
Performance as Metaphor for Social Activism: An Assessment of Akeem Lasisi's : *WONDERLAND POETRY*

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Citation: Toyin Shittu (2022) Performance as Metaphor for Social Activism: An Assessment of Akeem Lasisi's : *WONDERLAND POETRY*, *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, Vol.10, No.7, pp.121-136

ABSTRACT: *The performance poetry is one of the traditional performance art forms that literary artists have incorporated into the written mould. Though written performance poetry does not benefit from the physical accompaniment of gestures, dance, and other facial expressions, which the oral form enjoys, the expressive rendering of language in the written performance poetry has almost the same effect as the latter. In Performance poetry, the artist employs his creative ingenuity to educate and entertain the audience with imagistic expressions that address social, economic and political challenges in the community. Akeem Lasisi recreates the traditional essence of performance poetry in his WONDERLAND POETRY through dialogic performance poems in the collection, which are deployed as a satire of the Nigerian society. This paper examined the satire in the written performance poetry and concluded that performance poetry is a literary genre which is channeled towards the ridicule of untoward conducts in the society. In written performance poetry, the readers experience entertainment through artistic use of words and, at the same time, get informed, enlightened and sensitised about the happenings in their society.*

KEYWORDS: performance, metaphor, social activism, Akeem Lasisi's , Wonderland poetry

INTRODUCTION

Performance involves a performer's engagement with an audience at a specific location for entertainment as well as to address social or political themes. The essence of a performance is to sensitise the audience about happenings in the society and to this end, every member of the society looks up to its hosting usually in a village square or a town hall. The audience in a performance includes the high and the low in the society whose attendance is partly an assessment of the aesthetic rendering of the performer's poet and partly an evaluation of his comment on the sociopolitical happenings in the society.

In a performance, the performer, through gestures, dance and rhythmic rendition entertain the audience and appeals to its emotion in order to pass across certain messages. Hence, performance is designed for entertainment and it is equally a platform for societal regeneration and renewal. The performer exploits the medium to address a number of issues that are capable of enhancing social advocacy and ensuring peaceful coexistence in the society.

Performance is popularly performed in poetry and drama, it is one of the platforms for cultural orientation and regeneration. Performance is of folk origin in the preliterate society before the written word. The performer is seen as a professional entertainer who exploits the opportunity of the assemblage of large gathering to lampoon sociocultural and political transgressions in the society. The performers in the preliterate society had two forms of engagement, which were commercial and voluntary. The commercial engagement involved individuals making advance payment for the performance while the performers voluntarily displayed their artistry in a public place in a number of instances.

The technological advancement in contemporary time has enhanced airing of performance on electronic media like the radio, television, YouTube and a host of others. This media do not avail the audience the opportunity of experiencing gesture, dance and facial expressions, which accompany live performances. However, the media have wider reach, which benefit the performer in terms of being known across the ethnic variations.

The Performance Poetry

Performance poetry is specifically composed for an audience at a specific location. It can equally be composed during a performance in which case, the performer entertains the audience with the memorised verse. The term came into popular usage in the 1980s to portray poetry written and/or composed exclusively for performance and not for print distribution. Performance poets use a different style of writing poetry that is convenient for oral presentations before a live audience.

Performance poetry is different from just reading poetry aloud as it involves varying forms of performance strategies with aesthetic essence. The performance poets add their own twists and styles of performance into the genre to make each performance unique. In a number of instances, performance poems had to be memorised and the poets deploy certain devices like rhyme, alliteration, allusions, metaphors, music, rhythm, symbols, metonymy, allusion, imitations of nonverbal sounds, smells, and other perceptions of the senses to further enhance the aesthetics of the poetry. Performance poetry is sometimes performed simultaneously with other elements of signification and in some instances performance poets often incorporate aspects of their personal lives into their performances to effect narrative essence in their poetry.

The performance poets use body language and music while performing the poem. One of the most obvious features of performance poetry is the poets' presence on the site of the performance. The poets, by enunciating their poems before the audience, claims authorship and take responsibility for it. In performance poetry, there is the use of dialects, and accents, which situate the speech of the poet within a particular community.

Written Performance Poetry

Performance poetry is essentially designed for an oral presentation before a live audience but in recent times it has been presented to the readers with similar poetic devices in written form. The written performance poetry becomes a popular genre in contemporary times through the efforts of literary poets with traditional background and who replicate the folkloric essence of the performance poetry in the written performance poems. The performance poems are written with

the audience in mind and this makes them more engaging for the poet who has to create the right scenery and atmosphere for the poems in order to make the readers experience a performance.

In written performance poetry, the poet introduces elements that foreground audience participation and this differentiates the poetry from conventional poetry that is meant to be read and not to be performed. The written performance poetry explicates all the features of written poetry and has more poetic essence, which establish interaction between the poet and the assumed audience. The reader of written performance poem has visual imagery of a poet performing before a live audience and experience aura of dialogue between the poet and the presumed audience.

Akeem Lasisi's *Wonderland Poetry*

The collection contains five movements with two performers, Gbada and Kolade performing interchangeably. The poet, Akeem Lasisi uses these performers to replicate the essence of performance poetry in written poems as the performers reenact performance aesthetics with imaginary audience. The readers through imagery experience a performance occasion involving performers on an assumed podium performing before an audience.

The performers in *WONDERLAND POETRY* take turns to display their artistry in the rendering of traditional performance poetry and they explore the medium to attack identified ills in the society. Gbada and Kolade in their poems, deliver imagistic expressions that have telling effects on the readers' psyche. The duo, in narrative mould, presents their performances with occasional songs and drumming which enhance the performative aura of the art. The songs align with the thematic focus of the poems and it is suspected that the poems will be accompanied with drumming as it is peculiar to the Yoruba traditional performance poetry from which Akeem Lasisi draws his material.

The Oral poetry is an important cultural episteme of the Yoruba people, it evolves in their day to day interaction and in most important occasions like naming, festivals, hunting expedition, marriage, rites of passage oral poets entertain the audience. The professional oral poets have different poems for different occasions and this enhance the acceptability of the art. Isola's submission aligns with this postulation as he says that

...Oral poetry is very important in the life of the Yoruba. Many important occasions call for the chanting of oral poetry. Oral poetry becomes very handy for a writer who wants to create particular moods and atmosphere (493).

The movements in *Wonderland poetry* are with varying thematic focuses through which the performers address a number of sociopolitical challenges in Nigerian and African societies. The title of the collection suggests satire of the Nigerian nation, which the poet inadvertently refers to as a nation where wonders happen. The performers in the collection use different rendering styles that reflect their individual artistry and knowledge of Yoruba norms and nuances. Readers that are not familiar with certain aspects of Yoruba culture are exposed to such and in that vein, poetry serves the purpose of education and enlightenment.

The performers in *Wonderland poetry* treat readers to dual presentations in each of the movements. The movements have accompanying title poems that hint at their thematic focus. The title poems are conventional poems, which are not part of the performance but meant to introduce it. In Movement 1, the title poem entitled “We have stepped out” is an invocation of the earth, which the performers appease in order to have fruitful performance as they step on it.

This earth, My ties with you is tight,
I had appeased your might
With the blood of birth
Plus the unblical (sic) cord as a tenement rite.

WONDERLAND POETRY (1)

Invocation is a cultural cum traditional religious rite of the Yoruba people, it is used to appease a deity whenever a project or task is to be embarked upon. The Yoruba cultural enthusiasts or traditional religion devotees believe that one’s path will be smoothened after carrying out an invocation as the poet does for the performers before the commencement of this performance. Taiwo examines the importance of invocation and submits that it is “... used to plead with a deity to accept a sacrifice so that the deity may favour the person offering the sacrifice...” (87). The invocation in Movement 1 is a reiteration of Man’s relationship with the mother earth which begins from the cradle as a new born’s blood touches the earth and where the umbilical cord is buried. The poet seeks to explore this age-old relationship of the earth with Man to crave for the former’s support in this performance.

The performance starts with an atmosphere of festivity, with massive drumming and dancing to herald its commencement. The drumming is so overwhelming that a performer, Kolade sarcastically appeals to the audience not to be scared of the sound as it is not from a warfare but can be likened to chirping of the Nightingale. Hence, indicating that the performance brings about tranquility in apparent contrast to wide spread hostility ravaging the human race.

The performers start the performance with a prelude that sensitises and stimulates the audience towards the performance. As it is common with such performance in Yoruba land, the performers eulogise God who has the capacity to make the performance a success and emphasise the importance of poetry to human existence since it was at beginning of creation.

From the beginning of the world
Has been the word,
Poetry is the thought
That stands by God!

WONDERLAND POETRY (4)

The above excerpt is a biblical allusion to reiterate the inclination of the performers to supremacy of God. The performers thereafter invoke the spiritual being, the Christian God, through reference to a Psalm in the Bible, and the Yoruba deities. The invocation of the deities is an affirmation of the animist nature of the Yoruba nation and as Kayode observes that “the Yoruba religion comprises the indigenous religions and spiritual concepts and practices...” (281) thus, the performers’ attribution of the Yoruba gods is devotional and it is meant to appease the spiritual being.

This practice is reminiscent of such performances in the Yoruba culture. The essence of this is to solicit for the deities’ guidance and protection as the performers engage the audience in the performance art. The performers’ beginning of the performance in this form is as a result of their awareness of the peculiarity of the people that constitute the audience. Fanon identifies the salient responsibility of a native poet as it is the case in this performance poetry. He submits that: “... the first duty of the native poet is to see clearly the people he has chosen as the subject of his work of art. He cannot go forward resolutely unless he first realizes the extent of his estrangement from them” (182).

The performers through the *Ijuba* (obeisance), identify with the people that constitute the audience and it is of note that among the audience are persons of different callings, persons of differing spiritual dispositions some of whom the performers know have varying receptions to their persons as well as the performance itself. The performers’ demonstration of obeisance to the deities as well as the elders in the society, at the commencement of the performance, is a Yoruba traditional rite meant to make the performance hitch-free and for the audience to pay attention to the performers’ message. Soyinka attests to the Yoruba people’s reference to the deities as precursors to their day-to-day interaction when he says that:

... the Yoruba does not ... fail to distinguish between himself and the deities, between himself and the ancestors, between the unborn and his reality, or discard his awareness of the essential gulf that lies between one area of existence and another. This gulf is what must be constantly diminished by the sacrifices, the ritual, the ceremonies of appeasement to those cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf... (144)

The evocation of the deities and reverence for the elders are what the Yoruba people refer to as *Ijuba* (obeisance) in the traditional parlance. It is a common practice among performers, which the audience understands as the artists’ recognition of the preeminence of the spiritual and cultural essence in the society. The performers continue the *Ijuba* with the praise and evocation of the Yoruba deities, with the awareness that the gods are present to witness the performance. The gods (*Obatala*, *Orunmila* and *Ogun*), that are referenced as the core of the creative verve in the Yoruba cosmology are revered at the commencement of the performance.

The literary giants of Yoruba extraction are the next in the performers’ *Ijuba*. They eulogise both Professors Wole Soyinka and Niyi Osundare, who are seen as the most revered literary artists

among the Yoruba. The performers reiterate the ingenuity and fire brand activism of Wole Soyinka as occasioned by his attitude of singularly holding up a state owned radio station in the 1960s to announce a withheld election result which was won by the opposition party. Similarly, Osundare is celebrated for his craft in singing, drumming and dancing. The duo is celebrated and revered as a result of their unique literary prowess.

The performers' praise poetry is an affirmation of Yoruba peoples' sociocultural practice of eulogising important personalities before commencement of an important event. Adekoya observes this practice among the people and notes that:

An intensely religious people, the Yoruba use praise poetry as a form of worship. Their animist concentration of the cosmos enhances the practice of praising everybody and everything – gods, humans, animals, plants, natural phenomena, heavenly bodies, political events, social processes, rites of passage, ... there is hardly any poetic form in which praise does not feature. Even dirges declaim praise names of death and the deceased. Yoruba culture celebrates the totality of life (187).

The performers conclude the *Ijuba* with the eulogisation of the natural phenomena (the earth, the sky, the wind, the sun and the night). These natural objects, in the reckoning of the performers, are capable of guiding them to making their delivery delightful and their performance eventful. The refrain after every acknowledgement emphasises the humility of the performers and the preeminence of the referred spiritual and temporal beings:

`Ib`a o o
Olo`de `o se` ka` wa` sere`e

Indulgence! Permit our show
The lord of the land

WONDERLAND POETRY (20)

The aforesaid indicates that the performance can only take place after the powers have granted the necessary consent. This style of the performers points out the basic requirement of the art in the Yoruba culture, which aligns with Finnegar's position that:

... within the same culture there may be many set styles of performance designed to suit the different literary genres recognized in the culture. Indeed these genres are sometimes primarily distinguished from each other in terms of their media of performance rather than their content or purpose. In Yoruba poetry, for instance, the native classification is not according to subject-matter or structure but by the group to which the reciter belongs

and, in particular, by the technique of recitation and voice production.(54)

With the commencement of the performance with *Ijuba*, the audience is prepared for the performance and it is assumed that the performers will not encounter any problem in the rendering of their poetry. The practice of *Ijuba* is a confirmation of the metaphysical orientation of the

Yoruba people in believing in the existence of the spiritual beings that are always around to mar the performance or make such performance a reality. Hence, performance poetry encompasses a spiritual essence that is alien to the written form of poetry. Though Akeem Lasisi's *WONDERLAND POETRY* is a written form of performance poetry, the poet is able to recreate the quintessence of the traditional performance poetry in the collection. Thus, the readers are exposed to the Yoruba cultural ethics in the performance poetry even as they read such performance.

Performance as Satire of the Nigerian Nation

The artists explore the basic goals of literature as a veritable medium to comment on the socio-political development in the society. The title poem of Movement 11 underscore the significance of a poetry and the need to accord respect to it.

Wandering

I implore you the fans of the night

Savour my story with Solomon's mind.

My teeth I know are rotten

If I break Kolanut with them,

You can shun

But when I break with them a single poem

Give my stinking mouth a second thought.

WONDERLAND POETRY (24)

The poem states that performance poetry takes place in the night and emphasises why it is important for the audience to accord respect to the poem no matter the personality of the poet.

The performers identify social misdemeanor in the Nigerian nation and subject such to ridicule through satiric elements. The rendering of the poetry bears humorous and sarcastic tones which underline the commitment of the artists to agitate for a just, equitable and egalitarian society. The artists, through symbolic reference, see Nigeria as a nation reeking of nepotism, ethnic bigotry and religious hypocrisy. They expose the pretence of the nation to nationhood and insinuate that the identified ills threaten the continued coexistence of the country. Gbada takes a swipe at Nigeria through subtle remarks:

I know the tale of a secular clan

Where the east is after the soul of South

West pursues its North

Gun at war with pen

And the cross spits on turban like

Belligerent vampires.

WONDERLAND POETRY (28)

The artist sees Nigeria as a nation experiencing disunity at every facet of her existence, with the regions at loggerheads with one another and the nation on the precipice of disintegration. The

political leaders who are saddled with the responsibility of maintaining peace are disdainful of criticism and employ every means to cow any form of opposition against their tyrannical rule. The artist ridicules the two main religions in the country (Christianity and Islam) which are expected to quell the embers of acrimony, but ironically end up aggravating them. Through metonymy (the cross and turban), the artist castigates and ridicules the two religions for encouraging rancorous existence in the country. Thus, the artist uses the performance to address the sociopolitical challenges in the country and the audience is enlightened and informed about contending issues in its immediate society. Seymour, cited in Sekoni, opines that:

Oral narrative performance, like all other speech acts is a communicative system in which a social discourse takes place principally between a narrator/performer and an audience. All instances of such discourse are designed by the performer for an examination of the dominant concerns of the artists' immediate community in particular, and human behaviour and the human condition in general (139).

Gbada reiterates that disunity in Nigeria resonates in all spheres of her existence and that religion, which is expected to heal the wounds, further deepens them. He sees the practice of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria as a demonstration of spurious spirituality that negates the religious' callings of the adherents. He castigates the two faiths as representing the opposite of what they preach and, through humour, ridicules them. To him, both religions contribute to the underdevelopment rather than development of the nation and the numerous challenges the nation goes through deepen disunity in the country.

The crack in the center of the union
Widens daily, like the public ovum
Of a Lagos whore

WONDERLAND POETRY (29)

The military leaders in Nigeria then, who should arrest the nation's drift to the precipice, engage in implementation of divisive economic and social policies which aggravate tension in the land. Kolade ridicules the regime's unconvincing and unjustifiable excuses given any time it increased the pump price of petrol. The performer exposes the insincerity of the regime through the reasons it gave for the unfriendly policy of petrol pump price increase, which is one of the requirements of the Structural Adjustment Policy (S.A.P).

Kolade, thereafter, takes the audience down the memory lane of tyrannical rule of the military era of General Ibrahim Babangida's regime and reveals the totalitarianism of the junta in the incarceration of activists like Gani Fawehinmi, Tai Solarin and others, who condemned the implementation of the obnoxious economic policy of the Structural Adjustment Policy (S.A.P). These and other policies reveal the misrule the Nigerian nation was subjected to during the military era, and the performers (Kolade and Gbada) use the performance to fulfil the social obligation of artists in satirising untoward conducts in the society. Sekoni, in his assessment of the style of performers during performance, submits that:

The performer organizes these actions. To make audience sensation fluctuate and thereby further his interest in the achievement of aesthetic harmony with his audience. While he engages his audience cognitively with the notion of justice, he occupies them emotionally by varying their sensation with images that are capable of producing different sensations.(150)

Gbada goes on to lampoon the junta whose continuous stay in governance has not yielded the desired socioeconomic transformation in the life of the people. Rather, the people have been worse off than the regime met them in the ten previous years. Through irony and humour, the artist condemns the vainglorious recourse of the military to stay in power without achieving meaningful impact in the life of the people.

The king is ten in office
Elegant elephant grasses usurp our farms
Saltless stews on crumbling hearths;
The king is ten tomorrow
We applaud the scavenger's zeal
Of the decade siege.

WONDERLAND POETRY (41)

Gbada echoes the view of critics that the military's incursion into politics in Nigeria is an anathema to the growth and development of the country. The military which claimed that it overthrew the civilian regime due to inept leadership, perpetuated more maladministration than the civilian it ousted. Thus, there is a snag on the political situation in Nigeria owing to endless political debauchery of both the civilian and military administrations. The performer reveals the leadership problem confronting the Nigerian nation through the deployment of humour that insinuates that the political heads in the country make the people worse than they met them on ascension of power. The satirical nature of the performance poetry in *WONDERLAND POETRY* conforms with Dasylya and Jegede's position on the assessment of the characteristics of the satirical poems:

Satirical poems comment on human experience. They lampoon the follies or vices of men by the use of exaggeration, ridicule, sarcasm, irony and humour for the purpose of reducing the subject to absurdity. A satirical poem criticizes actual life in intelligible poetic structure of varying length ... may sound acerbic and biting yet hilarious, witty and elegant, thus compelling the audience to laugh at him/herself. (24)

The rendering of the poem attests to the desire of the performer to educate and inform the audience about the happenings in their society with a view to raising their awareness and enhancing agitation. The readers of the performance poetry understand the performers' message as a wake up call to end the drift of the nation towards the precipice through collective agitation for a new social order.

Sarcasm as Medium of Activism in Performance Poetry

Sarcasm is a creative means of articulating spoken and written utterances which a speaker or writer uses to shield the impact of his or her criticism of persons and institutions. Sarcasm appeals to the

psyche of the listeners who do not only understand the message but, also appreciate the dexterous deployment of language. The audience in a performance is treated to a variety of language use, which makes the performance interesting, appealing and memorable. Sarcasm and other forms of poetic rendering underlie the imaginative and artistic essences of a performer in spoken or written performances.

In Akeem Lasisi's *WONDERLAND POETRY*, the performers add aesthetics to their poetry with sarcastic outpouring of emotive remarks that bother on the political development of the Nigerian nation. The performers take the readers through the unsavoury military era of General Ibrahim Babangida, which introduced a seemingly endless and wasteful transition programme that eventually threw the nation into turmoil. Kolade compares the political transition programme in Nigeria with that of other nations and avers that:

They that are wise
Bank their crowns with merit birds
We, because we are wiser,
Cage our own in Pandora box of military
vagary.

The transition's sinuous street to the
promised paradise
Is befuddled with assassinated bones of
common welfare:

WONDERLAND POETRY (50)

Kolade condemns the hypocritical stance of the then military junta in foisting on the generality of the people an expensive transition programme, and the people for tolerating their undoing for so long. Through various poetic devices, Kolade underscores the quintessence of poetry in deriving aestheticism in language use. Poetry, as a genre, affords the poet the opportunity to explore the repertoire of language to address multifarious issues in his sociocultural environment. This postulation is in line with the position of Egya that, "Poetry prides itself as the prime example of linguistic unorthodoxy. It has the tendency to enshroud familiar things with an unfamiliar expression ..." (2). The performer turns the occasion of the performance to chronicle events and, at the same time, satirises them while poetry is used to advance the cause of the society.

The performers in *WONDERLAND POETRY* have punctured the claim of Egya (ibid) that "poetry seeks not to be a medium for expressing views on issues but a performance of words, a staging of artistic craft, often for sheer aesthetic values ...". Lasisi uses the poetry in this performance to achieve both aesthetic and didactic balance. The performers explore the beauty of poetry to comment on societal challenges, hence, readers are enlightened about issues in the society and, at the same time, they relish the artistic use of words in the poems.

The performers' criticism of the society is multifaceted as they focus on germane issues that border on economic, social and political matters. Every segment of the society is lampooned and the essence is to agitate for equity in the society. In this quest, both the rulers and the led become objects of satire of the performers. Gbada continues the satire of the regime's transition programme through the castigation of the people for their naivety in trading their conscience for the entrenchment of the military's hegemony. Gbada insinuates that the Junta thrived on the connivance of the people in perpetuating electoral fraud through an exchange of their votes for pecuniary gain:

The ballot box here
A mutual box of barter trade,
When naira sneaks in from a fox's holes
Gullible figures ooze out
Like millennial fingers of Noah's flood.(51)

The period witnessed vote buying and other forms of electoral malfeasance which encouraged the military to assume tyrannical stance in determining the fortune of Nigerians in the transition programme. Gbada derisively quotes General Ibrahim Babangida's pompous arrogation of power of succession to himself when he said "I know those who would not succeed me!" (51). Through sarcasm, he mocks the fraudulent transition programme which determines winners and losers prior to election. It was a period that subjected Nigeria to the ridicule of the international community due to the debased transition programme. The performers reveal in their poetry the time the country went through a turning phase in her history.

Kolade completes the sarcastic criticism of the botched transition programme in his denunciation of the role of General Ibrahim Babangida for truncating the election that marked the end of the transition programme through the annulment of the presidential election. He says:

Our priest is a clown
He has turned the shrine a laughing stock.
Dancing naked in a feast of greens
Asking the toad the tale of the tail,
Shooting at the cockerel for crowing at dawn,
Annulling our voice with a wave of will (52)

The performer represents the annulment of the June 12 presidential election in a traditional setting of a shrine and a priest. The seriousness and commitment required in normal shrine and priesthood are lacking in Kolade's metaphoric representation. The metaphor is to the extent that the priest, General Ibrahim Babangida, acted inordinately in the shrine (Nigeria) by unjustifiably unleashing punishment on the guiltless in a bid to justify the unwarranted annulment. The metaphor emphasises the totalitarian and dictatorial outlook of the regime, which was unable to provide any logical argument for the annulment. The action of the head of the Junta (priest) threw the shrine (Nigeria) into chaos, with the polarization of the polity into agitators for the revalidation of the

electoral victory and backers of the annulment. Ethnicity and religious bigotry played out in the division, and the unity of the country was thus threatened.

Kolade relives the determination of the agitators who were bent on confronting the military for the unwarranted annulment of the election:

We will fight this war
If only to win but a virtuous grave
Labeling our cause ‘suicide’
A derision on heroism
...
Our bones shall forever be gay in the earth
Each time our children cry
“Our fathers died for us to be” (52)

Kolade echoes the position of the agitators who dared the consequences to confront the military to validate the election. The agitators were of the view that posterity would vindicate them for taking up the challenge. In the process, the performer sees their action (the agitators’) as a reiteration of the call for the well being of the society. Kolade’s view is one of the essential features of a performance, which is in line with Mvula’s position that:

Psychologically, the performance is an outlet for the shadow part of the eye, the aspects of personality, which the performers have been taught by the society... they can sing about their darkest or suppressed desires and act them out while claiming that the protest or words are not theirs, but those of the characters in the performance.(84)

The period was one of the darkest moments in the annals of Nigeria. The concerned Nigerians and their friends in the international community held their bated breath as they watched the gradual drift of the country to the precipice on account of an avoidable crisis. The agitators were demanding for the validation of the electoral mandate to the presumed winner of the 1993 election while the military stood its ground on the irreversibility of the annulment of the election. Gbada recreates the scenario thus:

We shall remember the golden mandate
And dare the callous mammoths
To their stolen den;
Remember our offspring
Break their armoured tanks (53)

The crisis climaxed in the death in detention of Chief M.K.O Abiola, the winner of the election, and the presentation of the situation exudes anger in Kolade, the performer. In registering his condolences for the deceased victor, he curses the military, under whose watch Abiola died:

Condolences!
He who kills the vulture

Does not live long to see the end of the year,
Who murders the sacred eagle
Does not survive the month of doom.
Will they ever see the graceful rise of another
Moon
They who shot down the giant star?
They have murdered sleep –
These sons of a gun-
Sent to an abrupt grave the bird of peace:
How then can they live long
To see our new sun that must surely rise? (60)

The tone of the above condolence is marred with curse, which is against the tenor of a normal expression of condolence. The tone in the performer's presentation is a function of his mood, brought about by the dictatorial ambience of the then military in its role in the death of Chief M.K.O. Abiola.

The performers take the performance beyond the realm of entertainment as the audience is engaged in the political discourse of an event that shaped their existence. The performance poetry is expected to draw a large number of persons due to the popularity of traditional poetry. Ibitokun points out, "every motive of the African is therefore lyric and poetic, and existence itself, a big poetry" (61). The written form of this poetry elicits similar poetic attraction as the readers have imagistic demonstration of the performers and representation of their messages.

Symbolic and Metonymic Representations in Performance Poetry

The performers explore creative ingenuity to manipulate words to address the audience on socio political development in their community. The performers present their views on issues with varied expressions which enhance the poetic essence of the performance poetry. Symbols and metonymy afford performers the opportunity to address a number of issues in more discreet ways. Through these devices, the performers shift from addressing national affairs to ridiculing conflicts in foreign countries.

The performers' focus on international politics is a way of emphasising that conflicts are not peculiar to the Nigerian nation and that every nation of the world at one time or the other experienced political imbroglio, which, in most instances resulted into full scale war. In discussing these issues, the performers use symbols and metonymy to represent these countries and, in most cases, these devices further deepened the discourse, as the referents assume more layers of interpretation. Kolade, who compares himself to a wandering minstrel, recounts the Gulf War which was fought in 1991 between Iraq and the United States' allied forces. Kolade quarries the rationale for the gruesome hostility, which claimed innumerable lives. He says:

Wandering,
A war whistle from the Persian Gulf
And the world shivered like a quaking orb.

But why, the sudden stir in tongues of men?

WONDERLAND POETRY (64)

Kolade's reference to the war is an insinuation that conflicts were not peculiar to Nigeria and that every nation or region of the world had crises of varying proportions. The poser (But why, the sudden stir in tongues of men?) that he raised is to the effect that the world had experienced relative peace in the past, but recent developments are pointers to the fact that peace had eluded the human race.

Gbada reiterates Kolade's position that there is widespread hostility across the world, and he alludes to the Liberian civil war to buttress his position. The performer recounts the background to the war, the war mongers and its gruesome impact on human race. He insinuates that the war was a needless one, which could have been averted if the egoistic stake-holders had reasoned. In Gbada's narrative, there is a sarcastic reference to the hypocritical stand of the ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) which was set up then as a peace-keeping force:

A carnage of open dragons,
Doe cracking airs from his bunker's mansion
Taylor shooting, slashing with Hitler's prowess
And an unallied Ecomog, unallied Ecomorgue,
Un-allied ecomog, prowling for peace with
desperate guns:

WONDERLAND POETRY (65)

Gbada identifies recklessness and callousness in the conduct of the war-mongers (President Samuel Doe and the rebel war lord, Charles Taylor), whose actions aggravated the pogrom and through the use of Pun, Gbada berates the connivance of the peace keeping force (ECOMOG). The force's abbreviation is rendered in three different ways - Ecomog, Ecomorgue, and ecomog – Gbada derisively uses non-capitalization of the abbreviation to insinuate that the abbreviation had been integrated into the people's lexicon. The first Ecomog is treated as proper noun, the second abbreviation is a ridicule of the peace keeping force, which had metamorphosed into a murderous outfit through the suffix (morgue), while in the third abbreviation, the peace keeping mission is presented as a common noun, which denotes that the force is an ordinary outfit. The repetition of the word 'unallied' preceding the abbreviation is a reiteration of the ridicule of the ironic connivance of the peace-keeping outfit in aggravating the war. Gbada succeeded in chronicling the happenings at the time and his poetry affirms Okpewho's position that:

... the success of a performance is judged fundamentally by the degree to which the artist mirrors the outlook and expectations of this society; and the audience of the performance seems obliged primarily to aid the artist in this task of mirroring.(161)

The audience in his performance poetry are educated, informed and enlightened about the sociopolitical happenings in their society. The performance, thus, goes beyond entertainment; rather it becomes a platform for political education and sensitisation.

CONCLUSION

The performance poetry in written form is a transition of a traditional art of performance to the contemporary poetic form and it is an indication that literary ambience of the Nigerian society is not static. There are concerted efforts of the written literary artists to inculcate elements of traditional performances into the contemporary poetic verve and these have widened the scope of literary engagement in the Nigerian society.

Akeem Lasisi uses the performers (Kolade and Gbada) to address a number of germane issues bothering on national and international affairs, and has thus raised the stake of the performance poetry and elevates it to an enlightened spectrum to achieve social activism. The readers of Akeem Lasisi's poems relish the performers' artistic deployment of language through varying poetic strategies that raise their awareness and enhance their agitation for an improved social order.

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