

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA AND INTELLIGENCE ON LITERATURE

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**ABSTRACT:** *The influence of the media and intelligence on world literature has been immense. There is a close relationship between the media, intelligence and literature. Although the media helps the writer to make his work reach a wider audience quickly, the intelligence officer who is more of an adversary reports his activities to the state that uses it for a higher goal. The media watches everyone including the writer, but who watches the activities of the media during agenda-setting, sensationalism and yellow journalism? This is the thrust of this paper.*

**KEYWORDS:** Media, Intelligence, Literature

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### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the journalist and the writer is like that of two individuals on the same route aspiring towards the same goal. This journey which dates back to a long period of time will be better explained if both roles are more deeply analyzed. The third ally, who is more of an adversary than a friend is the intelligence officer, the third eye of the state gathering secret information about the mission of the writer and the journalist. The journalist reports among other things the work of the writer and his society while the writer simulates and dramatizes the work of the journalist and the activities of the state officials and their leaders. It is for this reason that the state watches over literary and artistic productions.

While the media communicates the human condition in its raw state with a mandate to inform, educate and entertain, literature is very much on the same route, trying to achieve the same objectives. In the same way, while intelligence is processed news or information, literature is simulated or dramatized news. Intelligence is processed news for the greater objective of running the state. In a sense, news, intelligence and literature have many things in common.

It has been said that the media as the fourth estate of the realm is the watchdog of the society. Thomas Jefferson in agreeing with this when he highlighted the importance of the media to governance in his 1787 letter had said: "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government I should not hesitate to prefer the latter." (Qtd in Baran (1919:116) In other words, the media is a crucial partner for effective governance. The media is needed for highlighting government programmes and to show policy thrust. A people aware of government programmes are more likely to support the government.

The writer is in partnership with the journalist in reporting poverty, promoting socio-political justice and cultural emancipation. Although literature can be its own advertiser, the media can make the work of the writer reach a wider audience quickly and prepare public opinion for its reception. Thus, both the journalist and the writer are immersed in the struggle for the liberation

of the society, though in varying degrees, depending on the commitment of both individuals. For the writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'O :

“What is important is not the writer’s honesty and faithfulness in capturing and reflecting the struggles around him, but also his attitude to those big social and political issues. It is not simply a matter of a writer’s heroic stand as a social individual-though this is crucial and significant-but the attitude and the worldview embodied in his work which he is persuading us to identify vis-a-vis the historical drama his community is undergoing. What we are talking about is whether or not a writer’s imaginative leap to grasp reality is aimed at helping, or hindering, the community’s struggle for a certain quality of life free from all parasitic exploitative relations. We are talking about the relevance of literature in our daily struggle for the right and security to bread, shelter, clothes and song, the right of a people to the products of their sweat. The extent to which the writer can and will help in not only explaining the world but in changing it will depend on his appreciation of the classes and values that are struggling for a new order, a new society, a more human future, and which classes and values are hindering the birth of the new and the hopeful. And of course it depends on which side he is in these class struggles of his times” (2007:478)

While Ngugi has a Marxist angle to his submission, the bottom line is : In what level of commitment is the journalist or the writer in the liberation and development of his society?

Agenda setting is a part of news gathering; the media attacks of government policies keep the government on its toes and in the process bring out what is desirable in the society, for sanction or correctional purposes and to work towards a free and egalitarian society. The media could through its reportage pre-empt the government, could make it bulk or totter and during elections could set up an unpopular candidate who could later do well in the election; a truism that portrays the idea that the pen is mightier than the sword.

The media could change the direction of literature by carrying strong views of writers and even those of government. For instance, the opinion of the Nigerian poet, dramatist and Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka neutralized the Negritudine obsession with African past, beauty and blackness with his timely comment. Soyinka opposed Negritude for its defensive network, arguing that the tiger does not proclaim its tigritude: “A tiger does not proclaim its tigerness, it jumps on its prey”. In the same vein, Jean- Paul Sartre while analyzing the Negritude movement in an essay in *Black Orpheus* said that Negritude was “anti-racist racism” which was necessary for the goal of racial unity. Keorapatse Kgositsile criticized Negritude movement for its white centredness and opined that this would strangulate it and prevent it from evolving new kinds of perception that would deliver black people and art from white conceptualizations. All these were reported in the media which helped to carry the message to the four corners of the world.

Similarly notable Pan Africanists like Kwame Nkrumah, W.E B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Paul Robeson, Jomo Kenyatta, Bob Marley, Henry Sylvester Williams, Edward Wilmot Blyden etc all relied on the media to propagate Pan Africanism which greatly influenced world and particularly African literature.

In taking a long look at the aim and achievement of Negritude or Black Consciousness Movement, one must look at the words of President Kwame Nkrumah and see how the government can use

both the state apparatti and its media to forge a new direction and determine the direction of African and world literature. Kwame Nkrumah made the statement on the occasion of the formal opening of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana:

“In studying the arts, however, you must not be content with the accumulation of knowledge about the arts. Your researches must stimulate creative activity; they must contribute to the development of arts in Ghana and in other parts of Africa; they must stimulate the birth of a specifically African literature which, exploring African themes and the depth of the African soul, will become an integral portion of a general world literature. It would be wrong to make this a mere appendage of world literature.

In this way, the institute can serve the needs of the people by helping to draw new forms of dance and drama, of music and creative writing that are at the same time closely related to our Ghanaian traditions and express the ideas and aspirations of our people at this critical stage in our history. This should lead to new strides in our cultural development”. (Qtd in Anyidoho17).

In Communist states, there is no clear and dividing line between the media, the state, culture, art and literature as all are streamlined to pursue the same goal: propagating the gospel of socialism. Mao Tse Tung reinforced this at “Talks at the Yen-an Forum” when he says, “In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art’s sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics”. In other words, it is politics that determines the nature of art, culture and class distinction. In their opinion, it is wrong therefore for a writer in such a state to privately express his opinion in the form of freedom of expression. In such a situation, the writer is expected to write according to the wishes of those in power or risk his liberty.

Closely related to this are the endangered groups who could use the opportunity in free states to liberate themselves from oppression like the feminists have done. The media was used and is still being used to canvass for the liberation of women writers from male domination as Ama Ata Aidoo rightly captured in her essay titled “To be an African Woman Writer- an Overview and a Detail”: “We have heard of editors of some well known journals on African literature who routinely refuse good studies on the work of some women writers on the pretext that they ‘are not ready with our special issue on women writers’. Of course, the question again is: why a special issue on the work of women writers, especially as these supposed special issues never come out at all, or once in a half a decade? Maybe it is time we confessed that precisely because of our own unashamed commitment to African nationalism, we feel most bewildered by such slights when they are administered by other Africans”. (Aidoo 2009: 516).

Feminists took up the gauntlet and in no time women literary works are now highly appreciated and accorded their rightful places in African and world literature.

The world as it is cringes under the influence of the media. With only four news agencies providing about 90 % of the total news output of the world press, this influence can be established firmly in AP, UPI, Reuters and Agence France Presse. The television gets the entire audience trapped in its reportage, giving ordinary human event extra-ordinary power and coverage. For instance, the

murder trial of Oscar Pistorius put the world on edge and no one seemed to notice anymore that there were other murder cases in most courts all over the world. The question then was: What was so special about the murder case of Oscar Pistorius that made the world get glued to it? The pull was on the existing social opinion, the agenda set by the Paralympics event already reported where Oscar Pistorius showed extra-ordinary prowess. The deluge of reportage was thus the fallout of the event already reported and the result was like the media that elevated him was now feasting on him.

Opinions vary as to the objectivity of the media. Critics believe the media is largely influenced by those with economic power, those who set them up and those with political power; those as it were who determine policy direction. They argue that the media does not fight those who pay them. Yet this argument is debatable as the media reports of the Watergate Scandal have shown. Not only did President Nixon resign, he could have been jailed had President Gerard Ford not pardoned him. What this gets to show is the extra-ordinary power of the mass media; it can elevate an individual and it can pull him down. Fixative reportage draws worldwide attention to the events like the Boston bombings and the callous attacks of the ISIS, Boko Haram and other insurgents.

Media coverage of African Literature and other literary events has been monumental. The Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) national and state conventions are usually given wide coverage. The same can be said of the prizes given at such events. Thus, hitherto unknown authors suddenly spring up as national and international celebrities after the highly publicized events. This can be said of the NLNG prize for literature, Etisalat prize for literature, Cain Prize and the Booker Prize. Some of the prizes carry as much money as \$300,000.00, a huge amount by any standard particularly when converted to Nigerian currency. Literary texts emerging from such prizes are also given worldwide promotion by journalists who also double as writers and members of the Association.

Yet the media has been accused of sensationalism and yellow journalism. True the media sensationalized the 1984-1985 UK Miners strike during the reign of the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The strike was led by the National Union of Mine Workers, an untouchable union established in 1888. When the Prime Minister's government announced its intention to close 20 mines and in the long run to close over 70 pits, there were mass walk-outs and the long strike began in March 1984. The media made a feast of the event including the Battle of Orgreave between 5,000 mine workers and 5,000 police officers. In the end, the mine workers lost the war and it consolidated the influence of Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative Party. The long political powers wielded with pride by the mine workers and most British trade unions were whittled down by those events. Be that as it may, one thing stood out clearly: The outcome of the events correlated with the media reports earlier, a scenario that showed the agenda-setting power of the mass media who not only deprecated the awesome power of the mine workers but wished it crashed.

On the other hand, if the media sensationalized news in its reportage, what can we say of literature? What is the truth of fiction for instance and how much of the human condition in literature is real and factual? Plato banished the poet from his ideal republic, for painting wrong images and for

being farther from the truth. In his great essay which he titled “The Truth of Fiction” Chinua Achebe tries to reconstruct how much of truth is imbedded in fiction:

“Actually art is man’s constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him; an aspiration to provide himself with a second handle on existence through the imagination. For practical considerations, I shall limit myself to just one of the forms he has fashioned out of his experience with language-----The life of the imagination is a vital element of our total nature. If we starve it or pollute it the quality of our life is depressed or soiled-----The fiction which imaginative literature offers us is not like that. It does not enslave; it liberates the mind of man. Its truth is not like the canons of an orthodoxy or the irrationality of prejudice and superstition. It begins as an adventure in self-discovery and ends in wisdom and human conscience”. (Achebe 2009:107-114).

In conclusion, it cannot but be accepted that the media has tremendous power, to create and to destroy, to set up and to sit in decoy; and the factors pulling the strings are immense. The media is watching everyone but who watches the media? Some have given this role to the courts but even the courts are not immune from its great influence.

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