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Aesthetics in Modern African Poetry

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Abstract:

The socio-cultural motivation and objectives for the creation of poetry by Black Africans has no more significant consideration than the factors that inform their aesthetics and aesthetic devices. In retrospect, the historical context of Modern African Poetry is similar across the African Continent and Black African poets have composed Poetry that speaks vociferously to such factors and issues that have plagued Africans through the long dark ages of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, and post-independence upheavals. The media used to communicate these themes range from songs of lamentation and critical tones to express tropes in direct and indirect poetic language, while at the same time eulogizing traditional African cultural practices and customs from which Modern African Poetry emerges. That is the burden of this paper. It explores 'how' Black African poets have remonstrated in the light of colonial and post-colonial oppression—while showcasing African values. It specifically deals with their exploitive use of language and literary devices that are express in expressing themes of African liberation and African cultural values and ideals. The appreciation is based on selected anthologies of Wole Soyinka, Niyi Osundare, John Aidoo and Lade Wosornu. The paper has four main parts: the historical background of literary aesthetics, Modern African Poetry, aesthetics in Modern African poetry, and Conclusion.

1. Introduction

The idea of aesthetics may be generally said to root from Aristotle's reaction to Plato's views on the essence of the poetic message. Plato's view of poetry is from the utilitarian standpoint, a means to improve man's life. But the works of art during Plato's period were not based on any existing theory of poetry, and therefore Plato's criticism on them was not informed by any known literary principles. It does not follow any system of conventions that make literature possible.

In his reaction to Plato's views on poetry, Aristotle emphasizes form and style in his *Poetics*. He perceives the universal quality of an idea as being inside it, and not outside. A thing is what it is due to its inherent qualities and so it is only the scientifically minded person who can discover and describe it. Hence, he defines and analyzes structures of poetry. Unlike Plato, Aristotle concludes that the morality of poetry is not the crucial issue about it but how true it is as art. This is because correct imitation is a source of pleasure and learning at the same time (Aristotle, *Poetics*; cited in Allan, 1982). This assumption presumably marks the beginning of the aesthetic function of art.

The foregoing view shows that the poetic message has an autonomous status since its importance is not sought for outside it—because no extra-textual considerations are given to judge it. It follows that art is studied for the pleasure it gives but not the moral lesson it teaches. Thus Aristotle emphasizes art for art sake, denouncing Plato's assertions about poetry being immoral and corrupting the youth.

Literary work and poetry for that matter reveals two underlying structures: the deep structure and the surface structure. The former and the latter are the equivalents of the Formalists' *Fabula* and *Sjuzet* respectively. The deep structure is the raw message which is not affected by the stylistic choices of the author. It is nonconcrete and hypothetical, and requires some level of abstraction on the part of the reader to extract it. The surface structure is how the message is organized. It may be described as the representation of the deep structure in a discourse and hence can be used to interpret it though it needs a certain level of systematization. In other words, the surface structure of poetic art gives expression to the deep structure which is the message.

Aesthetics in art focuses on the surface structure which has two dimensions: the verbal construction and the structural construction. The former deals with the writer's choice of words, devices and general language use or diction, while the former deals with how the text is organized. On the basis of form or structure, the Formalist and the Structuralist have a common principle. Formalists maintain that a literary work contains certain intrinsic features, and the theory establishes the

literary qualities in the text. They maintain that a piece of work is distinct and free from its context and author. It is in line with this postulation that Formalism becomes synonymous with Structuralism. K.M Newton, in his introduction to *French Structuralism*, observes that the structuralist critic emphasizes the system of conventions that make literature possible while ignoring authorial or historical considerations... (Newton, 1988). Thus, they are complementary. Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson (1993) note this assertion:

Structuralist agree that literature has a special relationship with language. It draws attention to the very nature and specific properties of language. In this respect structuralist poetics are closely related to Formalism. (p. 109).

According to them, the structuralist themselves emphasize the 'anti-humanist spirit of structuralism in which they emphasize the opposition to all forms of literary criticism in which the human subject is the source of literary meaning (ibid. pp.103—104).

Closely linked with the above, Newton (1988), notes: "The Russian Formalist rejected the unsystemic and eclectic critical approach which had previously dominated literary study and endeavoured to create a literary science". Since it is 'unscientific and unsystemic', the poetic message in traditional criticism is opposed to the 20th century Formalist scientific approach which sees language as means of communication. The essence of aesthetics therefore is to identify the poetic message or the content through its language so that the scientific claims of this era may be practically appreciated. From the Formalist standpoint the basis of literary appreciation is the text, but not the author. In Newton's *Twentieth Century Theory: A Reader*, this view is stated as follows: "In later Formalism, the emphasis shifted from the relation between literary and non-literary language to the linguistic and formal aspects of literary texts themselves". Evidently the text is now the focus of criticism within the context of its linguistic and formal features.

By a conscious study of the literary features of the text, even the literary devices and figures of speech, symbols and images that underlie its composition, one derives meaning and pleasure at the same time. These beautiful literary features of the text, even of poetry are the ingredients of aesthetics.

2. Modern African Poetry

Poetry as an art form has undergone several phases of evolution from pre-colonial to colonial and then to post-colonial eras in most African countries. Modern African Poetry can be said to have developed in the 1930s as part of a literary movement started by Black students in France—known as the negritude movement—aimed at artistically enunciating African cultural values. The most prominent African poets produced by this movement are Leopold Senghor, Birago Diop, David Diop and Bernard Dadie. Modern African literatures have been influenced to a remarkable degree by the continent's long tradition of oral artistry. Before the spread of literacy in the 20th century, texts were preserved in memory and performed or recited. These traditional texts served many of the same purposes that written texts serve in literate societies—entertainment, instruction, and commemoration of special events etc. The collective body of oral texts (folklore) in Africa is often employed for social commentary and instruction and also serve as a potent means of showcasing African values. Angmor (1996:95) indicates this idea with respect to West African Literature, Ghana to be precise:

Modern Ghanaian literature has emerged out of a polarized society: a society whose traditions have been challenged by those of the West. Its poetry, like the other genres, is therefore characterized both by sentiments to perpetuate the ideals of an indigenous culture as well as an awareness of the literary tastes and expectations expressed of a wider world of cultures...Indigenous Ghanaian poetry...rises out of the effluence of the life of the people.

But Modern Anglophone African poetry started to emerge in the 1940s as a response to the political and cultural situation arising from colonialism. For instance, in South Africa, *Apartheid* (the government's policy of racial segregation) stimulated important protest verse, some of them written in exile. With the 1976 Soweto uprising, political and protest poetry became a vehicle used for remonstrance against European denunciation of the Black race. Consequently, Modern African Poetry is also protest in nature. It comes as a reaction to various forms of injustices meted out to Africans by the colonial masters and later, post-colonial masters. It is the political, economic, social and cultural events of a society that shape its literature. In his essay: "Homecoming" Kenyan writer—Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo makes this stance very clear:

...The relationship between creative literature and other forces cannot be ignored especially in Africa, where modern literature has grown against the gory background of European imperialism and its changing manifestations: slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Our culture over the last hundred years has developed against the same stunting, dwarfing background. (cited in Duerden and Pieterse (1972).

A prevalent theme therefore of Modern African poetry focuses on the celebration of African cultural heritage and a reflection over the painful past as a means of remonstrance. Even though these works are pragmatically oriented, the aesthetic devices that underlie their composition cannot be underemphasized, as Literary Criticism has the responsibility to examine poetry in relation to their contexts, and orienting it to the aesthetic ideals.

3. Aesthetics in Modern African Poetry

3.1. Wole Soyinka

Wole Soyinka combines themes from Yoruba religion and folklore with traditional Western literary forms. In doing so he employs several symbols, linking them with natural settings to show the link between nature and traditional African cultural values.

In *IDANRE* the aesthetic devices are conveyed through the presentation of the indigenous Yoruba concepts. He employs traditional elements and symbols in the poem to highlight and celebrate the beliefs and practices of the indigenous people. Some of these traditional elements and symbols include *Sango*, *Ogun*, and *Oya*, who are mentioned in the first and second sections: **deluge** and **...and after**. *Sango*—the god of lightning and electricity and *Ogun*—God of Iron and metallurgy, Explorer, Artisan, Hunter, God of war, Guardian of the Road, the Creative Essence—whose season is harvest and the rains—are in unison to infuse with *Oya*—the earth god who is wife to *Sango* and *Ogun*. During rainfall, the lightening, flashing signals, and thunder that accompany them to the earth are therefore the actions of the *Ogun* and *Sango* and their meeting with *Oya*, their wife on the earth, the result of which is harvest, without which the year is incomplete and the people's lives are endangered. They are therefore symbols of rain and the earth that ensure the fertility of the earth for the cultivation of crops in the year for human consumption and survival. Harvest festivals are then celebrated as crucial landmarks in honour of the gods that have ensured the fertility of the earth and the fruitfulness of the year. The lines below illustrate these phenomena:

...When roaring vats of an unstoppered heaven deluge
 Earth in fevered distillations, potent with
 The fire of the axe-handed one...
 In these white moments of my god, plucking
 Light from the day's effacement...
 He catches Sango in his three-fingered hand
 And runs him down to earth...
 And no one speaks of secrets in this land
 Only, that the skin be bared to welcome rain
 And earth prepare, that seeds may swell
 And roots take flesh within her, and men
 Wake naked into harvest—tide

In the next five sections titled—*the Pilgrimage, in the beginning, the battle, recessional, and harvest*, he demonstrates the successive ritualistic activities the inhabitants, even the indigenous folks engage in within the agricultural year until harvest time. The various gods and divinities of the earth and of the sky such as *Orisa-nla* (Head of the deities), *Orunmila* (Sky-god, essence of wisdom), *Esu* (God of chance, disruption), *Ifa* (Divination and order) etc. whose dwellings are in the rocks, mountains and huge trees—'*iroko*' are given ritual elements like 'domes of eggs and flesh of palm fruit'—'red oil', 'golden gourds', 'ram', 'calabash', 'yam' and 'vegetable' among other things, so that their increases may abound unto the sons and daughters of the land. At the end of the year when all the phases and seasons of the planting and growth of seeds are over and crops are ripe for harvest, those who have been blessed with bumper harvest bring their first fruits to the gods in recognition of their bounties. This mental journey to the woods and hills of the gods and deities of Yoruba people is reflection of Soyinka's actual excursion with his people to those places of divine habitation, as he illustrates the journey through time in the lines below:

This road have I trodden in a time beyond
 Memory of fallen leaves, beyond
 Thread of fossil on the slate, yet I must
 This way again. Let all wait the circulation
 Of time's acrobat, who pray

The various sub-divisions of the poem are also aspects Soyinka's artistic craft. The *deluge* is an indication of the action of the *Ogun* and *Sango* in superfluity of rains that nourish *Oya*—the earth; *...and after* also shows the result of those rains and actions of the heaven gods whereby the earth is empowered and fertilized to give growing power to sowed seeds. *Pilgrimage* describes the first deity or 'slave to first deity either from pique or revolutionary ideas...'—indicating the people's cosmology or archaeological and anthropological wants; *in the beginning* also indicates important consultations/divinations with such gods and deities that determine fortunes, at the time of planting; *the battle* is also in recall of 'Ogun's day of mistake' and shameful deed, when drunk with wine and blinded by gore He turned on His own men and slaughtered them'—showing the powers of the God of battle; *recessional* is a pointer to the first deity—'*Atooda*' who symbolizes revolution and optimism—giving 'the illusion of a jinx in the natural state of man and a possible escape from it; and finally *harvest* is the end of the agricultural year when food and wine is in abundance.

In this imaginative account of *Idanre* the themes of agriculture and praises of African deities and legends, and the culture of African traditions.

Closely linked with the idea of African traditions are the contents of the other poems of *Idanre* and their suitable divisions: **of the road, lone figure, of birth and death, for women, grey seasons, october'66**. The aesthetics is in the content of the poems under each division aptly illustrate them, and the beautiful way in which nature is idolized. For example in *DAWN*, under **of the road**, he describes the phenomenon of the gradual rising of the sun in the early hours of the day and its resultant effect on the natural environment:

Breaking earth upon
The lone intruder, tearing wide
The chaste hide of the sky

The aesthetics is in the description of the sun and the nature of the natural vegetation on which the sun-rise illuminates. It is in the personification of the sun and sky that the language is aesthetically exploited. The sun is described as "lone intruder" who is "tearing wide"; while the sky is also depicted in the light of a virgin—"chaste". The sun appears alone hence it is 'lone', and since the sky is still fresh in the freshness of the bracing day, it is unaffected by the activities of men. It is hence 'chaste', and the sun now begins to penetrate the virgin sky, tearing it wide apart. It is in this process that he describes the fading of darkness:

Night-spread in tatters and a god
Received, aflame with kernels.

The elliptical description of the dawning of the day is aesthetic use of language; for instance—"Night-spread in tatters" describes the gradual disappearance of the night as the day dawns, occasioned by the appearance of the sun, "the lone intruder". This phenomenon the persona describes in the last stanza as the "celebration of the rites of dawn". The effect of the rising sun is not only on the sky but the things in it, including the earth:

Breaking earth upon
A spring-haired elbow, lone
A palm beyond head-grains, spikes
A guard of prim fronds, piercing
High hairs of the wind

In these five lines the description of the effect of the rising sun and the dawn of day on the natural vegetation is quite picturesque. The imagery is created of the springing or shooting of leaves and foliage of plants, grains, and grasses on the surface of the earth—into the "High hairs of the wind". The beautiful green features of the earth covered with green vegetation in the appearance of fresh foliage of plants, trees and grasses is herein depicted, and the phrases that carry such imageries are "prim fronds piercing, spring-haired elbow, palm beyond head-grain spikes". The vivid but succinct description of the phenomenon of the vegetation, of their "Breaking the earth" with the appearance of day, even the dawning of day and the emergence of the sun, is among Soyinka's aesthetic canons.

In another poem—*DEATH IN THE DAWN*, where the persona juxtaposes traditional beliefs and modernism, metaphoric images are at the heart of Soyinka's language in describing an accident scene while he travels at dawn. In this poem also, he poeticizes the natural phenomenon of a tragic scene, while portraying indigenous traditional practices. He begins the poem with an introduction:

Driving to Lagos one morning a white cockerel flew out of the dusk and smashed itself against my windscreen. A mile further I came across a motor accident and a freshly dead man in the smash.

In the first stanza—

Traveller, you must set out
At dawn. And wipe your feet upon
The dog-nose wetness of earth.

The traditional means of transport is contrasted with the modern means by vehicle. Both travellers risk losing their lives in unforeseen tragedies. The metaphorical comparison of the coolness of the earth at dawn to the wetness of a dog's nose in "The dog-nose wetness of the earth" is the beauty of the use of language. Other metaphorical descriptions of the dawn hours of travel and the horrific scenes on the way include: "early earthworm on the hoe, Shadows stretch with sap, a naked day, burdened hulks, silent markets, grey byways, dawn's lone trumpeter, futile rite, white feather-flakes, mocked, wrathful wings of man's progression, grimace".

It is obvious that Soyinka's language is complexly metaphorical. Common description of the means of transport (motor) is so impalpable in the expression "wrathful wings of man's progression". "burdened hulks" is also in reference to wearied dawn trekkers. These metaphors are not easily comprehensible. Nevertheless, they are beautiful in the precision of their semantic references. For instance "dawn's lone trumpeter" vividly describes the cockerel, and "white feather-flakes" refers to its scattered white feathers caused by the smash. Moreover, describing the scene as "a futile rite" also clearly connotes the traditional practices of the people. The sacrifice of fowls made by the indigenous folks to their gods to avert possible mishaps on their travels, symbolized by the death of the cockerel has proved the contrary result in the case of the cockerel. In this short description of the accident scene, the persona piles on details of traditional beliefs:

...but it proved
 A futile rite. Propitiation sped
 Grimly on, before.
 The right foot for joy, the left dread
 And the mother prayed, Child
 May you never walk
 When the road waits famished.

The people believe in the right foot giving luck when it dashes against a stone while the left signals bad omen—"dread". In the case of the cockerel, it is probably the left foot. His use of "...break the early earthworm on the hoe" also connotes the indigenous occupation of the people as manual labour in farming—from early mornings. In the last stanza, the contrast between the journey by vehicle and by foot is implied but satirically questions the safety of the modern means of transport, since they both cause tragic deaths, in view of the freshly death man in the motor accident:

But such another Wraith! Brother,
 Silenced in the startled hug of
 Your invention—is this mocked grimace
 This closed contortion –I?

As indicated earlier, Soyinka's classification of the various poems under suitable titles is very striking. For instance the above two poems (DAWN and DEATH IN THE DAWN) are classified under **...of the road**, and in both poems, nature is depicted clearly and against the background of the road—in the sense that the accident case in the second poem occurs on the road, and in the first poem the beautiful vegetation of nature is seen from the perspective of one presumably standing on the road/path where the phenomenon described may be observed. He also uses this medium to showcase the traditional practices of the indigenous people. It is in these ways that Soyinka's aesthetics are manifest.

A SHUTTLE IN THE CRYPT is divided into three sections: **Phase of Peril**, **Four archetypes**, **Chimes of Silence**, and **Processions**. In his *Preface* to this collection, in which he describes the meaning of the title and his intellectual and emotional condition during his solitary confinement in the Nigerian civil war, several images emerge:

The shuttle is a unique species of the caged animal, a restless bolt of energy, a trapped weaver-bird yet charged in repose with unspoken forms and designs. In motion or at rest it is a secretive seed, shrine, kernel, phallus and well of creative mysteries. Self-identification with this essence of innate repletion was natural weapon to employ against the dangers of an inhuman isolation. It was never a mere poetic conceit; all events, thoughts, dreams, incidental phenomena were, in sheer self-protection perceived and absorbed into the loom-shuttle unity of such an existence. This volume consists of poems written in goal in spite of the deprivation of reading and writing material in nearly two years of solitary confinement. It is a map of the course trodden by the mind, not a record of the actual struggle against a vegetable existence—that belongs in another place...

It can be observed how he uses imageries such as "shuttle", "caged animal", "a trapped weaver bird", "restless bolt of energy", "vegetable existence", and "charged in repose to unspoken forms". In *Ulysses*—under **Four archetypes**, he uses the imagery of "a raindrop Lengthen out to rivers on a window-pane", and "painless rack of time", and also—

...sleep-walker through
 The weary cycle of the season's womb
 Laboring to give birth to her deathless self

All these imageries describe his state of restlessness and his roaming mind. In **Chimes of Silence** where he describes the condition of the cell infested with vultures, albino bats, egrets, crows etc. overflying his crypt, he deepens the effects of the imageries to show the repugnance of the cell with the following lines: "wall of purgatory", "restless shuttle threading sun-patches through this darkest of loom", "a shuttle sinking in a fiery loom". Under this section in *Wailing Wall*, he uses such metaphorical images like "wounds and tears of pity", while in *Wall of Mists*, he uses "tomb of longing". In *Purgatory*, he uses "vegetable soul", "calloused shelter", while in *Vault Centre*, he describes his thoughts as "ghostly thoughts". But in **Procession**, he employs a beautiful transferred epithet in the opening of the poem—"hanging day" to describe the execution of his fellow prisoners in procession. Also in *When Seasons Change*, he employs "this my hermit earth", "A solemn future casts a backward glance over drooped shoulders" and "Hailstone summons on the dovecot roof" among others—in his reflection of the changing vicissitudes of life. All these show Soyinka's creative exploitation of language to achieve aesthetic effect in his poetry.

Thus, in A SHUTTLE IN THE CRYPT, his aesthetics lie in the use of metaphorical images and the categorization of the poems under various headings. The divisions—**Phase of Peril**, **Four archetypes**, **Chimes of Silence**, and **Processions** help to follow the diverse emotions that are evoked from different experiences of the broad spectrum of the horrendous scenes of the Nigerian civil war.

Thus, Soyinka gives detailed description of setting and the scenes of the symbolic intercourse between the gods of heaven and earth to produce the fruits of the earth. His aesthetics is therefore in the memory lane journey into agricultural

practices in the year from planting to harvesting. He is mused by the thought of this Yoruba yearly customary rite, and uses the import of the pilgrimage to poeticize literature, even though agricultural practices. The events/rituals that are observed both publicly and privately in the agricultural year are herein poeticized, as a means to both mystify and showcase traditional African heritage. The heroes and legends of the indigenous people such as *Ogun* are celebrated in these rites. This is the basis of his aesthetics. Moreover, he creates sub-headings of the poem to demonstrate the actions of the deities of heaven and earth. This sub-categorization helps for easy identification of themes and subjects of the indigenous experiences and natural phenomena. Soyinka's unique way of exploiting language in veiled metaphorical and symbolic terms makes his manner of poeticizing nature different from other nature poets like Wordsworth and Osundare.

3.2. Niyi Osundare

NiyiOsundare's aesthetic devices are not too different from Soyinka's. They are noticeable from his poeticizing nature from the ideological standpoint—his Marxist orientation of art.

THE EYE OF THE EARTH as the title indicates has aesthetic effect. It is a symbolic reference to what is seen of the various exploitations of nature on earth. His personification of the earth of having eyes to see also presupposes what the ears hear, so that the title enables him to give visual and auditory sensitivity to the earth to be able to see, feel, hear, and comment on what happens on it. As the eyes see, the mouth can speak vociferously and convincingly about what is seen. This very title is again prefaced with an epigraph:

...temporary basement and
lasting roof breadbasket
and compost bed.....
our earth will see again
this earth, OUR EARTH.

The epigraph aptly describes the earth as 'basement', 'roof breadbasket' and 'compost bed', and in this the earth is eulogized as the source of food and shelter for all living things especially man—"OUR EARTH". It is also depicted in the light of having the capacity to see: "our earth will see again". With this the persona lays the background against which the earth is depicted in all the rest of the poems in this anthology. The title and the epigraph therefore form part of Osundare's aesthetics.

Moreover, the language in this poem is profusely metaphorical, with occasional similes but chiefly, the personification of the earth is the dominant device. These devices form the gem of his aesthetics. Earth is personified as the embodiment of all that nature gives to humanity. His argument is therefore an advocate voice for the restoration of the earth. In the poem titled—*Earth*, the earth is personified in metaphorical phrases—to describe and eulogize Earth, the embodiment of man's benefits:

Temporary basement and lasting roof, first clayey coyness and last alluvial joy, breadbasket and compost bed, rocks and rivers, muds and mountains, silence of the twilight sea, echoes of the noonsome tide, milk of mellowing moon, fire of tropical hearth, spouse of the roving sky, virgin of a thousand offsprings.

These are his aesthetics; earth is personified in the last line "virgin of a thousand offsprings", before which series of preceding metaphors describe the magnanimity of Mother Earth. Food, shelter, light and all the components of the earth by which man is benefitted are with Earth. What can man do without Earth? By these descriptions, Earth becomes the indispensable source of sustenance for man. In these metaphors also lie sound effects, in the use of alliterations such as "clayey coyness", "rocks and rivers", "muds and mountains", "milk of mellowing moon".

Moreover, in *What The Earth Said*, series of similes and metaphors in describing what the earth said. In addition, series of repeated parallel structures serving or describing the Earth's action in regard to what she said premise the predication of each statement the Earth makes. The parallelism of these structures includes:

I have heard
I have seen
I have shaken
I have touched
I have felt

The figurative expressions, even metaphors and similes that predicate the above parallel structures include:

busy hands rouse a slumberous yard
into a hive of humming demons
foremen soulless like their whistling whips
labouring mouths famished like desert basins
lives snuffed out like candles in the storm

That is not all; onomatopoeia and synecdoche are among the aesthetic devices used in the predicate to describe the condition of the people the Earth saw. Onomatopoeia like "the thud of sleepy booths plodding", and synecdoche like "laboring mouths"—representing the poor working mass of people. Other devices that produce sound effects include alliteration—in

"dreary dawns", "hive of humming", "grit and grime", "whistling whips". More so, Osundare's 'created words' in this poem are among his beautiful devices. Words like "penuried lives", "native executheives". To add to the above, the personification of the Earth stands out in these devices, even in the repeating of the personal pronoun "I" which emphasizes the Earth's personal witness of the suffering masses and their labours. Finally, in the concluding stanza, this personification of the Earth is sealed in the Marxist spirit:

And the earth,
 the earth receives these green fruits
 with dusty tears,
 the earth receives them
 saying:
 behold these seeds planted so soon
 in the season before the rains
 let them sprout in the month
 of daring struggle;
 let them bloom
 and kill the killer pests.

In this last stanza, he uses the metaphorical images with the natural vegetation like, Soyinka to evoke revolutionary temper, which all pile upon his aesthetic devices.

The aesthetic effect of Osundare's next anthology—SONGS OF THE MARKET PLACE is seen in the music orientation of the title. It is his ideal to use poetry like music to communicate the message of the common people's ordeals and to inspire in the victims a passion for changing the status-quo. It is for this reason that he captions the Opening Section of the poems as—*Songs of Home and Around*, and the Closing Section—*I Sing of Change*. He employs a suitable setting—The Market Place. It is the common place to find the mass of the people from all walks of life—coming together to bemoan their lots. To this end, choosing this title enables Osundare to set the right tone and setting for the depiction of the masses' unfavourable condition and their quest for revolutionary change—the Marxist temper—the basis of his aesthetics. Osundare believes that poetry, like music is society-oriented, in other words it is used to convey societal needs and address them. Therefore he beautifully lays out the orientation of poetry in his manifesto in this collection:

Poetry is
 not the esoteric whisper
 of an excluding tongue
 not a clap trap
 for a wondering audience
 not a learned quiz
 entombed in GrecoRoman lore

Poetry is
 alifespring
 which gathers timbre
 the more throats it plucks
 harbinger of action
 the more minds it stirs

Poetry is
 the hawker's ditty
 the eloquence of the gong
 the lyric of the marketplace
 the luminous ray
 on the grass's morning dew

Poetry is
 what the soft wind
 musics to the dancing leaf
 what the sole tells the dusty path
 what the bee hums to the alluring nectar
 what rainfall croons to the lowering eaves
 Poetry is
 no oracle's kernel
 for a sole philosopher's stone

Poetry
is
man
meaning
to
man

In the above lies the bedrock of Osundare's aesthetic innovations. In it he lays bare the utilitarian role of poetry. His epigraphs are inclusive of his aesthetic devices. In the epigraph to his definition of poetry, he sates:

I made an unbreakable pledge to myself
That the people would find their voices in my song

In *Excursions*, under ***Songs of Home and Around***, he portrays the appalling picture of the struggles of the mass of the people, after which he affirms the Marxist spirit in the last stanza:

But soon
the people will shout
when murmurs break through muzzles
and will powers into action
then oppression's cloud will clear
the sun eastering hence
a life full and free

Moreover, in *Siren*, where he presents government functionaries in fanfare leaving the impoverished masses waving in allegiance to them he concludes in the Marxist temper:

But babies contorted
in mothers' backs
are question marks
for tomorrow's answer.

Again, the ideology of change is manifest in *The Horseman Cometh*, in which he presents the inequalities in the society—the last stanza evokes the Marxist spirit, even a revolutionary temper:

But the grass shall rise
Bladed against pounding hoofs
A new gust of will
Shall tell the hoary equestrian
That the turf indeed has changed

It is remarkable how he introduces the Marxist ideology with a "But", in contrast to the previous exploitive high class society presented before.

In addition, *SOWETO*, a suitable title in which he depicts Apartheid dehumanizing experience of the Blacks, his conclusion is expressly Marxist:

These murdered flowers
blossoming
will fruit in freedom
These rising shoots
will tree into free spaces
Beyond tomorrow.

It must be noted, as indicated above—Osundare's unique exploitation of words to create his own language. These also form part of his aesthetic devices. In this poem, his reference to the Apartheid victims in the use of the expression:

"These murdered flowers; these rising shoots;
will tree into free spaces beyond tomorrow"

—is an example of creative ingenuity in coining his own words, which are all the same meaningful. In *Sule Chase* where he narrates the lynching of a suspected thief by a throng of hungry people, words such as "Permsecs", "A barrel-buttocked woman", "onceinalife", "bumpertobumper", "onthespot" are among other aesthetic use of language, language/words coined by the poet himself. Moreover his description of hunger of the masses in a transferred epithet—"a hungry afternoon"—showing the poverty in the society is a figurative use of language. Metaphorical images also abound as aesthetic device in this poem in description of the mob action against Sule:

The crowd swarm on Sule
 Soldier ants on a speck
 In the leopard's trail

In *I Sing of Change*, where he 'sings' of the Upper Class society in contrast with the low standard of the Lower Class populace, the epigraph chosen from Yeats reveals his interest in music and his Marxist temper:

Sing on: Somewhere, at some new moon,
 We'll learn that sleeping is not death,
 Hearing the whole earth change its tune

But as in his usual conclusion the Marxist passion becomes his concluding statement, separated in a single line stanza: '*I sing of a world reshaped*'. It is this line that underlines Osundare's ideology of change and music poetry.

In the poem—*Let Earth's Pain Be Soothed*, Earth is still personified for aesthetic effect. Earth is depicted in the title as a man agonizing, whose pain the persona pleads should be soothed. Even in this poem, devices of aesthetics include his use of parallel structures, personification, transferred epithet, and repetition. The personification of Earth in the title is extended in the poem in the lines:

prostrate like famished horse
 brown hills cast vacant looks
 atbalded plains where playing kids
 provoke the dust in what once was
 the cradle of green

Although the first line is also a transferred epithet and simile, and the last line metaphorical, they combine with the personification in lines two to four to depict the exploitation of the natural vegetation and depletion of the Earth—showing the reason why the Earth's pain should be soothed. But in this context of human exploitation, the lines are symbolic reference to human beings. The first stanza serves as the motif repeated throughout the poem to emphasize the underlying Marxist revolt in the poem:

The sky carries a boil of anguish
 Let it burst

In his employment of the parallelism below, he reduplicates and the idea of exploitation of the Earth in the occurrence of 'dust' everywhere:

Dust in the eating hall
 Dust in busy bedrooms
 Dust in scheming boardrooms
 Dust in retrenching factories
 Dust in power brothels

There is still the repetition of the words: "Let it rain", "Let it rain today", to reinforce the idea of soothing the Earth's pain. The repetitions used in this poem together with other sound devices like alliteration and assonance create sound effect that synchronizes the music of the *Rainsongs* (used as the title of the section) which is the dominant subject. The sub-title—in bracket also reinforces the musical tone of the poem:

(for the one who brought rainy news from under-the-Rock
 to the accompaniment of a flute and / or the rain drum)

Alliteration in the poem includes—"heal her", "cornleaves may clothe", "bath the bawl and brawl", "lying too long". Assonance used also includes—

that roots may swell the womb of lying plains
 that stomachs may shun the rumble of thunder
 that children may bath and bawl and brawl
 the seeds noiseless in the dormitory of the soil
 the earth has been lying too long and songless

There is also internal rhyme in—"brawl and brawl", and "long and songless".

All these aesthetically add sound and musical quality to the poem. It also emphasizes Osundare's interest in music, exemplified by his musical titles and sub-titles, like the one in brackets—quoted above, and others like *Raindrum*, *Forest Echoes*—(with flute and heavy drums)

Finally Osundare's aesthetics is also in his exploitation of words—to create alliterative sounds in contrastive words. In the poem entitled—*Ours To Plough, Not To Plunder*, the title itself shows this aesthetic quality of contrasting words to create common sounds—in *Plough* and *Plunder*. In this poem, he uses this technique in somewhat complex ways—in antithesis, juxtaposition and collocation with metaphors:

This earth is
ours to work not to waste
ours to man not to maim
This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder

The earth is ours to plough and plant
the hoe is her barbar
the dibble her dimple

Out with mattocks and matches
bring calabash trays and rocking baskets
let the sweat which swells earthroot
relieve heavy heaps of their tuberous burdens

At the same time, this technique also creates sound effects in the assonated and alliterative words—shown in all the above stanzas. He exploits language this way to communicate his utilitarian philosophy—the value of the earth lies in its usefulness; hence it must not be wasted.

Thus, Osundare's personification of the earth; his romanticism of nature differently from the romantic poets; his simplicity and unique use of language—in metaphors and similes, even his manipulation of words and creating his own words; the music orientation of his poems, his epigraphs and the suitable titles and sub-headings of his poems as well as their categorizations are the basis of his aesthetic devices.

3.3. John Aidoo

John Aidoo, depicts the state of the nation—Ghana during the post-independence era. His aesthetic devices like Osundare and Soyinka hinge on the title and sub-titles of his poems, as well as his epigraphs. *THIS TURNING FACE*, written with the portrait of a lady's face gazing in one direction and yet seeing in all directions—is the title of the collection. The aesthetics lies in the turning nature, in other words changing nature of the lady's face—reflecting the unstable nature of the nation's economy during the post-independence era due to the socio-political dispensation of the time. In other words, the constantly changing nature of women in the face is linked to the constantly changing nature and instability of the nation. Unstable governments, unstable policies, and unstable economy due to revolutions, counter coups and undemocratic governance among other factors has not led to stable socio-economic conditions for the general populace of the African nations during the periods of their self-governance, and the case of Ghana is portrayed in the "Turning Face" of the title.

Similarly, the poem—*Justice Without Frontiers (for all workers)*, is suitable, depicting the summary trials and executions, unfair and unjust arrests of innocent citizens without recourse to constitutional provisions. And yet, amidst this injustice, the poem states:

Amnesty screams ready justice
transnational justice

The international body that 'screams ready justice' is seemingly insensitive to the dries of the victims of injustice in the nation, and the persona artfully addresses this fact in the caption—*justice without frontiers*. In addition, he uses simple language in depicting the sympathetic cases of the victims in the poem:

The neurotic dictator claps a humanist in jail
But this man
comes here 6. 15 every morning
rainy day, sunny day or holiday
wheeling his eternal barrow
upon a willing disposition
to hurl
my garbage
your garbage
our garbage...
yet when the order came
he with others was bundled home
to face the flattened bellies at home

never to return to his barrow
 To hurl
 my garbage
 your garbage
 our garbage...

The repetition of the parallel structures used to emphasize the menial work of the dedicated worker in serving everybody, is embedded in the aesthetic devices, and this together with the simplicity of the language makes it suitable for the subjects addressed, even the common people in the poem. Moreover, Aidoo's simple language is also rich in imagery, showing the intensity of the suffering that has affected even birds. This can be seen in the poem titled—*The Search*:

My Mother,
 when in the season of dust and cracks
 of crows and vultures
 I left home late morning
 I left you kneeling by our claypot
 that offered only drops of water
 with my promise to return a pitcherful
 to quench our thirst...
 So after long walks in the wilderness
 I found the old well
 and plunged my pail
 into a strange fullness;
 the sun was grilling high overhead
 when I snatched some fortune
 but the cord snapped mid-air
 O mother
 our cord snapped...

The imageries are seen in the use of words like "My Mother, season of dust and cracks, of crows and vultures, kneeling by claypot, drops of water, pitcherful, long walks in the wilderness, plunged my pail, sun was grilling high overhead, snatched some fortune, our cord snapped". The language is picturesque, and in its simplicity, the meaning is not far-fetched. His use of repetition in "I left" "mother", "search"—emphasize the speaker's personal experience and that of his mother in the miserable hopeless struggle for survival in hard times. The themes are obvious. They are similar to KobenaEyiAcquah's depiction of the abject poverty of the mass of the people in the era of socio-economic hardship occasioned by poor and unstable government in his poem titled. —*Gently*, where he describes a demolishing exercise by government agencies. The poverty of the people are conveyed in words like—"mud walls, walls naked and bald, aged smeared walls, to them this was home, their meagre meal, they hoped in wearied sleeplessness". Another of his poems *On Life's tightrope*, in which he compares the situation of the time to walking on a tightrope in which whether you 'linger or hasten', you fall in a 'bottomless ravine'. It signals uncertainty and the need to thread with circumspection in the land where the innocent suddenly becomes a victim.

Another of Aidoo's aesthetic devices is his epigraphs. For instance his use of excerpt from Gabriel Okara's *Once Upon A Time* in **The Fisherman's Invocation** demonstrates clearly, the aptness that is commensurate with his depiction of the unstable economy from which the mass of the people are subjected to terror and disillusionment:

So I have learned many things, son
 I have learned to wear many faces
 like dresses—homeface
 officeface, streetface, hostface
 cocktailface, with all their conforming smiles
 like a fixed portrait smile...
 I want to be what I used to be
 when I was like you. I want
 to unlearn all these muting things
 most of all, I want to relearn
 how to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror
 shows only my teeth like a snake's bare fangs!

The epigraphs show the pretending nature people. In the state of uncertainty, one must pretend to be what they not in order to be safe from the long arm of the law. They show clearly how political instability in the country affects people's lives.

Thus, the socio-political conditions that engineered Aidoo's aesthetics are still relevant today as they were in the 1970s and 80s: the frequent policy changes and their consequent repercussions on the people of the African nations, even Ghana. Poverty, hardship, crime, chaos and decadence hold sway over the lives of the citizens in these nations. It is in this light

that John Aidoo's caption of the collection becomes aesthetic device for conveying and communicating social issues. Moreover, the categorization of the poems into sections—*Gathered Away, We Came Around, Tell Them, Akwaaba*, and *Undying*, helps in linking the poems under the various sections to a single theme within the context of the 'Turning Face' and this facilitates easy comprehension—just like in Osundare and Soyinka. With regards to the epigraphs, they are carefully chosen or created to reflect the issues talked about in the various poems. These are aside his ingenuity in using simple language beautifully.

3.4. Lade Wosornu

The last poet in this discussion is Lade Wosornu, who used poetry for art sake. His collections—CELESTIAL BRIDE AND OTHER POEMS, and JOURNEY WITHOUT END AND OTHER POEMS clearly show a personalization of poetry to suit Wosornu's own philosophy of art, even his mystical beliefs. As such, like most of Wordsworth's poems they are reflective.

The categorization of his collections are among his aesthetic devices. In *Celestial Bride and Other Poems*, he has the following divisions: *Down, Spring, Ahlabata (Harmattan), Shamal* and *Twilight*. They are unique in their collective interfusion into the main subject and their separate definition of the poems that fall under them. In *Smiling Through the Storm* (TO EDEM), the aesthetics in sound effects are obvious in words such as "choicest fruits from foreign lands", "sandy storm", "shall be short" etc. assonance also abound in the lines—

Choicest fruits from foreign lands----- /o/ sound
 Every desert has its wells----- /e/sound
 Lusty latches clang again----- /a/ sound
 Thorny patches shall be short-----/a/ and /o/ sounds
 Scarlet carpet long and soft----- /a/ sound
 Ablest men as guards of honour----- /e/ and /a/ sounds

There are mages such as "choicest fruits, sandy storm, desert, wells, rusty latches, guards of honour, thorny patches, wedding in Saint Paul's, KnightSheild". They are used to show how God leads his people through the storms of life into moments of joy as implied in the title—*Smiling Through the Storm*. At the same time the profuse use of sounds reinforce the sound made by the 'storms' of life, while the Christian message, even the mystical beliefs in the examples of Saint Paul are portrayed.

Moreover, in the poem titled—*Flower*, where he admires the beauty of a flower, and nature, he creates sound effects by contract, oxymoron, repetition, assonance and alliteration. In these he creates synesthetic effects:

Beautiful from any view
 Irresistible though spineless...
 Unresisting in any way
 And vociferous in silence
 A flower remains a flower
 And, if darkness vision denies
 Fragrance cognition compels

The beauty and permanence of a flower is conjured in its unchanging nature and in its appearance –that although silent it is audible in charm. He appeals to the senses of audition, sight, touch, smell in the use of "fragrance, darkness vision, vociferous in silence, spineless, beautiful". At the same time sound devices used, even in alliterative sounds with their inherent assonance—"a flower remains a flower", cognition compels, darkness in vision denies", and oxymoron in "vociferous in silence". These devices are used to create beauty and the aesthetics of art for its sake as a peculiarity in Wosornu's poetry.

4. Conclusion

It is quite clear in the foregoing discussion that the socio-historic conditions that informed the creation of poetry by African poets are not significantly divers from those that informed their aesthetic devices. Soyinka, Aidoo, Osundare, and Wosornu among others have used poetry as a tool for social commentary, and in the process, used diverse devices ranging from sound, images, symbols, metaphors etc. in their poetic language. While they mainly used simple diction, Soyinka's diction is quite complex, obviously from his Western Educational background. But that notwithstanding, most of the African poets have a way with their poetry. Some attempt to coin new words as in the case of Osundare, while some narrate using a few words. Wole Soyinka belongs to the class of poets that invoke some foreign images in the body of their works. But both are beautiful in their respective nature. He deviates slightly from the others poets herein mentioned but as indicated earlier, the aesthetic devices are closely interrelated. Moreover, his themes also reflect human experience, and non-human elements and nature apart from the inner aspects of human nature. Aidoo uses simple language to express ideas but these expressions are characterized by images that give precision to their respective references. This is evident in his captions of the poems. Like Soyinka, there is much evidence of Western influence in Wosornu's poetry. His aesthetics hinge mainly on the language, the use of sound effects, metaphorical images, and diction—vocabulary. The division of his poems into sections, like the others is equally remarkable. As Wosornu attempts to spiritualize literature, the others mainly used it to address social ills and better the hard lots of humanity. They link poetry to music in both its power to appeal and to convey story through its solemn rhythm

and cutting tone. At the same time, they have not overlooked the indigenous traditions of the people whose culture gave birth to Modern Literature and Modern African Poetry. The various divisions of their poetry which are also interlaced with beautiful epigraphs help to simplify their poems and give expression to the contexts from which they wrote.

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