* based on the Rwandan genocide, in which a Tutsi mother instructs her daughter, Monique thus: "say you're one of them, OK?" (327) while she disappears into the fog of night before the approach of rattling Hutu militia. The little girl notices familiar church members in trepidation among the crowd: "Our church usher, Monsieur Paschale, is humming and chanting and wears a bandanna. Mademoiselle Angeline, my teacher's daughter is dancing to the chants, as if to reggae beats. She gives a thump-up to Monsieur François, who is the preacher at the nearby Adventist church" (331). Thus, Monique intuits the presence of invisible phantoms in the house through their "rasp breath", and strange enough, blood begins to trickle down the walls with neither parent ready to tell her that human beings (Tutsi victims) are in the ceiling, groaning. She is to witness the most horrific scene the next day the death squad apprehends her parents and her uncle Tonton André snarls at her father: "You were with us when I killed Annette yesterday. My pregnant wife. You can't keep yours" (349). With this the crowd finally coerces her father to kill her mother. Monique narrates:

"My husband, be a man,..." "My husband, you promised me." Papa lands the machete on Maman's head. Her voice choked and she falls off the bed and onto her back on the wooden floor. It is like a dream. The knife tumbles out of Papa's hand. His eyes are closed, his face calm, though he's shaking. Maman straightens out on the floor as if she were yawning. Her feet kick, and her chest rises and locks as if she were holding her breath. There's blood everywhere—on everybody around her. The blood overflows her eyelids, and Maman is weeping red tears. My bladder softens and pee flows down my legs toward the blood. The blood overpowers it, bathing my feet (350).

Criticism of SYOOT

A reader who perhaps feels much pain for the way facts are presented in *SYOOT* posts this reaction on the Internet: “I’m so angry with this book I could spit. I can’t even rate it. I’m so angry with it. I certainly would not recommend it (even though I think everyone should read it). It is an important book to read. I’m glad I read it even though it was the most horrific, awful, despairing, bleak, pessimistic, horrific, sad thing I’ve read...ever”(<http://www.goodreads.com>). Nnolim writes on *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*:

Armah’s philosophic pessimism places him in the rank of writers we truly call ‘representative’. He is one of those who articulate in bold language what others are too modest or too nice to put in print. At a time, one must express revulsion at the insensitivity in Armah’s language in which there is a lack of discriminating taste, and one must say, a lack of class (127).

Nnolim’s admonition strictly applies only to Armah’s novel, but it can also be applicable to Akpan’s *SYOOT* because both works seem to have common kinship for making fiction appear too real. According to Macherey, for literature, a direct reflection of the object makes it no longer a distortion of reality, which should be the major objective of literary art. Eagleton sheds more light on this: “For Macherey, the effects of literature are essentially to deform rather than to imitate. If the image corresponds wholly to the reality (as in a mirror), it becomes identical to it and ceases to be an image at all. The Baroque style of art, which assumes that the more one distances oneself from the object the more one truly imitates it is for Macherey a model of all artistic activity. Literature, then, one might say, does not stand in some reflective one-to-one relation with its object. The object is deformed, refracted, dissolved—reproduced less in the sense that a mirror reproduces its object...”(51). This is exactly the problem, I think, is with the epic short stories contained in *SYOOT*. It is the inability or outright lack of the artistic will to transform reality into a fictitious world. Some of the stories are too long which factor affects their coherence and unity. Lindsay Barnes notes:

What seemed wasteful in Akpan’s book was the way that the lengthiest stories were the least effective. Perhaps, it was their length that diluted them, perhaps if they had been shortened to the size and style of the stories that impacted me the most, that left me what felt like a taste of experience of shock, they would have felt like less of a chore to read (<http://www.goodreads.com>).

However, in *SYOOT*, Akpan exposes hidden motives behind the actions of religious zealots. For instance, Musa and Lukman’s description of Jubril, their bosom friend and creditor, as an untrue Muslim and their subsequent attacks on him reveal the complex nature of the disturbances especially when religion becomes a smokescreen for settling personal scores (Akpan:2009:220,222). Amakiri notes:

The deepest tragedy of the history of religions is that the very movements that should bring human beings closer to each other and to their ultimate source and goal have time and time again become forces of division. In one conflict after another around the world, religious convictions and interpretations of revelation have been used and abused as justifications for violence (531).

Again, the dimension of the crisis in *LH* which can deny someone government contract offer because one is not courting weird *Sharia* beard rips open the human face of these religious

follies (223). Akpan submits that these are farces, yet they cause the greatest losses of human lives and huge material damage to society. Such act of irrationality should therefore be condemned and stemmed failing which social or national survival will be difficult.

Summary of *ATF* (193 pages)

The major character, Sade, a nurse, is caught in a web of agony and odious hate and fate; she thinks she has lost her three month old baby boy, Tomi and a house help, Beauty to the deluges. She passes through ghoulish experiences, unbearable prodigal reproach and emotional stress. She is sacked by her employer, City General Hospital (64), for abandoning her shift that fateful night to attend the birthday party of Nana Okolie, a colleague in the hospital while the husband is on a business trip (5-7). Her former date, now Assistant News Editor of the *City Echo* and gossip columnist, Sam Boyo, writes about Sade: ‘MOTHER DANCES AS BABY DROWNS’ (57). In the story, he also adds that Sade is caught sleeping with Nana’s boy friend, James. Sade’s husband, Stanley Lala could not bear it and divorces her. After a period of self-isolation in her parents’ house, she is convinced to take a new appointment at the Christian Medical Centre (C.M.C.); there she faces huddles as the director, Pastor Adeoye makes amorous advances at her (25-26), plus another *City Echo* saga: “EXPELLED NURSE NOW IN PRIVATE HOSPITAL” (26). She protests against this relentless maligning of her character, storms the newspaper house, meets with envenomed Boyo, but it turns out a fence-mending visit (26-29). While she picks the remnants of her life together, Pa and Ma Lasisi, a childless couple, come across their baby, now called Moses, who is floating on a plastic tub [into which Beauty drops him before she drowns (42)]. They take him to the Baptist Medical Centre (B.M.C), Ife, avoiding Ibadan because of their intention (17-22; 51-52). The couple has an accident, the man dies, and the woman, before her own death, confesses and entrusts Moses to the care of Dr Graham (69-70). Sade falls in love again with Boyo. Nana, who is secretly dating Stanley, now a very rich man in Lagos, having won a fifty million Naira contract, supports this relationship to pave way for herself and Stanley (87). Sade resigns at C.M.C. to be free from the randy pastor; and next she has an unsuccessful wedding with Boyo (122-127). After this disaster, Sade, to fight shy of Ibadan, takes another route to Ife, where she accepts yet another appointment from B.M.C. She becomes ‘born again’ and joins a charity group to visit the prison where she meets Stanley Lala again (4; 159), who is clamped into jail for his company, LATOM wins a contract to widen the Ogunkpa and fails to do a good job. Another storm sweeps across Ibadan, killing people and destroying inestimable property worth to do him in (100; 104; 142-145). One day, Sade sees the tub that belongs to her former matrimonial home in a dry-cleaner’s shop (173). That leads her to embark on a desperate journey to trace Tomi, who has been taken by the Grahams on transfer to Kano (175). Dr Graham has left the country from B.M.C. Kano and hands Moses over to his servant Paul Shelima, who in turn has retired and gone to his village (179). On getting to Fara Kwai, the family refuses to listen to Sade’s tales; at night, she steals the baby (181-186). On her return journey, she is caught in Ibadan-bound train following a tip-off. The baby is recovered; Sade is clamped into jail (188-190). Fortunately, Stanley is free from detention and he traces Sade to the B.M.C., Ife, where he learns the good news. He gathers the essential documents from the hospital and takes a flight to Kano, accompanied by his lawyer (191-193).

Criticism of *ATF*

Wale Okediran’s *ATF* similarly lacks that mutation necessary for an object that is bound to become a literary creation through the tinkering craftsmanship of an artist, the consequences of which are this melodramatic portrayal of reality in a supposedly *de facto* fictional world. In

this novel, Okediran allows the harrowing emotions of flood victims to pour like the stupendous floods themselves into fiction in a way that makes the reader to wonder if one is actually in an imaginary universe. Here a very blurred and graphic painting of the empirical begets fiction.

Irony as Technique and Theoretical Framework

Irony is a critical idiom that generally highlights the antithesis underlying a message and its interpretation. It is the contrast or contradiction between a linguistic terminology, speech or situational event and the audience. Irony therefore is built around the structure of semantic import. According to Booth, anything that undermines clarity and brings out the negation in every affirmation is ironic (Maduka 139). Holman, on the other hand, defines irony as

A broad term referring to the recognition of a reality different from the masking appearance. Verbal irony is a figure of speech in which the actual intention is expressed in words which carry the opposite meaning. Irony is likely to be confused with sarcasm but it differs from sarcasm in that it is usually higher, less harsh in its wording though in effect probably more cutting because of its indirectness (279).

Irony floats on a triple paradigm. The first is the speaker or the speech or the text or the semiotic symbol or the social phenomenon that produces meaning. The second is the interlocutor or the audience of the speaker within the same text that misconstrues the intended meaning, while the third is the reader or the witness to the misunderstanding between the speaker and his interlocutor. This third paradigm is competent enough to distil or glean this intended meaning different from the apparent meaning. Speaking further on the function of irony, Holman adds that

Characteristically, it speaks word of praise to imply blame and words of blame to imply praise, though its inherent critical quality makes the first type much more common than the second. The greatest effectiveness of irony as a literary device is the impression it gives of great restraint. The writer of irony has his tongue in his cheek; for this reason irony is more easily detected in speech than in writing since the voice can through intonation easily warn the listener of a double significance (279).

There are several kinds of irony such as structural irony—structural feature in a work marked by duplex meaning and caused by the invention of a “naïve hero” (Abrams 142). Sophoclean or tragic irony refers to a situation whereby the fate of legends and kings in ancient Greek tragedies is known in advance to the audience (Abrams 144). Ironies of exclusion or inclusion are those which discriminate between values of good and evil and weigh both with equity (Maduka 211). Socratic irony is that which assumes a false posture of ignorance and expects others to instruct it (Abrams 143). Dramatic irony—where the word or act of a character on stage is not understood by him or her, but by the audience (Holman 171). Romantic irony is that for which Booth states that the romantic “spirit and value are violated by the effort to be clear about it” (Maduka 139). In other words, trying to represent reality, the Romantic end up in an illusion by revealing that the author arbitrarily manipulates the characters and their actions (Abrams 144). Other forms of irony also do exist. Abrams comments on the relationship between irony and sarcasm as a close one, thus, “Sarcasm in common parlance is sometimes used as an equivalent of all forms of irony, but it is far more useful to restrict it only to the crude and taunting use of apparent praise for dispraise” (143). In a more serious approach to irony, however, D. C. Muecke in *The Compass of Irony* has taken this technique to a theoretical

height. He compares it to genres like romance, comedy and tragedy (Maduka 140). Muecke is notable for the way he looks at irony beyond the basic idea about irony. In this book, it means

ways of speaking, writing, acting, behaving, painting, etc., in which the real or intended meaning presented or evoked is intentionally quite other than, and incompatible with the ostensible or presented meaning. (The 'real meaning' may be the contrary of the presented meaning or it may be no more than a hinting at a mental reservation. Our definition must likewise be allowed to include not only saying one thing and meaning another.) From the reader's point of view the irony depends upon the felt presence and felt incongruity of both meanings. It is too subtle, occulted, or impenetrable (for him) if the real meaning never appears, and it falls short of irony if the pretended meaning has no force (Maduka 141).

The three paradigms of irony for Muecke are three planes which include illusion, reality and innocence (Maduka 141). Illusion is the way the victim of irony (he who misinterprets a text or sticks to the unintended meaning) perceives life or the way the ironist (in case there is an ironist) presents life. Reality is the way the third person or the observer perceives life or the way the ironist presents it. These two planes are sustained by the principle of incompatibility. However, there is a way the victim of irony shows signs of innocence since he trusts his perception. That is where the third plane comes in. Besides, when irony is designed to correct bad behaviour in people's vast experiences of life, Muecke calls it corrective irony (Maduka 142). Non-corrective irony is irony for irony's sake. It is an end in itself, whereas the former is a means to an end (Maduka 143). Indeed, this study intends to read *SYOOT* and *ATF* with irony as a literary tool.

The use of Irony in *SYOOT*

Uwem Akpan's novel is deeply ironical in every facet of its episodes. In *AEF*, there is a change of guard in Baba's family when the children become the breadwinners while the parents come under their care and sustenance. Maisha, their eldest daughter prostitutes to earn a living for the family and train Jigana in school (40) by dating old men and white tourists. Jigana and Naema carry the twins Otieno and Atieno on their backs to beg on the street while Mama receives the proceeds at the end of the day and manages them. The parents now revere, fear and respect their children while these show no sign of reverence toward them. The reader is informed that Maisha snubs Mama and sentences her to indignation (31). Jigana humours this abnormal condition using a metaphor: "As Maisha came in, Mama stood aside like a maid, wringing her hands" (30). The narrator describes how Mama takes over the pack of milk Naema buys while plodding the street: "Mama took it carefully in her hands, like one receiving a diploma" (21). On the other hand, Baba's occupation is pick-pocketing (24) and Maisha takes over the moral responsibility of admonishing him. Karume, the taxi driver who brings her home one night becomes a would-be victim as Baba, who comes out to welcome his daughter, sneaks away with the driver's wallet, thanks to the intervention of Maisha. The driver complains:

"where is my money?" he said to Maisha finally finding his voice. "*Haki*, it was on my pocket now, now." Maisha charged forward and screeched at Baba until his stern face crumbled into a sheepish grin. He returned the fat wad of notes, giggling like the twins. The driver thanked her curtly, brushing his clothes with trembling hands (29-30).

Ironically also, the reader discovers that both Maisha and Baba do not enjoy their professions. Baba rebukes Jigana to go to school, wondering whether he wants to be a pick-pocket like him

(24). As for Maisha, the intention to leave prostitution is very clear in the following statement: “I will quit the brothel when I save a bit. I don’t want to stand on the road forever. Me myself must go to school one day...” (16). Irony streaks across the length and breadth of *FFG*. First and foremost, the reader is immersed into the celebrative mood of Fofu Kpee, who is in the church to thank God for blessing him with a *Nanfang* motorcycle. Here, Kotchikpa narrates the flash point of the church service:

Like two acolytes, Yewa and I stood at the head of the procession, our dance steps at once shy and excited, not completely in sync (sic) with the heavy drums and singing. Then came Fofu and *Nanfang*. He held the bike majestically, like a bride. Still, from time to time Fofu Kpee managed to stoop low and gyrate and flap and gather his *agbada* (58).

All kinds of food items and fruits are brought before Pastor Concord Adeyemi, with well-wishers swelling the rank of the procession and the clergy man prays and gives his blessing to make the day a fulfilled one for Kpee’s family of three. The question is this: is this bike not what is given in exchange for Kotchikpa and Yewa, who have been sold to the child-trafficker, Monsieur Ahouagnivo (92), through Big Guy, his agent? “When...*quand?*” Big Guy asked. “You *dey* make my job difficult *o*. De agreement *na* for five children. Give us de children” (78). The impression given to the congregation is quite remote from the truth and what is going on and the children who are dancing do not know they have been sold. Ironically, Big Guy, who is celebrating with Kpee and is his business partner at the moment is his potential killer; and the *Nanfang* that is the symbol of joy is indeed the source of pain, utter regret and death: “But if you tell anyone I go kill you.” “We understand,” one digger said. “How deep you want dis?” “Deep enough to bury Smiley Kpee *complètement*,” Big Guy said’ (160). Even before Kpee’s death the enthusiasm that greets his relationship with Big Guy has faded and in its place is worry and anger and Kpee has no option than to breach the agreement and it proves fatal. He tells Big Guy: “I go pay back. I dey make some money with *Nanfang*. Just gimme time, *na mi tán*” (130). Big Guy refuses outright. What shock and irony that strikes the little children to discover that those they call their teachers in school are just members of the trafficking network! While Kpee receives deadly blows for trying to escape with them, Kotchikpa hears a voice they recognize: “It was Monsieur Abraham, our games master. I turned and looked him straight in the face. In the moonlight, he was smiling, his white teeth gleaming” (142).

Reacting to the narratives in *SYOOT*, Kamalu notes: “Apart from the identity of discourse participants and the location of events which are fictionalized in some instances, every other detail of the texts is a factual account of the 1994 and 2000 ethno-religious crises in Rwanda and Nigeria” (1). If the events of *LH* are factual, it baffles one to imagine how a northerner like Jubril, despite the stories he tells about his origins, could sojourn to southern Nigeria during a religious demonstration of that dimension since such situations in the history of the nation force everybody to run to their native places or face the threat squarely where one resides. This is a very strong irony that beguiles the story. For Jubril with the identity of a Muslim and Hausa accent to be addressed as a southerner and an indigene of Ukhemehi in Delta state is very difficult to imagine (211). It is also not easy to reconcile the attitude of Muslims (represented by Jubril) who are afraid of seeing nude pictures and people drinking alcohol on the screen (201), but could not see greater evil in chopping off someone’s hand for stealing a goat or in murderous massacre of innocent souls on a false account of religion (206). Similarly, an ironical distinction is drawn between Jubril’s “dirty and jagged’ fingernails and Ijeoma’s “crimson nail polish” (201). Akpan uses the same device to bring out the real desire in Jubril, who, moreover, secretly lusts for Ijeoma’s “long beautiful legs”, whereas he hates naked

women (201). When Yusuf is martyred, Jubril lurches into a safe zone, watching him being “stoned to death” for professing the religion of the south (216). The same Jubril submits himself for punishment in line with *sharia* law to show his strong faith in Islam, for which he receives approbation (219). Again, he is rankled that Allah blesses the infidels in the south with oil wealth and “he would feel anger rise in him” (244). When Jubril is in danger, he ironically discovers that the same south he abhors is a haven where he could run to and easily claim identity and citizenship and that momentarily purges him of his hatred for the region. In all these, Akpan shows Jubril’s hypocrisy and that of Muslims like him. The southern refugees in the bus gasp over three instances of ironical situations. First, they could not fathom out why southern fuel gets into the hands of northern *almajeris*. Akpan writes: “What riles them was the sight of free fuel in the hands of *almajeris*” (235). In addition to that, Emeka accuses the politicians and wonders “who *dey* give dis Muslim kids dis fuel?” “...to burn our people and businesses!” (236). The climax is attained when the stranded commuters expect to see passengers in one of the buses arriving from the north and it turns out to be corpses strewn all over the bus interior (305). In *MPB*, a few cases stand out. Monique’s uncle, Tonton André, who hates her father’s uncle, the wizard “even more” is now in alliance with him during the crisis (328, 333). She observes: “Tonton André is now friends with the wizard” (336). Christians who preach love are among the irate mob, playing most active roles (331, 334). The parents’ apparent lack of care and change of mood is demonstrable in Papa’s urging Monique to hush her good morning (336) and Maman’s inability to look into the direction of her children (341). There is also the presence of people who cannot be seen which Monique refers to as ghosts. ““Ghosts! Ghosts!” I scream, diving toward Papa” (342). Finally, the killing of Maman by Papa is most ironical and the strangest of all the horrors in the collection (350).

The use of Irony in *ATF*

Stanley Lala is introduced for the first time in the discussion that goes on while Nana and James come to pick Sade to the party. He is described as a civil engineer. Contrary to ethics of his profession, he is said to have built his personal house near the bank of a river that has a history of convulsive overflow (4). Events reveal that this is done without adequate measures. Sade reechoes her worry over the unsafe site of the building when she replies to Nana, who tries to allay her fears during the fateful night: “You know the house isn’t far from the river” (5). Stanley proves he is not an experienced engineer, but a charlatan when his company, LATOM does a shoddy job in the contract awarded to it and other companies to create artificial dams that could forestall further flood disaster (104). In a way, irony features again in the advent of the second flood. While the storms gather in the novel (145-148), we see Rev. Dada, Sade’s father gather his family to sing a hymn, calling the Lord to disperse the clouds: “Master, the tempest is raging. The billows are tossing high. The sky is o’ shadowed with darkness. A deep in the angry deep. They all shall swiftly obey my will. Peace be still, peace be still. They all shall swiftly obey my will. Peace, peace be still” (142). This very meditation reveals the mood in which the inhabitants of Ibadan find themselves whenever the rains threaten and the skies grow grim and dim. With huge government expenditures in the contracts, yet the engineers do their usual window-dressing and Stanley, who thinks he has lost a son to the storms, is not different. A greater part of his contract funds ironically is diverted to partying in Lagos and sleeping with whores among whom is Nana, who has gone there with a relation, Clara, the prostitute; and from there also she, most astonishing to Sade, takes over Stanley in a romance that could not last, anyway (87). The request by the people for the chief priest of Ogunkpa to intervene with sacrifices during the first flood has a strong message for the reader: ““Baba, please help us! Stop this madness’, they pleaded. The chief priest, a wizened old man, tottered

to the shrine which was next door to his house. The anxious crowd watched as he started a small fire into which he sprinkled a dark powder and chanted some inaudible words” (9). Given these incantations and the prayers offered by the Dadas in which God and the Ogunkpa divinities seem not to answer, Okediran wonders how in Africa of the 21st century some people still seek divine intervention in the face of existential challenges that require empirical solution. Man is most often the architect of his own problem on earth. And the author writes that “different kinds of refuse which the inhabitants of the city had dumped into the river bed, also impeded the river’s smooth flow and made the flood spread into any available space along the river” (8). In spite of this, the same inhabitants want to rely on the metaphysical powers instead of channeling their energies and potentials toward overcoming artificial problems they create for themselves. Similar irony occurs in Kourouma’s *Monné, Outrages et Défis* where the people of Soba resort to sacrifices to be able to resist French invasion (25). Ironic situations that occur in the novel *ATF* are of higher and lower timbres. The dancing and gyration goes on at a corner and young people are rocking away to the swaying rhythms of the music at the other in the name of a birthday party. Unknown to them, walls, poles, buildings, roads are collapsing at break-neck speed as they are in wild spree. The reader imagines the ambiance when the narrator brings one to the point when Sade prepares her mind to enter into the spirit of the dance (5-6). The gleeful mood is only generally punctuated at a time the generator set gets switched off through one technical problem or the other and the gliding bodies suddenly screech to a halt not without the normal protests that greet such scenes (41). The venue of the party is finally hit by the storm and it begins to give way like others. At this juncture, the party attendants become conscious. The author confirms this: ‘The screaming and cursing of the previously happy crowd could not stop the flood washing away the house...’(41) On the other hand, the reader must ask questions why no concern is shown on the part of Beauty’s safety by both Stanley and Sade because it seems quite ironical. The search was strictly for Tomi and no mention of the poor girl throughout the period until her corpse is found in the mortuary by chance and Stanley shows no emotion of sorrow (56). This is also clear in Sade’s one-sided moaning while she rummages in the rubbles: ‘No! No! it’s not true!’ Flinging away the umbrella, she ran into the muddy flood crying. ‘My baby, my baby, my baby!’ she wailed as she stumbled through the shallow water’ (48). Even when she is coming, her prayer is centred on Tomi alone as if he is the only child she leaves in the house. The narrator notes this: ‘‘Oh God! Please keep my baby safe for me,’ she silently prayed as she started crossing the bridge’ (46). It rather remains a mind-bugging thing to remember that Beauty passes away almost a saint and heroin who has made a supreme sacrifice to save Tomi without being acknowledged. Another streak of irony is seen in the episode of Sade’s movement to the cemetery after her botched wedding with Sam Boyo and other developments in her life that ensue. She is meditating on these vicissitudes including the disappointments from both ‘friends and foes’ when, along the market area, a dealer flaunts shoes before her, followed by a fishmonger who in addition reminds her that the fish she is selling are fresh from the river. The word river hurls itself at her with a rude shock. The reader notices a kind of metaphysical mind distance that separates her from these hawkers’ hails which is ironical enough to deserve attention.

CONCLUSION

The fusion of fiction and reality is not new in literature and it is not only an African experience, but a universal phenomenon. History of literature has a rich record of this kind of works which is fast becoming a sub-genre. For instance, there is Influenza Novels in Europe such as Albert

Camus's *La Peste*; European Empire and Royal Dramas like Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar and Hamlet*; and Exploration or Discovery novels epitomized by Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Africa, indeed, is bustling with Historical works among which are Chaka novels, Dramas and Poetry, *Ovonranwen Nogbaisi*, Almamy Samory novels as can be seen in Kourouma's *Monné, Outrages et Défis*. In Nigeria today, it is possible to categorize some works as Crude Oil or Environmental literature which deals with oil exploration and its hazardous impact on host communities and the ecosystem; there exist also King Jaja of Opobo Dramas, Flood and Disaster novels, Religious and Social Crises novels. All these could serve as a marriage of facts and fiction. However, Akpan's *SYOOT* and Okediran's *ATF* come under works of fictionalized reality. They are unique in their graphic, gory and vulgarized accounts, details and documentation of reality, especially terror and violence which, at one hand, is provocative and, on the other, capable of undermining the subtlety of art or its sublime simulation of reality. The prophetic role rather than the post-mortem review which this study advocates, in my candid opinion, has the capacity to enhance literature's creativity and imagination. Otherwise, the risk that lies ahead is that literature may lose its intrinsic value, the primordial, but quintessential function, and drift away to the margins of vapidness. And if it is denatured in the process, if the trend continues, literature with time could ultimately come in collision course with such a discipline as history, mainly providing archival records. Besides, this study has taken time to look at irony in the narrations of both authors. It has revealed as such that irony as technique simultaneously avails itself, perhaps in every context in discourse, of both literary and social functions. When it wants to render a social function such as criticism of society, it deploys other techniques to work for it. For instance, if irony does not use satire as a tool, what purpose will it have served Akpan to writes this about Kpee's thanksgiving service: "...He has been a faithful Christian over the years, OK. Don't bring had luck to his *Nanfang*". "God forbid, God forbid! The church hollered' (60). It is also able to bring out the hypocrisy in individuals like Jubril, Paschale and François, the Christians in *MPB*. It again brings out the same hypocrisy in the way people practice the two religions—Christianity and Islam. In *ATF* the same use of satire by irony to render social functions is clear enough. The people of Ibadan like any other primitive society are portrayed as those who are out of touch with the modern world or empirical reality. Similarly, the irony in Stanley Lala's professional practice satirizes quackery and corruption in society. Again, the insensitivity of the Lalas to the condition of Beauty in the house as a maid and to her humanity and finally death remains very critical for its display of ungodly selfishness. In continuation of this function, irony reveals some salient facts in the works in analysis. One, it reveals lies in a very humorous and telepathic manner, for instance, the source of Kpee's *Nanfang*. It also causes shock to the reader (the witness) and the characters as in the case of Kotchikpa and Yewa versus their teachers in school. In *MFB*, the same shock runs over Monique caused by the friendship of Tonton André and the wizard and the action of the Christians. All in all, irony as a device is effectively used in the narration of *SYOOT* and *ATF* which are wonderful books that offer critics food for thought any day, especially for their devotion to metaphysical violence. If Khamfi is 'the corpse capital of the world' (235), *SYOOT* and *ATF* are the horror capital of the literary world.

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