

Course Code: ENG814

Course Title: STUDIES IN AFRICAN ORAL LITERATURE

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**Introduction ENG814 – Studies in Oral Literature**

ENG814 is a one-semester course of three credit units. It is developed and written to cater for the study needs of postgraduate students of English and others in related departments like African Languages, Literature and Communication Arts, as well as students in the department of History. The course has twenty one units which include a general overview of oral literature as a universal practice, origin of oral African literature, nature and forms of oral African literature, adequate examples and discussions of its poetic, dramatic and prose forms, factors that constitute the building blocks of oral African literature, functions of oral African literature, oral African literature as the source of written literature as well as the factors that hinder the growth and development of oral African literature. Others are ‘chremasticism’ or rubrics and designs in the African Verbal Arts, folktales and its aesthetic elements, methods of characterising aesthetics in oral African folktales through selected tales, ‘parenthetic’ creativity as the ‘moonlight’ of oral African literature, aesthetic delimitations and oral literary theories and modern incursions, ‘codemodifications’ and transitions in African Oral Literature.

The materials and examples used for this course are suitable for Nigerian post graduate students of English. The examples are drawn variously from selected popular oral African renditions to further make the African ‘Village Voices’ attractive to learners. We have designed ENG814 to improve upon students’ already acquired knowledge of oral African literature in previous similar courses taught at the undergraduate class, such as ENG323 – *Oral Literature in Africa*.

On the spot assessment of students’ view of oral African literature among undergraduate and postgraduate students showed expression of dislike arising from the belief that it is often cumbersome and burdensome. To erase such misleading conception, therefore, we have designed ENG814 to cover a wide

range of the aspects of oral African literature, as advancement over your previous knowledge. We have written the course in such a way that it is (picturesque and cinematographic or) practical and real to you. With such deliberate way of taking oral African literature away from the page of the written medium, it retains its very practical nature and entertainment for which it is known. The easy, accessible and communicative way that we have developed the course will fire up and ‘boost’ your waning interest on the aesthetics of the oral literature of your people and remind you of some of those things you may have forgotten and need to be reminded of about the oral literatures of peoples in other parts of Africa, other than your own ethnic nationality.

The course guide is designed to give a brief description of what ENG814 is all about, the course materials you need, the work you need to do, set of textbooks and tutor-marked assignments. This course guide also gives suggestions on the amount of time you need on each unit and number of tutor-marked assignments you need to do.

We expect you to go through this course guide carefully to know what the course is all about, particularly other novel areas of Oral African Literature which we have included in this course material.

### **What you will Learn in this Course**

From a general perspective, ENG 814 is to enable you learn the general nature, development principles and practice as well as the rendition of orature across cultures. The primary focus of the course is to acquaint you with the African oral verbiage in its major forms including characteristics and general aesthetics. The ability to develop and create oral issues from the oral pool of your lineage and or community is part of the essential things you will learn in this course.

### **Course Aims**

The course is designed to take you through African oral literature. It is meant to:

- Remind you of the nature of orature, including its tradition of universal continuum;
- Acquaint you with the ‘architecture’ and ‘building blocks’ of African Oral literature;

- Rekindle your interest in the oral composition of your people;
- Translate the orature of your community with its African aesthetics/values;
- Equip you with the special practical skills necessary for descriptive, narrative and expository display of African oral literature;
- Draw your attention to the categories of orature;
- Express the functions of African oral literature;
- Name the methods of characterizing aesthetics in oral African narratives.

### **Course Objectives**

At the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Define oral literature;
- Explain the concepts of ‘architecture’ and ‘building blocks’ of African Oral Literature;
- Recite the oral poetry of your community;
- Discuss the factors that hinder the growth and development of African oral literature;
- Relate modern incursions, ‘code-modifications’ and transitions in African oral literature;
- Classify the genres of African oral literature;
- Review African oral literature as the source of written literature;
- Defend ‘chremasticisms’ and design in African oral literature;
- Appraise the functions of African oral literature;
- Judge African oral literature using aesthetics as a paradigm;
- Estimate the oral literature of other cultures.

### **Working through the Course**

There are twenty one study units in this course. You should study the contents in each unit before you attempt the questions. Also, you should pay attention to the objective of each study unit to guide you through the unit. You should get ready to think and write simultaneously as you go through this course material which has been designed to make you do so. You will be assessed through Tutor-marked assignments which you are expected to do and turn in to your tutor

at the right time. You are also expected to write an examination at the end of the course. The time of the examination will be communicated to you.

### **Course Materials**

- The major components of the course are:
- Course guide
- Study units
- Text books
- Assignment files
- Presentation schedule

Each study unit is a week's work and is preceded by the objectives which you are expected to study by going through the unit. Each study unit contains the reading materials and the self assessment exercises. The tutor-marked assignment; the study unit, the tutorials, will help you to achieve the stated objectives of this course. There are twenty-one units in the course and they are as follows:

### **STUDY UNITS**

#### **Module 1 ORATURE ACROSS CULTURES**

Unit One	Tradition of Oral Literature as Universal Continuum
Unit Two	Origin and nature of Oral African Literature
Unit Three	'Architecture' and 'Building Blocks' of Oral African Literature
Unit Four	Factors that Hinder the Growth and Development of Oral African Literature
	(1)
Unit Five	Factors that Hinder the Growth and development of Oral African Literature
	(11)

#### **Module 2 NATIVE VOICES AS AFRICAN ORATURE**

Unit One	Oral African Literature as the Source of Written Literature.
Unit Two	Modern 'Incursion', 'Code- modifications' and Transitions in Oral African Literature
Unit Three	Poetry in Oral African Literature
Unit Four	Drama in Oral African Literature
Unit Five	Prose in Oral African Literature

#### **Module 3 DESIGNS AND FOCUS IN AFRICAN ORATURE**

Unit One	‘Chremasticism’ and design in Oral African Literature
Unit Two	Functions of Oral African Literature (1)
Unit Three	Functions of Oral African Literature (11)
Unit four	Functions of Oral African Literature (111)
Unit Five	Aesthetic Elements in Oral African Folktales

#### **Module 4 VERBIAGE AND CREATIVITY IN AFRICAN ORATURE**

Unit one through	Methods of Characterizing Aesthetics in Oral African Narratives Selected Tales (1)
Unit two through	Methods of Characterizing Aesthetics in oral African narrative Selected Tales (11)
Unit Three (1)	Parenthetic Creativity as the ‘Moonlight’ of African Verbal Arts
Unit four (11)	Parenthetic Creativity as the ‘Moonlight’ of African Verbal Arts
Unit Five	Aesthetics Delimitations in African Verbal Narratives
Unit Six	Oral Literary Theories

#### **Textbooks and References**

- Abimbola, W. (1965). *Yoruba Oral Literature. African Notes, Vol.2, Nos. 2&3, Ibadan.*
- Ayese, S. (2004) *Designs and African Orature: Selected examples from Ghana and Nigeria. Jos: Macmillan.*
- Akporobaro, F. (2001). *Introduction of African Oral Literature. Ikeja: Princeton Publishing*
- Bayangi, Y. (2001). *Orature and Literature. Jos: Macmillam.*
- Beye, C.E (1966). *The Odyssey and Homeric Tradition. New Delhi: Tricycle prints*
- Biodun, S. (2993). *Science, Orature and Literature. Lagos: Lens Publishers*
- Bradford, E. (1963). *Ulysses Found. London: Oxford University Pres.*
- Chukwuma, T. (2004). *Igbo Native Voices in Unwritten Literature . Enugu: Leve prints.*
- Danstan, C. (2000). *What is Oral Literature? Uyo: Onibonoje*
- Emma, T. (1984). *Mythical Tales of Creation. Abuja: Stove Prints*
- Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral Literature in Africa. London: University Press.*

- Homer (1995). *The Illiad. Great Britain: Chatan.*
- Idowu, Bolaji (1962). *Olodumare-God in Yoruba Belief. Ibadan: Longman.*
- Kemf, Elizabeth (1993). *Ed. Indigenous peoples and Protected Areas- the Law of mother Earth. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd.*
- Kuffi, E. (2007). *Myths and folktales in West Africa- The Akpan Example. Accra: Macmillan*
- Lewis, L. (2002). *Technology and Oral Literature. Kaduna: Pen*
- Mary Little Bear Inkanish (1980). *The Cheyenne Account of how the World was made.*
- Olosojumo, K. (2006). *Oral Literature among Yorubas. Ibadna: lkin.*
- Parrinder Geoffrey (1979). *Religion in Africa. Enugu: Excell*
- Robert, A. Benneth and Betty Yvonne Welch (1981). *Introduction to Literature. Lexington: Ginn and Company.*
- Steven, C. (2004). *Selected Oral Literature of Native Americans. N.Y: Oxford University Press.*

### **Assignment File**

In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for grading. The mark you obtain from the assignment will be added toward the final mark you obtain for this course. Additional information on assignment will be found in the assignments file itself as well as the this section on assessment in this course guide

### **Presentation Schedule**

The presentation schedule which have been included in your course materials give you the important dates you are expected to complete your tutor-marked assignments as and when due.

### **Course Making Scheme**

The table below gives a breakdown of the course marks:

Assignment	Marks
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Assignment 1-21	Three assignments, best three marks of the assignments counts for 30% course marks
Final examination	The final examination counts for 70% of overall marks
Total	100% of course marks

### Course Overview

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activity	Assessment (End of Unit)
1	Tradition of Oral Literature as a Universal Continuum	1	Assignment 1
2	Origin/Nature of Oral African Literature	2	Assignment 2
3	Architecture and Building Blocks of Oral African Literature	3	Assignment 3
4	Factors that Hinder the Growth and Development of Oral African Literature (I)	4	Assignment 4
5	Factors that Hinder the Growth and Development of Oral African Literature (II)	5	Assignment 5
6	Oral African Literature as the Source of Written Literature	6	Assignment 6
7	Modern Incursions, 'Codemodifications' and Transitions in Oral African Literature	7	Assignment 7
8	Poetry in Oral African Literature	8	Assignment 8
9	Drama in Oral African Literature	9	Assignment 9
10	Prose in Oral African Literature	10	Assignment 10
11	'Chremasticism' and Design in Oral African Literature	11	Assignment 11
12	Functions of Oral African Literature (I)	12	Assignment 12
13	Functions of Oral African Literature (II)	13	Assignment 13
14	Functions of Oral African Literature (III)	14	Assignment 14

15	Aesthetic Elements in Oral African Folktales	15	Assignment 15
16	Methods of Characterising Aesthetics in Oral African Narratives through Selected Tales (I)	16	Assignment 16
17	Methods of Characterising Aesthetics in Oral African Narratives through Selected Tales (II)	17	Assignment 17
18	Parenthetic Creativity as the 'Moonlight' of African Verbal Arts	18	Assignment 18
19	Aesthetic Delimitation in African Verbal Narratives (I)	19	Assignment 19
20	Aesthetic Delimitation in African Verbal Narratives (II)	20	Assignment 20
21	Oral Literary Theories	21	Assignment 21
22		22	Review
23		23	Review
24		24	Review
25		25	Review

### **Final Examination and Grading**

The final examination for ENG814 will be three hours paper in which you are expected to answer three questions. Each question accounts for twenty marks, giving you a total of sixty marks (70 marks for the examination). The thirty marks for the tutor-marked assignments and seventy marks for the examination give a total of one hundred marks (i.e. 30+ 70=100). The patterns of the question for your examination will not be very different from those you are familiar with in your tutor-marked exercises. You should revise the units very well before the date of your final examination.

### **Tutors and Tutorials**

There are 10 tutorial hours for this course. The dates, time, location, name and phone number of your tutorial facilitator and your tutorial group will be

communicated to you. Feel free to relate with your tutorial facilitator who will mark, correct your assignments, and monitor your attendance/performance in tutorial-marked assignments. You should always contact your tutorial facilitator by phone or e-mail if you have any problem with the contents of any of the study units.

**Summary**

ENG814 has been written to reintroduce you to and enrich your existing knowledge of Oral African Literature. On completion of the programme, you should be adequately skilled in the discussion of oral African literature.

At the end of the programme, you should be able to answer the following questions on the course:

Choose and discuss the oral poetry of your people.

Outline and discuss the functions of oral African literature.

Discuss the ‘parenthetic creativity’ in oral African literature.

What is ‘chremasticism’ in African Verbal Arts?

What factors delimit the aesthetics of African verbal narratives?

Wishing you the best as you go through this course.

## **MAIN CONTENT**

### **Module 1 ORATURE ACROSS CULTURES**

- Unit 1 Tradition of Oral Literature as Universal Continuum
- Unit 2 Origin and Nature of Oral African Literature
- Unit 3 ‘Architecture and Building Blocks’ of Oral African Literature
- Unit 4 Factors that hinder the Growth and Development of Oral African Literature (I)
- Unit 5 Factors that hinder the Growth and Development of Oral African Literature (II)

### **Module 2 NATIVE VOICES AS AFRICAN ORATURE**

- Unit 1 Oral African Literature as the Source of Written Literature
- Unit 2 ‘Incursion’, Code-modifications and Transitions in Oral African Literature
- Unit 3 Poetry in Oral African Literature
- Unit 4 Drama in Oral African Literature
- Unit 5 Prose in Oral African Literature

### **Module 3 DESIGNS AND FOCUS IN AFRICAN ORATURE**

- Unit 1 ‘Chremasticism and Design’ in Oral African Literature
- Unit 2 Functions of Oral African Literature (I)
- Unit 3 Functions of Oral African Literature (II)
- Unit 4 Functions of Oral African Literature (III)
- Unit 5 Elements of Oral African Folktales

### **Module 4 VERBIAGE AND CREATIVITY IN AFRICAN ORATURE**

- Unit 1 Methods of Characterising Aesthetics in Oral African Narratives through Selected Tales (I)
- Unit 2 Methods of Characterising Aesthetics in Oral African Narratives through Selected Tales (II)
- Unit 3 ‘Parenthetic Creativity’ as the ‘Moonlight’ of African Verbal Arts (I)
- Unit 4 ‘Parenthetic Creativity’ as the ‘Moonlight’ of African Verbal Arts (II)

- Unit 5           Aesthetic Delimitations in African Verbal Narratives
- Unit 6           Oral Literary Theories

## **MODULE 1 ORATURE ACROSS CULTURES**

- Unit 1           Tradition of Oral Literature as Universal Continuum
- Unit 2           Origin and Nature of Oral African Literature
- Unit 3           ‘Architecture and Building Blocks’ of Oral African Literature
- Unit 4           Factors that hinder the Growth and Development of Oral African Literature (I)
- Unit 5           Factors that hinder the Growth and Development of Oral African Literature (II)

### **UNIT 1        TRADITION OF ORAL LITERATURE AS UNIVERSAL CONTINUUM**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0   Introduction
- 2.0   Objectives
- 3.0   Main Content
  - 3.1   Tradition of Oral Literature as Universal Continuum
    - 3.1.1   Myth/Mythology
    - 3.1.2   Relationships between oral tradition and the universe
    - 3.1.3   Illiad and Odyssey
    - 3.1.4   Greco-Roman
    - 3.1.5   Mythical Creation Story of the Ancient Greeks
    - 3.1.6   Native American Creation Myth
    - 3.1.7   Cherokee (Great Smoky Mountains) Creation Myth
    - 3.1.8   Creation Myth of the Yorubas Nigeria – West Africa
- 4.0   Conclusion
- 5.0   Summary
- 6.0   Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0   References/Further Reading

#### **1.0   INTRODUCTION**

We have designed this unit to reflect the nature of orature as a popular culture; hence we have proven its universality by providing some examples of myths drawn across continental cultures, over the ages. The fascinating examples of the creation myths of the ancient Greek, Romans, America, Europe, India and Africa, some of them are Cheyenne, Cherokee as well as the Yoruba creation myth which have been provided as evidence that oral tradition is ever present everywhere and preciously obtainable in every culture all over the world. No

matter the language of rendition and by whatever name oral tradition may be called, across cultures, it is a popular culture that is available and culture specific.

In our current world of growing technological advancement and encroaching civilization, the existence of oral tradition is never in doubt. In this module which is made up of five units, you will appreciate the nature of oral literature as a general practice by the human race, past and present.

As a postgraduate student of English studying Oral African Literature, you should necessarily be aware of the different perspectives of people generally to the oral tradition including how the world came to exist; what constitutes their oral literatures, their mode of performance, method of transmission. You should be able to determine the 'thin layer' that differentiates the oral literature of a particular people from the others, in terms of performative, style and rendition. For instance, you should be able to give examples of and discuss some of the oral literatures of the Greeks, English, American, Arabs and parts of Africa, that are often expressed in the forms of myths, fables and so on. Myth has adequately explained the events that may appear shroud to humanity to broaden our scope of our 'controversial' world. All the different ethnic nationalities of various origins the world over have oral literary explanations for the world that surrounds them with volumes of her 'near incomprehensible mysteries'. The different perspectives from which oral explanations are given about events is what necessitates a study of the different world-view of myth Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

- define oral literature in your own words
- explain the universal nature of oral literature
- discuss any creation myth chosen from any part of the world
- state the theme in any of the popular world fables
- compare different myths about the creation of the world
- attempt a discussion of any myth and the moral lessons attached to such a myth
- relate the creation myth of your people with its supportive moral lessons
- explain the relationships between oral tradition and the universe
- define the concept, myth

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 What is Myth/Mythology?**

A myth is a story about superhuman beings of an earlier age, usually of how natural phenomena, social customs and so on came into existence. Mythology, myth is a legend, story, tradition fiction, saga, fable allegory, fairy-story, folk-tale. It is an ancient traditional story about gods, heroes and magic. See *Collins English Dictionary*, (2006) and *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2007).

An important part of the oral tradition of every culture is its myths. A myth may be seen as an anonymous (often translated to recipient cultures) traditional story that explains the supernatural or leans on the supernatural to explain an aspect of human behaviour, a natural phenomenon or a mystery of the universe. Myths are stories created or invented to explain natural phenomena such as the moon, stars, mountain, the sea or the reason a certain society exists or is known to practice certain custom, beliefs and so on. But, myths often emphasise certain connection or spiritual bond between its creator as well as the natural world. Such bond often promotes such mythical creator as the ancestor or a progenitorial position or guardian to those concerned with the myth. Below are the examples of myths selected around the world.

### **3.1.2 Relationship between Oral Tradition and the Universe**

Oral literature is the form of literature that uses the oral medium as its mode of transmission and expressions, to offer explanations to the vital issues that surround man, his existence and related world, world view. It is a form of unwritten performance characteristically transmitted orally and handed down to succeeding generation much as it is inherited orally from previous generations to lead the present people in the explanation of their cultural believes, politics, economy, local sciences, industry, war, and commerce. It is the oral revitalizing system of re-enacting, re-creation, re-standardization, re-inventing, re-claiming, proclaiming, justifying, exhibiting, and configuring the existence of man, his universe, and other surrounding 'bodies'. Whatever oral literature is used to do in any existing society, it must be transmitted orally, oral literature do not have the culture of writing, but its recognizeably culture of verbiage makes it essentially oral. It is a regenerated local wisdom, told and retold to justify its purpose. Orature is the 'voicing capacity'; the 'native voice' of the people that expresses the totality of their existence, histories, wars, politics, commerce, industry, economy, religion, reactions to other vital human related issues like how the Earth came into being, the existence of God, the sea, heaven and death; it is the local verbiage that measures and justifies man's living standard, interactions, identities, his position, heroism, ancestral connectivity, stories to explain why?, how?, and where of things? Orality normally finds answers to things most of which are shroud to man; and many of life challenges.

Many of such stories orally transmitted are packed with or woven around moral lessons, some frown at laziness, arrogance, pride, using themes that are relevant to human situations like death, love, courtship and marriage, depict universal emotions like selfishness, disobedience, how gods and traditions came into being,

attributes such as hatred, flaw, ambition, generosity, courage, honesty, dishonesty with which the social and ethnic education of the traditional societies are carried out.

Oral literature is the avenue through which the world traditional society finds her identity, the spoken word is primary to its rendition, whether it is in the form of myth, tales, proverbs or legends, the oral literary tradition is still useful, social culturally engaging performative and universally engaging in man's contemporary world.

We can quickly provide the examples of oral literature selected around the world to justify the universal nature of oral literature. The oral literature of the Yorubas speaking people of Nigeria is also preciously obtainable among the Akan people in Ghana, the Swahili, Kongi of Zimbabwe, the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Indians and Indigenous Americans and elsewhere in the world. We can quickly give the following examples of oral literature (myths) across world cultures.

### **3.1.3 The Illiad and Odyssey**

The Greek poet, Homer was said to have first orally composed *The Illiad*, the Greek epic poem of approximately 16,000 lines. It is the story of the epic of the Trojan War, and about the Greek hero, Achilles who left the field of battle to wine and dine with his War Commander-in-Chief, Agamemnon, seized his price of war, the lovely Briseis; a move which angered Achilles pride as a warrior, this led to the decline of the fortune's Army. Achilles is then pleaded with to return to the Army when his good friend, Patroclus is killed in a battle by the furious Trojan Prince, Hector. The stage was then set for a battle of the Titans as the Greek hero, Achilles and Hector will fight in a contest that will determine the hero of the Trojan war as well as the hero of Troy. The story assumes a climax but pitiable dimension as Achilles spared Priam in the very engaging and determining battle, elevating heroism and compassion above the futility of conflicts, war and tragedy.

However, much as the identity of Homer who orally composed the poem is unknown, some people have argued that the oral story was the great work of a woman, and not man. Added to this, is, about seven cities have claimed that the one who composed *Illiad* is theirs. But, whether *The Illiad* and *Odyssey* were first orally composed by different or similar authors belonging to diverse oral traditions, around 8th BC, they were first composed orally before ever translated to written form. The works belong to the Greek oral tradition (civilization) and broadly Western oral literature much earlier than the world of the English poet, William Shakespeare.

Similarly, Homer's *Odyssey* as related orally and according to the Greek tradition, is the adventures of *Odysseys* which means (Ulysses in Latin Language) is the story of Odysseus back to his Kingdom of Ithaca after the Trojan War. At Ogygia, the depth Western Isle of the sea nymph Calypso

stopped and prevented Odysseus from returning to his kingdom, the delay lasted for seven years, Odysseus is offered immortality if he will stay but he prefers to return to his beautiful and virtuous wife, Penelope. But he is released by Calypso on the intervention of Zeus, but Odysseus was later shipwrecked on the Phaeacian Isle of Scheria, but befriended by King Alcinous and Nausicaa his daughter. A banquet was organized in his honour, he then reveals his identity and advised to tell the story of his wanderings in the country of the Lotus Eaters where those who eat the Lotus plant forget their pasts. How he defeated the one-eyed Cyclops, Polyphemus, witnessed a gift of a bag of winds from Aeolus, the god of winds, and his experience with the cannibal, Laestrygonians, how he was enchanted by Circe who transformed his crew into swine, his further experience in the underworld, his success over the Sirens of bewitching songs that hasten men to their deaths, killing of the Cattle of Helios the reason for which his shipwrecked at Calypso Island made him a heroic figure. Odysseus' excellence at fable, attracted him to goddess Athena who guided him to Alcinous. At last, Alcinous helped Odysseus to return to Ithaca, met his son Telemachus who was already looking for him all over the Mediterranean Sea. They therefore conspired to kill the chaste Penelope so that they could acquire the kingdom of Ithaca in his absence and the story ends happily.

However, the identity of Homer, the oral composer of the oral narrative is controversial, as seven cities say he is their own, though he was said to be blind, modern theory puts his gender as a woman. The *Illiad*, and *Odyssey* are from the Greek tradition, but suspected to be a combination of many traditions of orature.

### 3.1.4 Greco-Roman

The Greco-Roman oral literary world is often partly reflected in whatever they see or perceive within their socio-cultural environment. They thus, merge and channel their cosmographical perception of their world and the world around them into cultural symbols and natural bodies, hence objects are named after their gods and goddesses leading to some degrees of cultural multiple meanings, such cultural connotations are based on the 'native decoders' intuition which of course are transmitted from generation to generation. Such becomes part of the people's philosophy and thus axiomatic within their cultural milieu, which they admit as their guiding, principles to either interpret or confront the challenges of life within, even outside their cultural existence.

Greco-Roman mythical name calling. This is also called classical myths. The Greco-Roman myths have renamed every planet to justify their oral believe in their traditional gods and goddesses. Their oral compositions also immortalize their gods and goddesses further by renaming them with/after months of the year and other planets. This is because they believe that their gods have enduring and overbearing influence over material things of nature, oral histories and compositions are also woven around such names and re-naming/rechristening. For instance, Jupiter is named after Zeus, king of the gods, Saturn named after Cronus, ruler of the Titans until Zeus dethroned him. Prometheus is the saviour

of humanities, Hera (Juno) is the queen of the gods, Neptune named after Poseidon, god of the sea, Pluto named after Hades, god of the underworld, Hestia (Vesta) goddess of the hearth and home, Pallas Athene (Minerva), goddess of Wisdom, Apollo (Phoebus Apollo) god of the sun, Aphrodite (Venus) goddess of love and beauty, Hermes (Mercury), messenger of the gods that heads over any event where skill is required, Delemeter (ceres) goddess of agriculture and the harvest, Artemis (Diana) goddess of the moon, Hephaestus (Vulcan) god of artistry. Such names have been given based on the cultural functions, responsibilities and or characteristics of the 'figures'.

### **3.1.5 Mythical Creation Story of the Ancient Greeks**

According to the ancient Greeks, before the world was fully created, before earth, sea and the heaven were created, the entire things of this world had a similar shape, appearance of chaos, thus the name 'confusion' was given to the shapeless mass, dead weight, stagnant sea, the air that was not transparent, and the mixed nature of the Earth. Nature therefore, reacted and put an end to the confusion and conflict that separated the Earth from sea and Heaven. Then, of more fright, was, the light that sprang up and formed the sky and the air which was next in weight and place. The Earth became heavier, sank below, the water then took the lowest place and pushed up the Earth. Then, an unknown god gave responsibility to rebuild the Earth. In this case, he appointed rivers, bays, raised mountains, scooped out valley, fountains, distributed woods, stony, plains, fertile fields. The air gave way and stars began to appear, birds of the air, four footed beasts took over the land and fishes dominated the sea. At last, there was need for a greater animal of greater honour thus man was made. But what man was made up was not known, whether of divine materials, or of heavenly bodies.

Prometheus a gigantic race of Titans living on the earth before man was created, used some of the Earth, mixed up with water and he was made in the image of the gods. He gave man upright nature so he could be quite different from other four footed animals, thus while other animals face the Earth as they walk, he gazes at Heaven and the Stars, Prometheus and his brother, Epimetheus had the great duty to create man and gave him everything that will make his living preserved and successful. After man had been created, Epimetheus gave all lesser animals the gifts of courage, swiftness and strength, wings and claws, shell as necessary. When the question of who should be superior to all other animals came to being discussed, Epimetheus the prodigal had spent all his resources and left with nothing to give man, he then turned to his brother Prometheus, who had to go to Heaven, with the aid of Minerva, brought fire down to man. With fire, man superseded other animals as he is able to forge weapons, tools, with which he built houses and cultivate land, introduce the art to coin money, and later, trade and commerce.

But, there was a need for a woman, Jupiter made woman and sent her to Prometheus and his brother to punish them for beign presumption in stealing fire from Heaven, and man for accepting the gift. The first woman was named

Pandora. She was made in Heaven, every god gave out something to perfect her beauty. Mercury gave her persuasion, Venus gave her beauty, and Apollo gave her music, now well equipped, she was presented to Earth who in turn presented her to Prometheus, who accepted her gladly, but warned his brother to beware of Jupiter and his gifts. There was a day Pandora became eagerly curious to know what the content in a jar in the house of her host contained, she slipped off the cover and looked in, paved a way of escape for the plagues such as rheumatism, colic for his body, gout, spite, envy and vengeance. She struggled to replace the lid, but all the contents of the jar had gone except hope which was left at the bottom of the jar. That is why up to now, whatever evil may befall man, he has hope left in him and no matter how great illness may afflict man, it cannot make him completely wretched.

### **3.1.6 Native American Cheyenne Creation Myth**

In the beginning, only the spirit called Maheo lived in the void. He saw nothing around him, heard nothing around, but nothingness. He moved everywhere in the void, and then moved by his power, he asked himself the question of the usefulness of power if not for it to be used to people the world – the void and nothingness around him. He then used his power to create a lake-like water that was salty, in the voidy-darkness of nothingness, Maheo felt the coolness of the water and its salty taste on his lips. He thought to himself, that there should be water being, and there appeared fishes swimming to and fro in the deep water, craw fish, snails, mussels, lying on the sand and mud, and he formed the bottom of his lake. Again, he thought of creating things that lives on the water, and snow geese, teal, mallards, loons terns and coots living and swimming on the surface of the water were created. Then, light began to spread beginning from the East, radiating, in the form of gold, till it covered the middle of the sky and all the horizon. Maheo watched the horizon closely and saw the fishes, birds and shellfish lying on the bottom of the lake as exposed by the light, thus Maheo commended himself “beautiful”, he saw and nodded approvingly.

Then the snow goose settled over where she thought, standing on the space above the lake, Maheo said, “I do not see you, but I know you exist”. Then the goose replied, “I do not know where you are, but I know you must be everywhere. Maheo interrupted, “you have made good water on which we live. But the birds are not like fish. Sometimes, we get tired swimming such that we would like to get out of water”. Then fly”, said Maheo and he waved his hands and all the water birds flew, skittering along the surface of the lake until they had sped enough to ride in the air and darkened the sky. “How beautiful they are “said Maheo to his power as the birds turned and wheeled and became a living pattern against the sky. The loon chirped first to the surface of the lake and said he has made sky and light to fly in and has also made them water to swim in. We sound ingrate to want something else, “yes, we do”. When we are tired of swimming and flying, we should be able to walk on a solid place and to build our nests.

Maheo agreed to grant their requests because he had made things like, the water, sky, air, and light and the peoples of the water. He confesses that his power could only make four things by himself. He tasked the swifts and biggest among the goose to find water first, "I am ready to try", the snow goose said, she drove herself along the water until the white wake behind her grew and grew to sharp-white print that drove her up into the air as the feathers drive an arrow. She flew high into the sky until she became a dark spot against the bright light, then the goose turned up and down and plunged faster than an arrow, and dived into the water, pierced the surface with her beak like the point of a spear. Maheo counted to four hundred times before she emerged to the surface of the water floating, "what have you bought, asked Maheo?" but the goose sighed sadly, "nothing, I brought nothing back".

Then, the Mallard and loon tried after him, dashed with the speed of flashing arrow into the water but brought nothing. It was the turn of the little coot, paddling across the surface of the water very quietly, dipping his head sometime to catch a tiny fish, and shook the water beads from his scalp lock each time he rose. Maheo, said the little coot softly, 'when I put my head beneath the water, it seems to me that I see something there far below, perhaps, I can swim down to it – I don't know. I can't fly or dive like my sister and brothers. All I can do is swim, but I will swim down the best I know how, and go as deep as I can. May I try, please, Maheo?' "Little brother", said Maheo, "no man can do more than his best and I have asked for the help of all the water peoples. Certainly, you all try. Perhaps, swimming will be better than diving afterall. Try, little brother and see what you can do".

"Hah-ho" the little coot said, "Thank you Maheo", and he put his head under the water and swam down and down, down and down until he was ought of sight. The coot had gone a long long time till Maheo and other birds could see a little dark spot beneath the surface of the water slowly rising towards them. It was as if they will never see the coot again, but at last the point began to form a shape, they could now see clearly, the coot is now emerging from the bottom of the salty lake. When he arrived, he stretched his beak upward into the light but he did not open it. "Give me what you have brought", Maheo said and the coot let his beak fall open and a little mud ball of mud fall from his tongue into Maheo's hand so when Maheo wanted to, he could become like a man". "Go little brother", Maheo said, "Thank you and may what you have brought always protect you". That was it, the Coots flesh taste of mud, neither man nor animal will eat it unless there is nothing to eat. Maheo rolled the ball of mud between the palms of his hands, it grow larger gradually and his palm could not contain it, he looked around for a place to put the mud, but there was nowhere to put it. Maheo requested help again from the water peoples, "I must put this mud somewhere, one of you must let me place it on his back". All the fish and other water creatures swarm towards him, and he tried to find the right one to carry the mud, the snails and crawfish who lived in the deep had solid backs but were too small. The fish were too narrow and their back fins stuck up to break up the mud. At last, only one water person was left. Maheo asked, "Grandmother Turtle, do you think you can help me?" Maheo said once again, "Let the Earth be known as our

Grandmother and let the Grandmother who carries the earth be only being who is at home, beneath the water, or within the earth, or above the ground, the only one who can go anywhere, by swimming or by walking as he chooses". That was how the turtle and the whole of his generation carry the weight of the entire world and its peoples on their back.

At last, Maheo commanded the Grandmother and all her descendants to walk very slowly as they bear the burden of the world on their backs. He added, "our Grandmother Earth is like a woman, she should be fruitful let her begin to bear life. He is my power". Before this period, the Earth and water has been barren. After Maheo's pronouncement, trees and grass sprang up to become the grandmother's hair, flowers became her ornaments, the earth offered fruits and seeds to Maheo. The birds came to rest on her hands when they got tired, and the came close to her sides, Maheo concludes that the Earth woman was beautiful, the most beautiful thing he had made. Maheo thought that the woman must not be alone, and needed to convince her of his love, he reached out for a rib of his right side, pulled it out and breathed on it and laid it softly on the bottom of the Earth woman, the bone moved, stirred, stood and walked, thus the first man came to be.

He is now alone with the Grandmother Earth, he then reminiscenced how he was once alone and concludes. "It is not good for anyone to be alone", so Maheo created a woman from the left side of his rib, set her with the man, thus there were two persons from the Grandmother Earth, her children and Maheo's, they were all happy and Maheo was happy too as he watched them.

After a year, the first child was born at spring time. And as the years passed by, there were other children; they spread over the Earth to become many tribes. Maheo created animals to feed and take care of the people. He gave them deer for clothing, and food, porcupines for ornaments, antelopes to run the plain and praine dogs to burrow the Earth. He also instructed his power to make the Buffalo. Up to now, Maheo is still with us all, everywhere we go, watching over the people he created. Maheo is life, the ancestor, creator, the teacher, guardian, and embodiment of wisdom.

### **3.1.7 Cherokee (Great Smoky Mountains) Creation Myth**

There was water everywhere, but all the animals crowded above the arch, wandering what was beyond the water. Then, the water beetle, Bearer's Grandchild decided to go and see, so as to learn, so went everywhere on the water but found no place to rest. It went under the water and emerged with mud, which he later spread and formed the earth, which was later tied to the sky with four cords but there was no oral account of who did it. The Earth was flat, but soft, and the animal were eager to get down, but the investigation conducted by the birds revealed that there was no dry place, hence had no where to perch but returned to Galunlati. But, the task to find a solid earth was given to the Great Buzzard, he flew everywhere, got no dry land but got tired when it got to the land

of the Cherokee, his wings began to weak, and if struck the ground to provoke valley everywhere it struck, and mountain grew where it turned up. All the animals became afraid of the mystery behind growing mountains and thought everywhere on Earth may be mountaineous, so they recalled the Great Buzzard that is the reason, up till today, everywhere around the Cherokee is mountaneous.

The animals were not comfortable with soft Earth everywhere so they requested that the sun make it a shine duty to daily across the island from East to West over head, it was too hot but Tsiskagili, the Red Crawfish had his shell scorched bright red, this spoilt its meat and it became forbidden for food to the Cherokee. The conjurer infused another hand breath on the sun, it was still too hot, until the seventh time, and it was right, so they left it so, and the place till today is known as *Digalun Latiyun* which means the seventh hand breath high above the Earth. Thus, daily the sun goes under the arch and returns in the night on the upper side to the point it started from.

There is another world under the sun, it is similar to ours in population. It has animals, plants and people but has different season from the Earth. The streams from the mountain serves as the hope to the underworld because its water is cooler in Summer and Warmer in Winter. Nobody knew by whom the animals were made, they were told to keep vigil for seven nights, and they all kept vigil the first night, while many could not cope the second night, and others too slept the successive nights, except the Owl and one or two others and were all empowered to see through the dark and prey on birds and animals which sleeps at nights. Among the trees, only the Cedar, Spruce, Pine, holy and Laurel kept vigil till end, and were thus empowered to be ever green, and be greatest for medicine, but others were decreed thus, "Because you have not endured to the end, you shall lose your hair everywhere".

Men were created after the plants and animals, a brother and sister were the first to be created, until she was struck with fish and commanded to multiply, so in seven days, a child was born, and in another seven days and the population of the world increased through the process such that the Earth became overpopulated, then a decree went forth that to prevent the danger of overpopulation, a woman should have only one child a year and that has been the condition for a woman ever since.

### **3.18 Creation Myth of the Yorubas Nigeria, West Africa**

The place we now call the Earth was once a mass of water, the sky in Heaven was the abode of Oludumare and other divinities. The divine beings above used the mass of water for sporting activities. They often descend with a strand of spider's web, a web which also formed the thin layer and bridge between Heaven and the Earth. They also often descend to the Earth for hunting expenditure. What moved Olodumare to create solid Earth is however controversial. At the conception of idea to create the solid Earth, he invited Orisa-Nla, the arch-divinity and instructed him with the role of getting the materials. He gave him a

leaf packet of loose Earth, five toed hen, a pigeon, as tools. Some version said the solid earth was in a snails shell.

Orisa-nla distributed the loose earth in some portions of the water until the watery waste was covered with the Earth. He reported back to Olodumare that he had done the work. On the instruction of Olodumare, the Chameleon inspected all that Orisa-nla had done. The choice of the Chameleon was based on his rare quality of being careful, and delicately move around to accomplish great tasks. The Chameleon in the first inspection of the Earth confirmed that the Earth is wide, but had not been sufficiently covered yet, thus, it was not ready for any further operation yet. His second inspection revealed that the Earth is indeed wide and dry enough. The particularly sacred spot where the creation began is named Ife, a wide area according to the Yoruba meaning of the word. That was how the sacred Yoruba city derived its name, Ile-Ife, but the prefix Ile was later added to indicate a sacred spot of an existence, this differentiate the spot from other areas or towns that came into existence as a result of migration.

The creation of the Earth took four days, but the fifth day was set apart for rest and worship of the deity when Olodumare confirmed that the work had been completed, he sent Orisa-nla in company of Orunmila back to beautify the Earth, though Orunmila was to play the role of a counsellor to Orisa-nla. The Olodumare handed the primeval Igi-Ope (Palm-Tree) to Orisa-nla to plant the juice will give drink and its seed will give oil and kernel for seed. He also gave him three different kinds of trees fully sap. They are Awun (white wood), Ire (silk-rubber tree) and Dodo. They are to be planted so that their juices too can give drink. The earth was still dry, foggy as there was no rain, upon the Earth. The Pigeon and hen responsible for spreading the Earth should increase and so that there can be meat for the inhabitants of the Earth. Olodumare, had the duty to lead a group of deities down, and they became the nucleus of the Earthly inhabitants.

Activities had began on Earth but, she was short of water, thus Orisa-nla appealed to Olodumare who blessed the Earth with rain drops. But, Orisa-nla had to create man, a responsibility oral tradition was not specific about where he first began the creation of human features. Olodumare would breath life into any feature which the sculptor moulds into a room, and inform Olodumare to give breath as the last stage of the creation of man. But, orality tells us that Orisa-nla envied Olodumare's exclusive right to give life and then spied on him. A day he had moulded man, he locked himself with the lifeless bodies in the room, hid himself with the aim to spy on Olodumare and watch him though the process Olodumare knew the crafty design of Orisa-nla and forced him into a deep sleep and woke up after the human processes have been completed by Olodumare. With such experience, Orisa-nla became satisfied with his own department of the creation process. His department or specialty in moulding man gave him the right to mould by whichever shape, figure, perfect or defective and colour like the cripple, hunchback, white, Albino. Apart from Orisa-nla, Orunmila, an embodiment of wisdom is said to rank next to Olodumare, he witnessed all the processes involved in the creation of humanity, his excellence in wisdom

qualified for the post of an adviser to Orisa-nla from the beginning, hence, up to now man consults the deity for counselling in Yoruba land.

Oral tradition explains that the proximity between Heaven and Earth then made it possible for the inhabitants of the Earth to stretch their hands and touch Heaven and everyone could travel to Heaven and return to the earth. Suddenly, something frustrating was said to have taken place in the period of the Garden of Eden, the sudden occurrence created a wide gap between Heaven and Earth. The sudden occurrence was itself a subject of oral controversy up to now. One version said a woman with filthy hand touched the face of Heaven, and another said a greedy person took too much food from Heaven. The whole idea is that man transgressed against the God of Heaven, hence Heaven retreated from man to cut humanity off the bounties of Heaven. The above represents the first aspect of the oral version of the creation of the Earth, within the Yorubas alone, there is other versions that Oduduwa was responsible for the creation of the Earth because when Orisa-nla departed from Olodumare, on the way to begin the mission of the creation of the Earth, leg drank palm-wine and was over drunk and he fell into a protracted sleep. Apparently worried, Olodumare sent Oduduwa on enquiry to find out what was wrong with Orisa-nla, who was found helpless and lying on the ground. Thus, Oduduwa quietly retrieved the materials meant for creation of the Earth in the possession of Orisa-nla and went ahead to execute the task. It was the Oduduwa from whom the Yorubas are believed to have emerged that became the ancestral father of the Yorubas with Ile-Ife as aboriginal home and a legendary figure whose children later found all other Yoruba lands.

The different versions of the oral mythical creations of the world have been given above to justify the universal practice of oral literary tradition among all cultured races of the world. Most common among all is the creation myth which is traceable in any race of the world. Though we have given the examples of the creation myths of the Cheyenne, Native American, Ancient Greeks, Greco-Roman and the Yoruba version in Africa. This is to justify the undeniable existence as well as oral tradition as a continuous practice among every race. The creation myths reproduced here will also remind you of the creation myth of your people and other oral versions. They are all clothed in moral lessons just as the examples that we have given here. The embedded moral lessons are left for you to unravel as you read on, moreso, they are direct and visible as you read the exciting creation myths.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Discuss two of the myths discussed in this unit and outline the moral lessons for each of them.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have discussed the creation myths of the Greeks, Greco-Roman, Native American, Cherokee and Cheyenne as well as the Yoruba oral versions of the creation myth.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt the following

- the meaning of the concept, oral literature
- every people/tribe has her own oral version of the creation myth
- oral literature is a continuous practise as it is necessarily passed on from one generation to another for the purpose of maintaining continuity of cultures
- moral lessons are embedded in every oral literature, including the creation myth
- in the next unit, you will learn the origin and nature of oral African literature.

## 6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Read and answer the questions below

- 1) Define oral literature in your own words.
- 2) Following the examples of the creation myths drawn from at least three continents of the world, justify the assertion that the oral literary myth of your village is realistic.
- 3) State the moral lessons you have learnt in the creation myth of the Yorubas you are familiar with.
- 4) Summarize any of the creation myths discussed in this unit.
- 5) Using these myths as model, write an original myth of your own about some elements of nature. Write a paragraph that compares and contrasts what life was like before the earth was created and the significance roles played by plants, animals and humans as seen in any of the creation myths.

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## **UNIT 2      ORIGIN AND NATURE OF ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we have also considered the forms of oral poetry, the features, of oral African Literature, method of transmission, and training of the oral Artist. As much as written literature has its origin and nature, so also is oral African literature. As a student in the department of English, who is undertaking a course as oral literature, you should be able to say something meaningful, should questions arise on the origin of the oral literature of your people, the oral mode of transmission of oral literature, the forms of oral poetry, the oral artist and his

training. All these are necessary undertakings that will sharpen your knowledge of your people's culture and of the course. Our discussion in this unit will help you to understand the structural nature of oral African literature, its evolving progressional pattern from the pool of orature, as discussed in the next unit. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

- describe the oral artist
- discuss the origin of the oral literature of your people
- explain the nature of oral African literature
- describe the nature of the training of the oral literary artist
- identify the delivery system of oral African literature
- reveal who the oral Artist is in African community
- develop the praise poem of any hero in your community
- state the features of oral African literature
- compare the praise poetries of the Pygmy of the Congo, Basin, Tutsi of Rwanda and the Bemba speaking tribes of Northern Rhodesia
- recall the dirge and praise poetry with suitable examples

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 What is Oral Tradition?**

Oral tradition (oral lore) is the cultural material and tradition transmitted from one generation to another. The messages are solely transmitted in speech forms (song). Examples are ballads, folktales, and chants. The transmission is done through oral history, knowledge over generations without expressing it in any of the western recipient languages such as English, French, or Portuguese. Oral tradition may also be described as the transmission of cultural material through vocal utterance long believed to be associated with folklore or folk heroism and as distinct from oral history which records personal histories.

Oral tradition as an academic discipline has been variously described as oral traditional theory, the oral-formulaic composition and the Parry-Lord theory (named after two of its founders). Orality is the verbal expression in societies characterized by verbiage in societies where the print medium, writing or technologies of literacy are strange to the populace/culture.

Orality may be categorized as primary orality, (that which is defined by cultures), writing print and the secondary orality of the (familiar age of

electronic, technology culture that expresses orality through by radio, telephone, television and other electronic devices).

We have observed that literature manifests itself in written and the oral, but the oral literature had its forms that are determined by the oral nature of the medium. Oral literature, as a result of its multiple roles within the community has as a result shown variety of forms which include myth, legends, funeral dirges, songs, folktales and praise poetry. We are, however concerned with the major forms of poetry. They are *the dirge* and *praise poetry*.

### **3.2 The Origin of Oral African Literature**

Literature may be said to be as old as man, hence it is unlike the written literature that has a set date, periods, even the first writers in a particular literary genre in most instances are known and the circumstances that surround the birth of the particular genre of literature is often known. But, the case of oral African literature uniquely differs from all such as the actual date of the beginning of oral African literature may be said to be unknown, and where?, who the first man or woman to engage in oral African renditions and compositions, either myths, occupational songs, folktales, proverbs, lullaby's praise songs, dirge, elegy and fables is not known. This is because such compositions are themselves as old as the African continent that breeds and practises them. Such oral renditions, we may be categorical, belong to the distant past, the remote part of our existence. We may even say that they are the 'children' of the 'dark age', birthed by the preliterate societies, our primitive past of Africa to actualize certain societal demands of the periods that produced them, the conditions that gave rise to them. Indeed, oral African literature originated from the remote past and part of Africa, they are not alien to the African cultural compound where it originated from the extinction (death) of the one generation does not necessarily mean an end to the oral African literature of the people as it is a natural law that oral African literature (orature) in all its forms must be passed onto the succeeding generations, and in the process oral Artists are trained or emerges to carry on the cultural practices of the oral African rendition in all its ramifications and aesthetics, including paraphernalia or materials that are necessary to empower the excellent executions of such office as it may be deemed fit or depending on the circumstances or situation that called for its practise.

Yes, the origin of oral African literature is itself embedded in the oral tradition that birthed and popularized it. Every oral Africa rendition is a necessary part of the culture of the people, every strand of oral composition in Africa do not exist in vacuum as it must necessarily be woven around events, issues, a story that is/are often directed towards cultural manifestation, towards enhancing, reviving or strengthening the people's moral standard, teaching morals, initiating ceremonies, entertaining or educating the people.

Perhaps, the fact that oral African literature is more deeply rooted in the remote part of Africa may be the reason its practise is stronger in the villages than in the

African metropolis, moreover the latter area is endangered by the thriving wave of civilization backed up by science and technology. Orature is still a thriving culture in the African society, even of the modern time. Every strand of oral civilization is woven around events, history, circumstance, situation and conditions, hence oral African poetry, for instance are in various forms.

### **3.3.1 A Dirge**

Dirges are usually songs of lamentation sang during or after the burial of a loved one, thus, we may say that such similar circumstance in the past may have led to either an individual, group or communal conception of dirges, thereby giving birth to a tradition of a people that sing dirges in honour, appraisal or remembrance of their deceased ones, who may be a hero, heroine, wife, husband, sister, aunt, uncle, nephew, friend or any loved one. Here is an example of a dirge, oral African poetry of the Bemba speaking people of Northern Rhodesia.

### **3.3.2 A Dirge of the Bemba Speaking People of Northern Rhodesia**

Listen to our sorrow  
Hear our lament  
The sun has retreated her beauty  
The moon shut her glittering eyeballs  
Leaving the mournful Earth to  
Inherit a stream full of tears  
Tears that dripped with the  
Mighty torrent of rain  
With her swagger stick hitting  
hard on the rocks and mountaneous edges  
The sun's rainbow of agreement  
betrayed out eyes with  
misty unshed tears  
Leaving every mouth agap  
Each asking, "where are you?"  
"Where are you?"  
The ancient battle maker  
of ages has gone  
Gone with all the rare  
Skills of battle making  
All the strength  
The might of no equal  
Anywhere on Earth  
He has gone into his Eternal  
Home beyond the skies above

To take a seat with our  
 Ancestors before him, the first  
 war heroes of our land  
 Had we a fore knowledge  
 of your departure  
 We would have requested  
 Your strong fists  
 Your bow of targeted destination  
 Dane gun of magic power  
 Your million venom against  
 Distant enemies of our land  
 We hadn't  
 the premonition that you had  
 woven your latest battle  
 into an invisible strand  
 To transport your soul to Heaven  
 The mudslingers have slithered  
 into the mud  
 The pulprus slithered into the muddy pool  
 And the sparrow and partridge  
 flew Heaven ward came calling  
 The Bat not to slumber  
 But insist the sun has intercepted the  
 Darkness as a hero has gone to  
 Sleep in the broad daylight  
 Do not rebel  
 When you arrive in Heaven  
 Do as they do, eat what they eat  
 in Heaven  
 Goodbye Till we meet  
 Goodbye Till we meet  
 Goodbye Till we meet in Eternity

In the above oral dirge of the Bemba speaking people of Northern Rhodesia is sang for a departed war hero or war general. The poet composed the dirge in honour of the deceased member of the Bemba community using metaphors to rend weight to the skillfulness of the deceased in the field of battle, he is compared to a retreated beauty of the sun, moon, leaving the stream and earth mournful in the poem, a personification which adds to the oral aesthetic of the oral composition. The personified rain in the poem also shares from the mournful moment of the dead war hero, just as humanity was suppressed at the shocking departure of the deceased. The poet laments that the brave warrior left with all his bravery and war skills unrivalled by anyone on Earth. The valiance of the war hero the poet says will qualify him to take a seat with the poet's ancestors in heaven, the foremost warriors of the land. The poet regrets that the war hero departs with all his weapons of war, even as his departure gave no premonition. Also, nature sea-mammals reacts to the hero's death, the pulprus, mudskippers,

partridges, sparrow, bat, the oral dirge concludes with the hope of meeting the poet again.

### **3.3.3 Praise Poetry**

Praise poems are often designed to eulogise the virtues of the subject who may be human, non-human, even a deity, animal, bird, king, tree or the sea. Oral poetry invokes the qualities of the subject a by generous use of allusions, simile, metaphors, and onomatopoeic. The following is an example of the praise poem of the sun by the Tutsi of the great Lake region in Rwanda-Burundi.

#### **3.3.3.1 A Praise Poem of the Sun**

You, the dazzling virgin  
of innumerable colours  
Colourful eyelashes disguised as  
Rainbow  
Longest, brightest eyelashes  
of magnetic attraction that  
stretched wooing the  
Earth  
In a humble invitation  
To a game of love  
A beauty that woos  
Other planets  
Earthly creatures  
You the bright Jewell  
Ancient queen eternal  
bestowed longevity  
Go on, Go on our virgin  
Our heroine, heroic beauty  
of ages

Anonymous

The above praise poem of the Tutsi praises the sun in glowing language, embellished with comparisons and personifications, elevating the status of the sun even greater than that of man, as embodiment of beauty and longevity.

Likewise, we reproduce here under, for the purpose of this unit, the oral praise poetry of the Night moon by the Pygmy People of the Congo.

#### **3.3.3.2 Praise Poetry of the Moon-Pygmy People of the Congo**

Glittering stars of the white night,  
Moon shinning on high  
Piercing the forest with your pale beams  
Stars friend of white ghosts

Moon their protectress

Anonymous Oral Praise Poetry  
of the Pygmy People of the Congo

From the poem, we see how the night moon is eulogized in a very descriptive form and is metaphorically compared to any sharp object or a knife that could cut through things. The invisible nature of the night moon as having the capacity to protect is also addressed in a poem that combines visual with sensory imagery.

Indeed, the conditions that surround the creation of these poems birthed them in the various rural communities of the different parts of Africa that practises them. For instance, the condition of death gave birth to dirges, but heroism and eagerness to immortalize nature birthed praise poetry.

### **3.4 Features of Oral African Literature**

The most important feature of oral African literature is the importance of the actual performance since it is not written down. Ruth Finnegan also confirmed this when she insists that “oral literature is dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion”.

The phrase “on a specific occasion” used above lends weight to all we have discussed and given examples of from the different parts of Africa and more specifically that oral African poetry depends on the situation that formed them.

Oral literature depends not on the written medium but through the voicing power to be transmitted from one generation to another. The Artist who is to deliver the oral knowledge through words relies on various visual resources at his disposal to perform his task because he has his audience waiting right with him, face to face and such is to his merit. This is because he can take advantage of the situation to modify the content of his rendition or composition, and he may employ the use of idiophones, manipulate scenes or used a dramatized dialogue, admit the sense of humour. He may even get his audience involved or perform from the point of view of aloofness.

#### **3.4.1 Verbal Variability**

In terms of verbal variability, the Artist takes or assumes the role of the original account of the Artist a well blended with form may even change the words to achieve aesthetic and variety to avoid unnecessary repetition and stereotypical ideas in the work.

The Artist may introduce a new dimension in the form of improvisation, yet without giving away detailed wordings, and without affecting the patterned structure and counters of the compositions. Yet, the plot can be moderately modified by introducing simple twist, for the purpose of embellishment. All the

additions, subtractions, modifications and so on are the Artist's ingenious creativity.

### **3.4.2 Audience**

Another feature of oral literature is willing audience. Written literature may not require the use and presence of an audience, but public audience is necessary in public oral performance as his responsibility and the fulfilment of the requirement of oral tradition.

Audience participation: The audience may occasionally inject ideas, exclaim, query's or chorus a line or two as may be necessary in the form of feed back of response to the narration. This justifies the unity of the African form of oratory or confirmation of joint authorship and may be for the clarification of ideas.

### **3.4.3 Method of Delivery**

Relying on verbiage, oral literature is passed from one generation to another, especially during public performance which may be in the moonlight (night time) or day. The oral Artist gets all the materials he needs to actualize the story ready, and all these also depend on the cognitive/retentive ability of the oral Artist to recall past events.

### **3.4.4 Action/Performative**

Orature backed up by action. Orature should necessarily be accomplished by action to make the story performative and real to the listening audience. The use of physical action, gesticulations, signs, and so on other than depend only on the use of the words of the mouth helps audience comprehension of the story as signs aids ethical communication in communal settings. For instance, to mimic the way tortoise in African oral folktale walks with a swaggering gait to pretend to his in-laws that he suffers a fractured leg will exude laughter from the audience, buttresses, pampered to when such an incident is merely narrated.

### **3.4.5 Drumming**

The art of drumming aids the delivery system of oral African literature. Drumming message may be used to convey information in an African setting. For instance, the talking drum among the Yorubas and in other ethnic settings of Africa is often used to give 'decodable' information beyond mere guesses.

Although, with science and technology, the use of cinematography makes it possible for words and actions to be recorded and passed on to succeeding generation without missing out the elements of oral performance in orature, but

the originality and naturalness that colour the oral art of talking drum is irreplaceable and more aesthetically satisfying. Hence, the *Ayan* family of drummers among Oyo Yorubas in Nigeria, West Africa exemplifies the importance of drummers and drums in orature.

### **3.5 The Oral Artist**

There are two types of the oral artists, they are the professional and non-professional artist. The nature of the economy of the traditional societies, most people usually engage in various occupations such as farming, fishing, hunting or palm-nut collector. There was no specialization, hence no professional artists who depend entirely on singing or story telling as a means of livelihood. Professionalism was therefore not developed, it was limited to the court entertainers like the griots.

The non-professionals refer to the generality of the people who perform occasionally as artist, but were also otherwise involved in other occupations. They could receive some tokens during performance, as artiste, sometime, it could be gifts in the form of food or drink; but did not base his source of livelihood on performance. The tradition African artist was highly regarded in the society in the absence of the modern forms of entertains like the cinema, theatres, club houses and disco arena, tape-recording, television sets and videos. The oral artist plays all these roles in the society/community. As a respected entertainer, he relates with every section of the society, thus has free ticket into every social gathering in the society as his presence makes social functions lifelier and rich.

The artist is the acknowledged historian, teacher, orator, songster, informat, and culture information and indigenous information disseminator. He passes vital information to both young and old with his repertoire of knowledge, of course he ensured through his medium the continuity and survival of culture and tradition. As cultural historian, he recounts the exploits of heroes, heroines and their valour or excellence in war battles or wars. The artist is the respected moralizer and philosopher. His songs and stories often teach morals and must be punctuated by nuggets of wisdom. He encourages good behaviour, but condemns uncultured behaviours as such behaviours deviate from approved societal norms. By the nature of the African culture and practices as well as the mode of transmission, every member of the community is a story teller, songster, and indeed an artist of a kind or semi-artist as they traditional inherit oral artistry as cultural essence.

### **3.6 Training of the Oral Artist**

In traditional African societies, the oral Artist is not just a story telling or an entertainer, a philosopher but an acknowledged voice of the people, an historian, custodian of information, teacher and educator who uses the oral medium to teach; inform, and educate both young and old on the culture of the society so as to maintain the continuity of the peoples culture and tradition. Every member of

the society including the aged belong to his school of oral repository. The oral Artist many have his own occupation, but also do not charge for the services he render to people, though, he may receive any gift which range from stipends to gifts like food and drinks, even when he is not invited he freely attends any social functions in the community to entertain, though, he does not depend, entirely on story telling or entertainment to earn a living as he may be gainfully engaged in other occupations in the society such as farming, fishing or hunting. But, his role as an entertainer is often recognized in the community as one who preaches virtue to the people.

The training of the oral Artiste was informal and it does not have a particular duration of time, fees were not charged and there is no teacher-student relationship as we have in formal education setting. The skill of story telling may also be acquired by watching other Artistes perform, and such may take some years.

### **ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

After reading the dirge of the Bemba speaking people of Northern Rhodesia in this unit, you can reproduce the oral dirge from the pool of oral tradition of your people.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have discussed orature and the oral origin of oral African literature. We have also given some examples of orature, specifically using the dirge of the Bemba speaking people of Northern Rhodesia, praise poetry of the Tutsi of Rwanda and the praise poetry of the Pygmies of the Congo Basin. We have also discussed the features of oral African literature, the personage of the oral Artist, his training as well as mode of delivery or transmission. Please take note of them all and do a self evaluation by putting them to practise constantly before you submit to your facilitator.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- orature began in the preliterate societies
- you should be able to reproduce the oral literature of your people
- you can also reproduce a popular dirge of your community
- to identify the features of orature
- who an oral Artist is and his method of training and delivery system
- that it is also possible for you to produce the praise poetry of your lineage or of the heroe of your village

In the next unit, you will be introduced to the ‘architecture’ and ‘building blocks’ of oral African Literature.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Read and answer the questions below

- 1) Explain what you found fascinating about the dirge of the Bemba speaking people of Northern Rhodesia.
- 2) Return to the oral pool of your people and reproduce a fascinating praise poem of your choice.
- 3) Compare the praise poetries of the Tutsi of the great Lake region of Rwanda and that of the Pygmy of the Congo.
- 4) Who is the first African man/woman orature?
- 5) Who is an oral Artist?

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## **UNIT 3 ‘ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING BLOCKS’ OF ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1.1 ‘Architecture and Building Blocks’ of Oral African Literature
  - 3.1.2 Orature and Language
  - 3.1.3 Subject Matter
  - 3.1.4 Deliberate Artistic Construct
  - 3.1.5 Order of Naratology
  - 3.1.6 Oral African Literature and the Figurative Use of Language
  - 3.1.7 Moralistic Tale with End in View
  - 3.1.8 Legendery
  - 3.1.9 Audience Evaluation of Orature
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is designed to take you through what really constitute the ‘architecture’ and ‘building blocks’ of oral African literature. As you go through this unit, you will understand the relationships between comparing the ‘architectural design’ of a building to the source of oral African literature and how vital such beginning is to the general nature of the orature, what a foundation is to a building. This unit has been designed in such a way that you will find the study of oral African literature more interesting.

One of the very important ways to be a successful reader of oral African literature is to be able to acquaint oneself with the necessary beginning components of oral African Literature, the chronological or sequential ordering or chronology of the orature. You will come across situations in which you may be requested to discuss some aspects of the orature of your people, the essential

foundational pattern and designs, if understood will make you a super star discussant as you will be able to discuss orature with the consciousness of the source of any oral narrative, its generational necessity, as well as look out for possible interferences by recipient Western cultures like the English, French and Portuguese languages, and how the role of the oral artist has helped to shape your communal verbiage. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define the concept of ‘architecture’ and ‘building blocks’ in relation to oral African literature
- identify the necessary ‘materials’ that constitute the ‘building’ block of oral African literature
- present any genre of the orature of your people and identify its ‘building block’
- state what makes three of the patterned ‘building blocks’ of more aesthetic value than the others
- do a critical discussion of the building blocks of oral African literature

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1.1 ‘Architecture and Building Blocks’ of Oral African Literature**

The same way buildings are constructed to achieve aesthetics, so also oral African Literature has design, plan and structures that follow a specific ‘architectural’ fashioning and that is what we may refer to as the ‘building blocks’ of oral African Literature.

### **3.1.2 Oral African Literature and Language**

In the discussion of oral African Literature across its genres, language, an important element of its processing and building is deliberately fashioned to play the role of ethical communications and naratology that oral African Literature is known for. Language is woven around strings of plotted story, arranged and manipulated and shaped to configure something to become permanent, regenerative and passed on from one generation to another to give pleasure, happiness, knowledge and entertains. It is when language has been used to achieve such purpose that we may say that the construction of ‘oral literary edifice’ has been completed for the general populace to serve as their refuge and or ‘umbrella’ for the peoples.

### **3.1.3 Subject Matter**

Subject matter of the oral African poetry with the deployment of language as an important part of the ‘building block’ of oral African poetry. The subject matter – what the entire oral poetry is all about become vital. Whether the oral poetry narrates an event using the folkloric pattern or in its prosaic or dramatic form.

It has subject matter or comes up with a statement that must be relevant to life and human existence, such poem must strike our mind with some life related values or issues. A poem may discuss the subject of death, love, courtship and marriage, other deep frightening mysteries of life; it could also be about politics, economy and culture. The human emotion is naturally awakened to some realities of life, depending on the subject matter; an oral form of literature may adopt the use of dark humour, comparisons, onomatopoeic in its narration. Everything depends on how the verbal artist is able to present the story to curry the attention of his audience.

### **3.1.4 Deliberate Artistic Construct**

Oral African Literature is a deliberate imaginative construct of the society that breeds it oral African Literature in all its forms. It is a deliberate artistic construct of the Artist who is also a product of the very society that breeds the story. It is thus artfully designed to bring pleasure to the life of the members of the society who are his audience. This means that orature is designed to purposefully teach moral, and educate the people on some aspects of the life of the members of the society, including politics, religion and the promotion of the culture of the people. In the process, the audience appreciates the oral construct, the leisurely experience that produced different kinds of satisfaction that accompanies oral literary tradition; be it emotional, psychological and sometimes physical satisfaction.

### **3.1.5 Order of Naratology**

The expository order of the naratology of oral African poetry is the order in which the content of the story, plot action and character are revealed. Mostly the story in oral African literature opens with an invitation, the audience is often beckoned at to share from the pleasure of the story to be hold, with “Once upon a time” or “Here is a tale” and the audience responds in acknowledgement of readiness to share the moral and educative purposes of the story sometime “with time, time”. The whole idea behind such opening is to awaken the audience to or seek the readiness of the audience to be ready for the story teller who tells the story. With the popular opening, the story unravels itself gradually, and with audience centred purposefulness directed towards the realization of the narrative.

### **3.1.6 Oral African Literature and the Figurative Use of Language**

Written or oral, literary forms all naturally use language figuratively when the oral Artist narrates his story, he employs a general use of figuratives of different types. The use of such figurative is not the exclusive reserve of the written literature, oral poetries too use them greatly, the commonly used are metaphors, similes, allusions, onomatopoeic, hyperbole, climax, imagery. Be it drama, prose or poetry, in oral African literature, the figurative use of language elevates the themes and general aesthetics of the work.

### **3.1.7 There must be a Moralistic Tale with End in View**

The tradition of story telling is a vital part of and the basis of oral literature in Africa. The period that such story happened does not really matter, though oral narratives are usually set in a nameless pasts, and sometimes involving some unverifiable deities and mythical designs, there has to be a story to be narrated. It is the story that carries moral weight and serves as the string of discourse; it is the nucleus upon which the moral ideology of the society is based. The composition is the connecting tissue between the oral story teller and the audience, of course the society because morals are derived from the narration. And such story must necessarily have an end, as oral narration cannot go on and on forever without a definite conclusion.

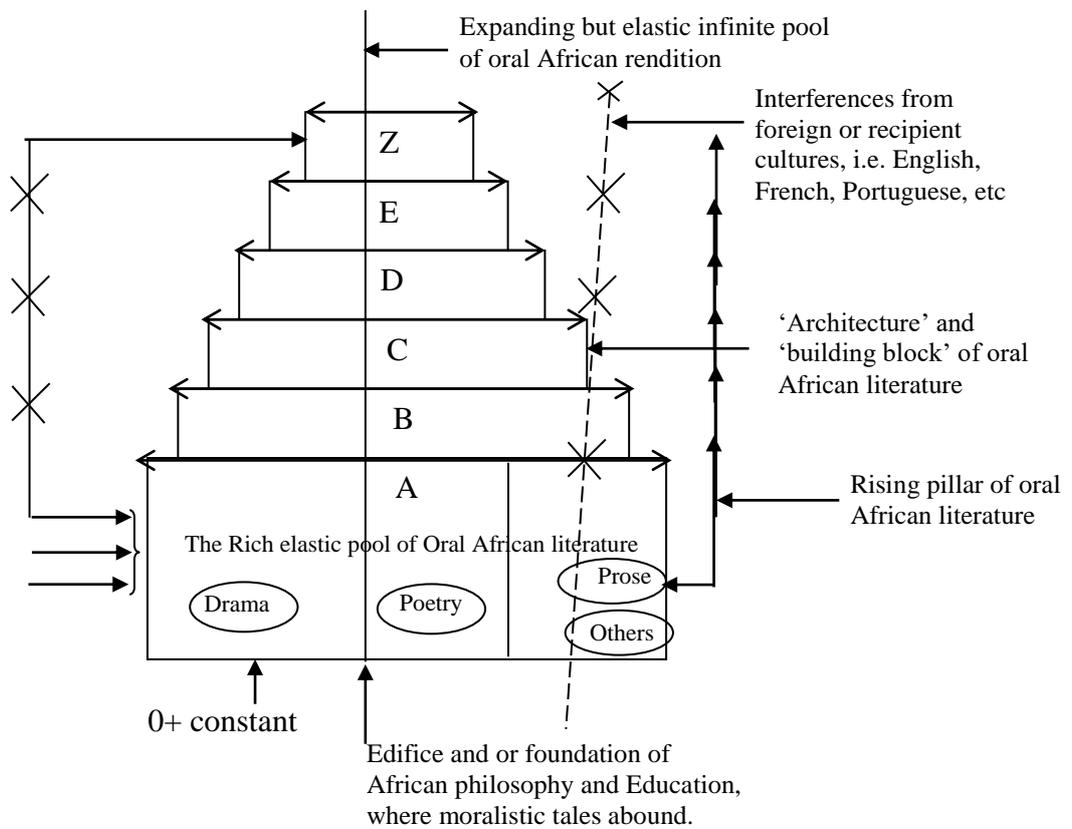
### **3.1.8 Legendery**

Oral literature must be legendery and act on an ideal oral literary focus that are normally woven around the supernatural, and ideas; such ideas are the motif that generates excellence for the oral tradition. The justification for its oral existence is its generous use of legend and legendary figures in the tell tale to proof that the cultural value, existence of a people depends on the legendary nature and figure of the oral experience.

### **3.1.9 Audience Evaluation of Orature**

After the oral Artist has taken the audience through his narration, the audience must punctuate the story with exclamation applause of various degrees and the spontaneous response from the audience in the oral context is synonymous with active reading strategies of a written novel, poetry or drama, the reader's own comments, and evaluating strategies. In orature, audience ability to predict the likely end to the story confirms the audience as listening audience as oral literary audience must not be a dormant or sleeping audience, hence his active involvement is a necessary feedback on the Artist which serve as a motivating factor for the Artist who gets encouraged to continue his oral researches for the purpose of excelling in his chosen trade and to further satisfy his audience.

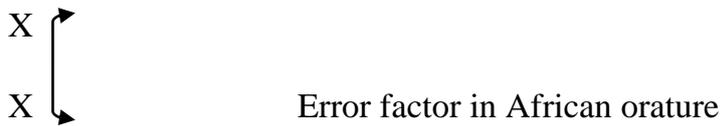
Fig. 1 Architectural Pattern of African oral Literature



Source: Adapted from Stanley ORIOLA, (2011)

Key

- 
0+ constant
Oral materials from pool of tradition are conventionally constant with its moralistic tales.
- 
Rising pillar of orature
- 
Foreign interferences on African orature
- A – Z
Expanding but elastic pool of orature



### Interpretations of Figure (I)


 Indicates the rich pool of oral African literature where moralistic tales abound in brands of conventional African education and philosophy. The rising arrow located at the right hand side of the diagramme is the rising and or elastic pillar of oral African literature. The arrow extends to the pinnacle of the architectural design, even beyond to indicate the infiniteness of African orature despite foreign interferences. The broken arrow to the left, next to the rising pillar is the presence of foreign cultural interferences in oral African literature. Usually, such interferences are noticeable in African’s recipient cultures/imposed languages of our colonial masters such as English, French and Portuguese. A – Z indicates the expanding pool of African orature.

The arrow to the extreme left hand side of the figure that curved inward, is marked with three “XXX” to indicate the “error factor” in oral African literature. The ‘error factor’ is misconceptions and the conflicting foreign values and battered new image that has been imported into and or ascribed to oral African literature by foreign tutelage and other forms of ideological impositions for the purpose of cultural disorientation and domination.

### SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE I

With the aid of orature drawn from the pool of tradition of your people, discuss the building blocks and what makes up the ‘architecture’ of the oral literature of your people.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have defined ‘architecture’ and ‘building blocks’ in relation to oral African Literature. We have also given a figure that represents the ‘growing’ (rising pillar) pattern of oral African Literature from its sufficient oral source of wealthy generous pool of its infinite pool of inferences. Adequate interpretation of the figure has been provided to expantiate our perspective of oral African Literature consider our novel idea here as you study the unit, and put all you have learnt into practise so that your work can justify the fact that you are from a rich African cultural background.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that

- orature passes through some designs the same way a building must necessarily undergo some form of architectural designs
- you can identify the ‘building blocks’ and architectural design of the oral literature of your people
- it is possible to differentiate between audience reaction and expository order of naratology of oral African poetry
- orature has its own source
- orature still suffer certain interferences in modern time
- orature by its nature is elastic.

In the next unit, you will be introduced to the factors that hinder the growth and development of oral African Literature (I).

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

Read and answer the questions below

- 1) Explain the two of the factors that constitute the building block of oral African Literature.
- 2) What is meant by audience evaluation and prediction in orature?
- 3) Differentiate between a story and moralistic story in orature.
- 4) Use two of the architectural designs of oral African Literature to justify a chosen orature of your people or from any part of Africa.

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## **UNIT 4 FACTORS THAT HINDER THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE (I)**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Orality
    - 3.1.1 Orature cannot solve the socio-economic and political problems of the modern man
    - 3.1.2 Design and essence lacks international intelligibility
    - 3.1.3 Growing readership of the novel genre hinders the promotion of oral culture and Literature in Africa
    - 3.1.4 Justification using Oral Tales (I)
    - 3.1.5 Problem of translation to foreign cultures
    - 3.1.6 Orature and the question of Nativity
    - 3.1.7 Modus Operandi of Orature is associated with primitivity and illiteracy
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is written to investigate the factors that hinder the growth and development of oral African Literature. We wish you share from our current knowledge that oral African Literature, though is still being practiced in many parts of Africa but that the enthusiasm with which it is being practised today is not the same in the last three or so decades. In other words oral literary researchers agree with our opinion that the practise of orature in modern Africa dwindles daily and there are obvious factors that contribute to its present retrograde. Thus, our understanding of such inhibitive/ enemies of our once thriving culture of orality will help improve your awareness of how to help revive the ‘dead’ and ‘dying’ or vanishing parts of African orature.

This unit has been written to expose you to the demeaning factors that are characteristically responsible for the waning culture of your people. This aspect is also important for you as you may continue to encounter situations that may compel you to say or write something about the present state of oral African Literature.

We wish to continue this important discussion in the next unit. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- say something about the present state of oral African Literature
- use examples drawn from your oral tradition to explain weakness of orature from the economic perspective
- explain design, lack of international intelligibility in oral African Literature
- discuss the negative influences of the modern African novel on the growth of oral African Literature
- assess how (translation) recipient cultures are problematic to the growth of oral African Literature
- do a critique of orature and the question of nativity
- familiarize yourself with primitivity and illiteracy as demeaning factors to the growth of oral African Literature
- create a table as in figure 2, show how translation process from English Language to orature impacts negatively on the growth of or constitute self to diminishing the aesthetics of oral African Literature

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Orality**

Orality which is the unwritten cultural ‘theatre’ of the African peoples is practised with similar cultural activities but with some regional differences, is a common property of all across Africa. The strength of oral performance in Africa may be said to be in the decline in the last few decades, and the factors which we have identified in our discussion hinder the spread and development of oral African Literature across the regions.

#### **3.1.1 Oral literature cannot solve the socio-economic and political problems of the modern man**

Contemporary believe of the modern man that the thriving oral literary culture does not, and or cannot solve his socio-economic and political problems, as a

result should not be studied is unnecessary. Such discouraging view hinders the growth and development of the individual's interest in advancing the course of the verbal art. Beyond discussing mythical issues of legendary virtue, oral literature according to the general opinion of the modern man cannot make one smile to the Bank or put food on one's table and it is not recognized by the instrument of state as the solution to the modern man's complex political problems in Africa.

### **3.1.2 Design and essence lacks international intelligibility**

The oral literature has been designed by the community or tribe that produced it for African communal socio-cultural representation. Its language and intelligence is about Africa for African audience, and the materials of the oral Artist are of Africa origin. Its setting, plot, story and characters are all of Africa descent for the purpose of satisfying Africa audience of the narrative. For instance, an African folktale about the Tortoise will necessarily draw its characters from the African pool of communal folktales to achieve its primary purpose. Though, the cultural nuances may make no meaning to the Western community, but its relevant to Africa, the roots of such a design.

### **3.1.3 The growing readership of the novel genre hinders the promotion of oral culture and literature in Africa**

Since the publication of the historic romance *Sesotho* in 1908 written by Thomas Mafolo, translated by F. H. Duton, followed by Solomon Plaatje's *Mhudi* in 1930, *Eighteen Pence* by Obeng of Ghana in the 1940's. *Songs of the City* by Peter Abrahams of South Africa in 1945, *Palmwine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola of Nigeria (1952), *Houseboy* by Ferdinand Oyono (1954) and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in Nigeria in (1958), over half a century the novel genre has increased in number and popularity and writers from every part of Africa are adding a sizeable number to the increasing volumes of the novel written by Africans every year. With such development, the novel in Africa, it seems has displaced the oral African Literature in fame, popularity and acceptability with its compulsory use in primary and post-primary schools.

### **3.1.4 Justification using Oral Tale (I)**

We may further justify the above with a sample oral tale of the Yorubas as follows

Once upon a time there was famine in the animal world at a time, birds and animals were friends. A great famine affected animals so much because they could not get fly over great rivers and difficult terrains to acquire food for

themselves and loved ones. The animals called a meeting where it was agreed that Animals should source for food from three sources, the human society and among birds and in the sea. But, //Arogidigba//, the chief mermaid refused, she said she cannot offer her children as food to animals, but //Ogbigbotirigbo// a predatory bird agreed to fly the Tortoise to a distant land to fetch food for the hungry animals; but got nothing in return as the Tortoise gave all what she got to her family in exclusion of the animals all of whom became angry, threw her against the Iroko tree, and shattered her shell. The party that went to the human world in search of food arrived when man was in festive mood, celebrating the festival of abundant food, singing, dancing and drumming with tall //Igunuko//, masquerade, a deity, //Orunmila// chaired the human festival of food. Instead of man to give food to the animals, they killed the animals as meat for the festival. As a result and up to now, man delights in hunting animals for food, and in retaliation, the powerful ones among animals kill man whenever the need arises. And for the refusal of the chief mermaid to help, the predatory bird kills fishes, and animals too kill fishes for food.

We have attempted a translation of the above anonymous oral tale of the Yorubas, but we notice that as it is the tradition of orature, it is important that we translate some key words identified in the orature when narrating the story in modern time. We have provided a figure below and provided a translatory paradigm of such words in Standard British English. Lets see the problems we may encounter in our translation of key concepts in the African folktale to the English language.

Fig. 2 Translation process (recipient culture as problem of oral African Literature)

<i>Source of words pool of oral tradition constant and unique to source culture</i> 0(+)(+)(+)0+ constant	<i>Words</i>	<i>Origin of tale</i>	<i>Nature of tale</i>	<i>Poet</i>	<i>First language of rendition</i>	<i>Literary meaning</i>	<i>Level of meaning Standard British Translation</i>
	Igunuko	Yoruba	Yoruba trickstar tale	Anonymous	Yoruba	A stretching masquerade	Meaning Exaggerated (+)(+)+ Non-existence +-(+)- Suffer reduction -(+)
	Arogidigba	Yoruba	Yoruba Orature	Anonymous	Yoruba	A chief mermaid	Translated forms handicapped (TFH)
	Ogbigbotirigbo	Yoruba	Yoruba Orature	Anonymous	Yoruba	A predatory bird	Translated forms handicapped (TFH)
	Orunmila	Yoruba	Yoruba Orature	Anonymous	Yoruba	A Yoruba god of creation, sculptor	Translated forms handicapped (TFH)

Source: Adapted from Stanley ORIOLA (2007:70)

**Key**

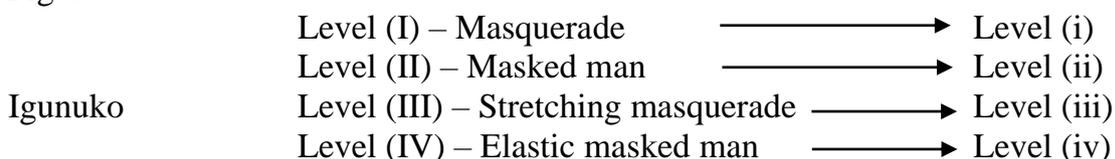
- 0+0+ constant = Source culture of words are constant
- + = meaning of source words translated may be exaggerated
- = meaning aesthetics of source words diminish
- (+)-(+)-(+)- = non-availability of appropriate lexical item
- TFH = non-availability of appropriate lexical item to exhaustively capture the source meaning of words

Interpretations of the table, fig. 2

From the table in figure 2, 0 is constant because in orature, the original value of words taken from the pool of orality is as conventionally constant and as culturally unique to its oral source, hence the (+) addition and (-) subtraction signs indicate that when words are extracted from the source culture into the recipient culture, the meaning of such word is either exaggerated, distorted or devalued.

The non-existence indicates possible non-availability of appropriate lexical item in the recipient culture (English), the (TFH) means that translated or forcefully translated words from Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa or any other oral African source to any recipient culture, English, French or Portuguese, are often handicapped as they may not be exhaustive in capturing the source (oral) meaning of words. Based on the above, we may further place the words from the oral literature on levels of meaning.

Fig. 3



From the above meaning, there are four levels of Igunuko and a critical examination of the word in relation to the oral Yoruba culture clearly indicates dissatisfaction as non even capture the conventional meaning of the concept within the framework of cultural usage. It then means that the validity or authenticity of a source word suffers when the native content is expressed in a foreign language.

The novel as a recent trend has enjoyed phenomenal growth with its ability to adopt apparently easy form of expression capable of reaching the largest possible readership who have close interaction with the novel genre.

### 3.1.5 Problem of Translation to Foreign Cultures

Oral African Literature represents and emphasises communal spirit and everyone is an integral part of the community, thus its language of creation is that of its community be it the Akan, Ewe, Ashanti and Fanti, Tiv, Ibibio, Ebira, Yoruba, Ilaje, Hausa, Igbo, Jukun, Tutsi, Pygmies to mention a few. When these mentioned variants have their Artists compose their oral African Literature in their different dialects. So, for a non African native to be able to understand the oral composition of the different oral perspectives, such has to be translated to the recipients culture for easy communication and comprehension. So, the problem of oral translation makes it impossible for oral African Literature to be popularized, acceptable by peoples of other cultures. Even in Africa societies,

mostly, oral literary experience of the people are translated within the culture for easy discussions.

### **3.1.6 Orature and the Question of Nativity**

Rendition of oral literature in Africa are mythical and legendary. Beyond the Africa continent, even elsewhere in the world, among the Greeks, Romans, Native Americans, Latins, and other parts of the world, oral Artist everywhere find himself on the same path with co-oral Artist in other parts of Africa, through, there may be a little deviation in name callings and plot of say creation myth, but the similar paths are often visible. As a result, of the general claim to oral literature by every indigenous settlements all over the world, people found the question of the nativity of oral literature unanswered, and should be resolved. Whose is orature?, Africans?, Americans?, Greeks?, Latin? It appears shroud and spurious that orature is the child of every tribe and nationality.

### **3.1.7 Modus Operandi of orature is associated with primitivity and illiteracy**

Modus operandi of oral literature is associated with primitivity and illiteracy. The modern man nurses dislike for the oral literary tradition considering its proximity to tradition and pre-literate society. The different aspects of the orature, such as incantations, invocations and getting oneself initiated into some forms of cults and cultisms are considered loathsome. With such experience, everything backward, evil, retrogressive, primitive and socially unacceptable are associated with the oral African Literature and culture.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE I**

With the aid of oral literature of any of the genres, discuss at least two demeaning factors of such an orature.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have mentioned and explained some factors we consider inhibitive to the growth and development of oral African Literature in our growing world of science and technology.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt that the oral African Literature is demeaning, and that the factors identified and discussed are responsible for that.

In Unit 5 of this module, we further our discussion of the factors that are responsible for the growth and development of oral African Literature.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) With the aid of an oral poetry selected from the oral tradition of your people, argue in favour of the assertion that people are not as enthusiastic towards oral African Literature like in the days of our forefathers.
- 2) Provide an orature of your choice and proof that the problem of translation is indeed a problem to the advancement of oral African Literature.

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## **UNIT 5 FACTORS THAT HINDER THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE (II)**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1.1 Too culture specific
  - 3.1.2 Distortion of facts and history
  - 3.1.3 Hypothetical and cumbersome
  - 3.1.4 Women as underdog in orature
  - 3.1.5 Inferior representation of life
  - 3.1.6 Evasive moral in place of ‘truthful lies’
  - 3.1.7 Inconsistencies and unrelated, conflicting plot structures
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

We have written and developed this unit to further our discussion of the problems that hinder the development of oral African literature in our competitive world of cultures and cultural interferences. Though, you are already familiar with these factors, we wish to refresh your memory of some of the constraints to the growth of oral African literature; which you may have forgotten.

It is high time you understood that oral African literature and culture is contending with some inhibitive factors, some of which we have discussed in the previous unit and refreshing your memory within our current unit by adding a sizeable numbers. This unit has been specifically written so you may believe that oral African literature has not gotten to its height of development. And imagining down your study years as a degree student in the university and indeed your boyhood and ‘girlhood’ years of cultural beginning, you will have no doubt that, oral African literature/culture must be consistently ‘rebranded’ in our attitudes and practices for cultural consistency. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the concept of orature and culture specific
- juxtapose our retreating oral cultural heritage with the encroaching age of science and technology using any oral tale, poetry or drama

- use instances from your oral culture to argue that orature distorts history or facts
- differentiate between the cumbersome nature of orature and the treatment of women as underdog in oral African literature
- state and explain the inhibiting factors to the growth of oral African literature
- identify the inhibiting factors to the growth and development of the orature of your community
- discuss how orature contributes to misrepresent life and erase moral for 'truthful lies'.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

In our current world of advancing science and technology, the modern African society seem to pay little attention to creating any meaningful awareness that will promote the verbal art in the new Africa of cultural disorientation and culture conflicts same. Hindrances to the growth and development of oral African literature are.

#### **3.1.1 Too culture specific**

Oral African literature is the expression of continental cultural concern, though with regional colorations. It is the vanguard of cultural nationalism, representing the community in the peoples own language, maintaining interractional philosophical view of the people, the culture that is the binding string that holds the social cultural and spiritual values of the people together. Those who do not share common culture, principles and consciousness together with the oral African articulants will see themselves in danger to servitude in tranquility and will distant themselves from such 'fattish' practise, no matter how popular.

#### **3.1.2 Distortion of facts and history**

Orature and specifically oral African literature is often culture specific and as the people's voicing power in our world of multiplicity of culture and cultural practises, with its combination of myths, mythical experiences, fables, proverbs, folktales that do not have universal appeal and representation, it is believed to be nothing but mere distortion of facts and a recreation of what would have been oral history and historiographical record.

#### **3.1.3 Hypothetical and cumbersome**

Beginning from the oral Artist's investigation into the cultural vibrancy of his people so that he shares with his audience, the necessary gathering of oral related materials to make performance real, attractive and purposeful, the general

concession is that the whole process is doomed to cumbersome. And, with the combination of the artistry, personage and narration, the latter involves mythical and or legendary personages, orality is considered hypothetical, especially as the legendary characters in the oral narration are remote.

### **3.1.4 Women as underdog in orature**

The retarding growth and development of oral African literature may not be unconnected with its treatment of women and themes related to women. Women who are naturally the custodian of orature feel excluded in the growth and promotion of the verbal earth they 'mothered' considering the oral handling of feminine related themes and stories. Women in orature are either treated as incapable of advancing beyond the level of concubinage, as witch, proud, betrayals, slaves of men; or as nymphomaniacs such reduces women's interest in the promotion of orature.

### **3.1.5 Inferior representation of life**

Most oral narratives give the audience the mental trouble of re-interpreting the narrative, as the oral narrator hardly tell tales from the soul and intelligence and normal state. So events are hardly stated from simple reality and to emphasise the artistic doctrine that is also expected to be drawn from the story, thus reducing the Artist's tale tell to any good effect.

### **3.16 Evasive moral in place of 'truthful lies'**

The oral composer cum narrator is also an Independent Artist but acting within the confine of his cultural dependency or communal norms, the Artist may get carried away to an extent that he concentrates only on the story line and unconsciously economise the moral truth, credibility of the story, thus reducing the 'authenticity' of the story to nothing. The oral Artist is also an experimentalist. The observer in him recreates the story as handed down to him orally. He finds the experimentalism in him editing the story he narrates. During such experimental intrusion, he misses out or bend the succession of facts of the story, in the process allowing his temperamental machinery to interferes in certain conditions of the narration, denying the story of the mechanism of facts. In the process, the truth of the story is then reduced to 'truthful lies'.

The major implication of this is that the Artist ends up suppressing moral truth. In the 'tale telling', the Artist may omit what is tedious or irrelevant and suppress what is tedious but necessary. This may happen for instance in the process when the oral Artist re-constructs his characters, controls and makes them speak, the audience listens and watches them function.

### **3.1.7 Inconsistencies and unrelated, conflicting plot structure**

Orature is often marred by inconsistencies and unrelated plot structure. The Artist may allow his private emotion to get in the way of a story and finds himself retelling the tale different from a version he inherited. He may even form a character whose traits may be different from the original. He cannot put all characters in a story unless he was to have the whole day or week, even months to himself for the story and this is not even possible. He has to select traits and take some traits for granted. He must do everything to let his characters memorable to his audience if he wants them to go home without leaving the morals of the story behind. The oral Artist must strive to leave a good and permanent impression on the minds of the reader. The oral Artist must be careful, or else, inconsistencies will confuse the plot of the oral narration, making it difficult for the audience to fully comprehend the story.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE I**

State the plot narrative of any oral tale of your community.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have identified and discussed the inhibitive factors to the growth and development of oral African literature. Some of the identified factors are too culture specific, distortion of facts, hypothetical, women as underdog and evasive moral.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- orature is too culture specific
- identified orature with the distortion of facts and history
- the cumbersome and hypothetical nature of orature is impediment to its further growth and acceptability beyond the African cultural environment

In Module 2, Unit 1, you will be introduced to how oral literature serves as the bedrock of written literature, though the latter now out popular orature as a result of the continuous incursion of modernity and erosion of African values. The first Unit of the next module reveal the relationship between oral African culture, colonial intrusion and the battered image created about Africa and the struggle by educated Africans to redeem the blackmailed African culture through diverse creative efforts.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

- 1) Explain the inhibiting factors to the growth and development of oral African literature
- 2) Using an orature, explain how orature may be said to treat women as underdog
- 3) Using an orature of your choice, how does orature distort history and facts
- 4) Identify an aspect of the orature of your community and explain what you find inconsistent about it

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## **MODULE 2 NATIVE VOICES AS AFRICAN ORATURE**

Unit 1	Oral African Literature as the Source of Written Literature
Unit 2	‘Incursions’, Code-modifications and Transitions in Oral African Literature
Unit 3	Poetry in Oral African Literature
Unit 4	Drama in Oral African Literature
Unit 5	Prose in Oral African Literature

### **UNIT 1 ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE AS THE SOURCE OF WRITTEN LITERATURE**

#### **CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1.1	Written literature and oral African culture
3.1.2	Colonialism, Negritude and other reactions from African writers
3.1.2.1	Igbo oral poetry from Nigeria – West Africa – Breaking colanut
3.1.2.2	Akan, speaking people’s dirge, Ghana, West Africa, Owusu
3.1.2.3	Senegalese praise poetry, Senghor’s <i>I Will Pronounce your Name</i>
3.1.2.4	David Diop’s <i>The Vultures</i>
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
7.0	References/Further Reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit has been designed to take you through the relationships between oral African literature and the written Literature. This unit is meant to reflect the role that oral African literature played in the beginning of written or imported culture (English, Portuguese, French) and other inherited colonial languages.

In this unit, we have created a chain of thought, like, beginning from the incursion of colonialism and missionary activities and subsequently the place of Western education in African cultural setting as well as how African writers who later acquired Western education used the recipient culture to fight the prevailing misleading Western ideology about the colour African cultural heritage and civilization.

Examples of the poetry used for our purpose in this unit are, “breaking colanut”, “Owusu”, “I will pronounce your name” and “The Vultures”. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- recreate the orature of your village or community
- get familiar with the oral African literature of your people
- discuss some of the traditional African poems written in English or any of the recipient cultures
- do a critical assessment of some African poems written by Africans to redeem the battered African image
- create a poem from the oral African poem of your people
- compare the themes in *Breaking Colanut* and *Owusu*
- outline the themes in Senghor's "I will pronounce your name"
- evaluate the social and economic contexts of "Breaking Colanut"
- list the themes in "Owusu"
- recall the themes in "The Vultures"

### 3.1 Written Literature and Oral African Culture

We may not be adamant here by trying to wriggle out a definition for written Literature, this is because, a particular definition at this immediacy may not be sufficient for us, and we are also conscious of the fact that hardly are there generally acceptable complete definitions/of written Literature, it does not matter whether it is American, English, West Indian, French, German, Russian or African Literatures. The Literature of a people must have basis, a function. It is the total way of life of a people that makes up their Literature, written or oral, or such ways of life may be culture specific, religion, economy, politics, dressing, occupation, conflicts, peace, customs, tradition, proverbs, drama, riddles, etc everything, anything that defines the existence of the people, their total make up, history, politics, geography, pattern. Infact, the oral Literature of a people may be said to be the bedrock of their written Literature, the basis upon which the written literature is fashioned. Be it as it may, written Literature, we may argue owe its foundation and existence, contents, subject matter, themes and style to orature. This is the reason it is conceivable to give oral literature its place of recognition, even while discussing written Literature. No matter the perspective from which written literature may be discussed. Apart from the above, we should not forget that Europeans on civilizing mission to Africa met a thriving culture of written Literature in some parts of Africa even before the romances of Europe, earlier than Roman-Caesar's civilizing incursion into the German tribes of Vercingetorix in the 1st century. And with the discovery of Papyrus in Egypt in the early centuries, written Literature we may say has a long tradition in parts of Africa.

Prior to colonialism, Africans thriving oral tradition and culture has expressed itself in the forms of folktales, myths, dirges, songs of various types, festivals, drama, poetry, and various narration. The African culture, ceremonies, rituals, music, and so on are based on Africa believes and practises as we discussed

earlier in our previous units in Module One. Africans are their own masters, of their own form of indigenous education, and customs, the people governed themselves according to established norms, practises and maintained close intimacy with their ancestral spirits, hence it is common among Africans to discuss cosmological (reality) world (The believe in the worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn including spirits). The form of expression among Africans accommodates every way of life of the people, including occupational ethics like farming, religion, societal norms, taboos, the natural environment that includes, the sun, moon, plants, the sea and mammals, hills, and trees. Africans were versed in music and drama with all the materials that are necessary for such traditional 'offices'. In oral African culture and education, stories are woven around every object, conditions and situations, with the aim to teaching morals thereby educating the community. The African understandably and culturally knows that such stories must be passed on from one generation to another with the continuous purpose of exercising the ingenuity of an average African and with the primary aim of educating and entertaining the community.

African takes advantage of every situation to teach morals and educate the community for the purpose of cultural transmission. Even in pre-colonial African societies, villages and remote towns, culture of the people is manifested fully, in line with the religious, economic and African political setting, governed by the kings and chiefs. In pre-colonial Africa, white missionaries met this practise and witnessed, the local governance in many African settings. The mode of government in the African political situation was what Western philosophers appraised with all its system of the dispensation of justice, local communal ethics punctuated with the maintenance of law and order. Early missionaries in many African villages, testified to the cultures of families and clans and kingdoms with their kings and have been expressed in the archeological discoveries that all combined to exonerate Africa from the prevailing Eurocentric writers of the period with their repressive ideology of the continent being the white man's grave, a colony of disease, death and uncivilized and uncultural people. But the oral cultural practices of Africa in its varieties helped to disabuse misleading Western conceptional and egocentricism. This image of distortion, denial and degradation which characterized the history of Africa was also expressed in the perspective of the history Professor at Oxford University, Professor Hugh Trevor Roper. He denied the existence of African history, but admits the existence of 'darkness' which according to him is not a subject of history. He recognized the reality of European (super) history which only is a worthy discipline and attention to which every race must submit.

Joseph Conrad too in his *Heart of Darkness* (1910) used powerful invective languages such as "niggers", "dark things", the very heart of darkness", "evil, God forsaken wilderness" and such to establish the inhumanity of the Blackman and his 'God-forsaken' part of the Earth. Yet the Ivory with which God blessed the Congo attracted the white men to the savage continent; and ironically the exploitations made was used for the development of the West. The West has seen the reality of the African rich culture and economy only had to give a dog a bad name so as to be able to hang him. They witnessed the rich African culture of

poetry, drama and prose, the local economy and trade and the powerful African kings and court attendants and poets, and heroes of the century with all its aesthetics. All the fine attributes are practised everywhere in Africa, among the Ewe of Ghana, the Ashantehene, Yorubas of Nigeria, the Tutsi of Rwanda, Zotho of South Africa. We cannot be exhaustive on the categories of orature in Africa before the arrival of colonialism, but Ruth Finnegan (1968) too was categorical that long before the advent of the white men, Africa has rich cultural dirges, praise singers in the courts of chiefs and kings, professional chants like hunter's chants, farmers chants and fishermen's chants and weavers and potters, tappers, infact for all categories of African related occupations.

However, with the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885, African countries were divided among the Western nations for the purpose of domination and imperial exploitation. And, with the resumption of full missionary activities in Africa, full missionary journey began and to help their desires the European had to understudy oral African tradition so that they could have ideas of the culture, tradition and languages of the people, perhaps for effective colonialism.

Therefore, a fusion of the African and culture of the West – became inevitable. The colonizers hid under the umbrella of Christianising the indigenous Africans, and to liberate them from the culture of the African they described as 'fetish' and retrogressive there was a need for the natives to acquire Western education, this infiltration of Western education was achieved with colonialism and the introduction of the indirect rule system of government through which African culture and tradition further suffered deprivation. We should state that while all these were taking place, against imperial domination there was spontaneous reactions across Africa by Africans, some of them are D. O. Fagunwa, Oludare Olajubu (1972) in his Iwi Egungun, Ijala songs by Adeboye Babalola in (1960), Tutsu poetry of Kagame of Rwanda, Chukwuma Onwukwe's Igbo native dirge (1962) Hausa poetry in praise of the Emir (Kings), Ewe oral poetry, Akan women's praise poetry of their kings, Yoruba oral poetry, Ijala Ode, hunter's chants, songs for oral political satirical poetry of the Hausas dedicated to Daniya, Yoruba chants in favour of Ogun the god of iron and metallurgy, Rara, Ofo or Ogede poetries of the Yorubas, oral praise poetry of the Iroko tree (mahogany tree), Epic poetry of war of Ibibio, the oral rendition of the Luo, Baganda, Gikuuyu, Masai and the Bahim of Ankole are cross-section of Africans in East Africa who are also skilful oral poets. East African heroic reactions praise man and animals. Every African culture encourages children to create praise poetry in preparation for a future father-in-law who would request praise poem from his daughter's suitor as a condition to giving his daughter away in marriage. Also, every Muhima, (Bahima plural).

The various examples of oral rendition are a proof that oral literary tradition is indeed African heritage with its diverse norms, values and societal codes and responsibilities and must be exposed to all, including Westerns who earlier denied the presence of any form of culture in Africa. Hence, oral Africa practitioners deliberately used the African verbal arts to disabuse the minds of Eurocentric writers and scholars who already propagated the misleading view

that Africans have no culture. The traditionalists also used the African orature to reject Western civilization with all its complexities, but the hope of a developmental change for the better which the 'new order' promised later made a few Africans to cautiously embrace Western education and civilization. The revivalists or reformists believe in the fusion of both African and Western education to achieve or fashion out a new belief based on the byproduct of the dual cultures with the aim of achieving enduring traditional religion. Yet, Africans of the period and succeeding generations have considered it their primary responsibilities to continue to answer Western questions on the non-existence of African culture and history in world culture and civilization must recite praise poem during the coronation of a king. Their praise poems only centre on the heroes singular bravery in war, whether it is Ila 'Ekyuugo' which praises the heroic dexterity and those of his comrades in war. The second type is the 'Ekira hiro' that praises a man's cattle. These praise poetry types are different from the Yorubas that often centres on kings.

### **3.1.2 Colonialism, Negritude and Other Reaction from Africa**

It is apparent that long before the advent of colonialism, a very rich and robust culture of orature existed in every part of black Africa. The coronation of a new king, sight of a new moon, birth of a baby, house warming ceremony, a successful hunting expedition, indeed, almost every occasion of significance called for the making of poetry. Pioneer African poets who have acquired European Education took advantage of the written medium to address and romanticized Africa with a deep sense of nostalgia. One of the founders of Negritude, the leading Senegalese poet named Leopold Sedar Senghor was in exile in France where he knew Aime Cessaire and Leon Gotran Damas of Guyana in the 1930's. The man came up with the philosophy of Negritude or "poetry of refusal/repudiation to counter a stereotyped Eurocentric idea of the writer's eccentricity, hence African philosophy to Europe assumed a "headlight" function and to Africa an "echo-sounder" (Oriola, 2007). The early Negrituditionists crafted their poems using materials from the African communal pool of folktales in the recipient culture to deliberately glorify the past of Africa so as to correct her battered new image, as seen in Senghor's prayer to masks, *Nuit de Seine*, I came with you and camp 1940; all loudly and provocatively serving as artistic evocation of an African cultural heritage. Also, some poets from Angola and Mozambique also eminently battled with a Portuguese system of colonial exploitation. The poems of Augustino Neto, De Saousa and George Rebelo will forever be remembered for their imagistic and lyrical approaches with which they condemned perceived aberration of the West in its response to African culture and religion.

In addition to the efforts of the Negrituditionists, those Africans who did not travel abroad to acquire their European Education but were trained by colonial teachers, including those who had gone abroad in the process of acculturation, later known as educated returnees such as Gladys Casely Hayford and Michael Dei Anag of Ghana, Dennis Chukwude Osadebay and Gabriel Okara of Nigeria

to explore their literate ability in the Western sense to protest the customs of colonial overlords, material exploitation, racial discrimination, and other forms of negative policies deliberately designed to underdevelop African communities. Up to now, African writers still take the advantage of the fusion of the Western and African cultures to protest a further western intrusion and bastardization of the African culture and tradition and other forms of inhumanities. Writers such as Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, David Diop, Birago Diop, Gabriel Immomotime Okara, Dennis Brutus, Kofi Awoonor, Titus Chukwemela Nwosu, Niyi Osundare, Tayo Olafioye, Kofi Ayidoho Awono, Jared Angira, Stanley Oriola, Frederick Akporobaro, Hope Eghagha, Bai Tamiah Lubega, Khona Khasu, Muktar Mustapha, Mazisi Kuene, Atukwei Okai, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Flora Nwapa, Adaura Ulaosi, Mariama Ba, Adimora Akachi Ezeigbo, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, Yao Egbiewogbe, Michael Edieruo, Kalu Uka, Taban Lo Liyong and many others. While some of them were more concerned with battling foreign intrusion; some criticized the home bred post-Independence politicians who were agents of destruction planted by the whites. Their themes span the genres of literature, letters and essays through which they intervene in the socio-economic and political conditions, of abuses in the various parts of African societies with the intention to develop and reform the society and by extension, the continent of the Blackman. Some of the latter works focuses on the African home front with her post-colonial, post-independent abuses, socio-cultural, economic and political corruptions, including gender oppression. The poems discussed below are representative samples from different parts of Africa.

3.1.2.1 Poem (I) Traditional, Breaking Cola nut  
Translated from the Igbo by Lawrence Emeka

God the Creator  
Who lives on high  
And his eyes cover the whole ground  
Who lives under the ground  
And no dirt soils him  
Who lives in the waters  
And is dry;  
Who moves with the winds –  
The wind is never seen by the eyes –  
And yet, air is everywhere  
I come with greetings  
And with pleadings

GOD THE TRYST MAKER  
Who makes tryst with men  
Makes appointments with them  
Where and when he pleases  
And they cannot escape

God who creates and who destroys  
Who beats up human beings  
And consoles them  
Crushes them and remain their friends;  
Who brings and takes away  
And who creates  
Before the created knows  
At dawn, we open our doors and our mouths  
At night we close our doors  
But not our minds

It is KOLA I bring  
It's all I can offer  
A little baby  
Can only hold its mother  
As far as its hand can go  
Kola is small  
And yet its big  
Like the sacrificial food  
It is more important than it goes round  
Than that it fills the stomach  
Our fathers' fathers  
And their fathers before them  
All our ancestors –  
Saw all the fruits of the land  
But they chose Kola  
As the prime substance for hospitality  
And for offerings  
What an old man lying down has seen  
Has the Youngman ever seen better  
Though he perches on the highest tree?

Of all food on earth  
Only Kola  
Is not cocked by water and fire  
But by spoken word  
The rich can afford it and the poor can afford it  
And Kola is the biggest offering  
Men bring to you GREAT GOD  
To whom the swallower of what swallows an elephant  
And with an hippopotamus tucked into its mouth  
And palmyra as chewing stick  
Whistles freely  
Is smaller than spittle

It is not that Kola  
Is the sweetest food on earth  
Or that it fills the stomach fastest

But, its only with kola  
That we pray for life  
And whoever brings Kola  
Brings life.  
And brings health  
And brings prosperity  
And brings peace  
And children  
And what we shall feed them with  
For its YOU GOD  
Who brings kola  
And ordains its manner of breaking  
This KOLA  
Is like a mound in the middle of the arena  
On which we stand and speak in the assembly  
Of people and of spirits  
And our ancestors  
And you Great God  
The TRYST MAKER  
And the words reach the ears they're made for  
So our fathers fathers fathers  
Hear my voice  
God hear my voice  
I am a little innocent child who washes his stomach only  
But your eyes see me  
And you can judge  
If I've ever touched the wife of a relation  
Or seen the nakedness of a sister  
If I've ever stolen what belongs to any human being  
Or oppressed a widow or cheated an orphan  
Or borne false witness or spoken calumny  
If I've killed any human being  
With knife or spear  
Or arrow or rope  
Or poison or witchcraft  
If I've done any of these things  
May this our land  
And mother EARTH EAT ME  
If none of these is my guilt  
And my fellow-man would afflict me  
Because if anger of the heart or anger of the eye  
Then let whoever comes to kill me  
KILL HIMSELF

Anybody who says he must see me and my household  
With evil eyes  
Let his eyes perish in the seeing  
Any person who says an innocent household

May not sleep  
Make him roost with the chicken  
I pray for the good of the people in the bush  
And the good of those at home  
For the good of those in the hills  
For the good of those in the valleys  
For the good of those at work  
And for the good of those at play  
But if a man I can stand by does not stand by me  
Let what kills traitors kill him  
If a spirit I can vouch for does not vouch for me  
Let what kills spirits kill it

If anybody would bring poison into this house  
Let his polluted hand enter his mouth  
Let no guests bring evil to his host  
On his departure  
May no hunch grow on his back  
Let a rat not dare to eat the big of a medicine-man  
And let the medicine man not dare curse the rat

It is said that an innocent man  
Guiltless of any sin big or small  
Crosses water on a piece of calabash  
That the snail moves over thorns  
So I'll keep clean my hands  
You will defend me from cows  
A man cannot wrestle with a cow

If I must suffer for my offences  
It is just  
If for the guilts of my children  
I'll bear it  
The mouth speaks what earns the Jawa slap  
A man's head shakes the ant's nest  
His mouth suffers for it  
What is good is what we want  
I have not asked you to give that to me only  
Eating everything alone is bad eating  
If the kite perches  
Let the Eagle perch  
Whichever denies the other the right to perch  
May its wings break  
God  
Why we never be in need and find no helper  
A man who has friends is greater than a wealthy man  
Give our wives faithfulness  
One blow one fall

Give us children  
And give us the means to feed them  
Let any of us or our children  
Who goes out to work  
Come back  
With plenty of money  
And come back safe

Let any weed that brushes us  
On our departure  
Brush against us on our return  
It is not an easy weed  
Whom we see at the back  
Let evil be in front  
And when we are in front  
Let evil be behind  
Let no illness come  
And let no doctor cure  
Let no one be ill  
And let no one heal  
But I have not spoken and it is final

You have the yam  
And you have the knife  
To whomsoever you give  
And in whatever measure he will eat...  
I break the KOLA NUT

### **Breaking Kola nut – A Discussion**

Kola nut among the Igbo speaking people in Eastern Nigeria is a mark of social cultural and spiritual respectability among the people and other peoples in Africa. It is also a fruit that has economic viability. In what looks like an incantation, a deep string, serious connection is created between the Igbo people in the poem and their ancestors, and Kola nut is the object of connexion to complete the ritual process and prayer in the complex but dramatic offering, the mysteries that surrounds the breaking that is absorbed in metaphors, allusions, proverbs, aphorisms and rhetorics. The Almighty God is admonished as the ubiquitous one who sees and controls all the affairs of man, determines his death and longevity, coupled with the creative and compassionate qualities of the Almighty God as seen in the poem. The poet then unveils what he has brought which is Kola nut as seen in the third stanza, the sacrificial food, Kola nut is good for everyone of all age, including babies, the aged and the ancestors and gods, it is the best food for “hospitality”, its never cooked like every other food and it rank first among all the fruits of the land, and as such is fit for the Almighty God. Among other qualities that Kola nut has are its ability to fill the stomach, heals, enriches, prolongs life, its manner of breaking too must necessarily pass through a ritual

process, it empowers and gives boldness to speak in the assembly of the people, a democratic spirit, the poem tells us the cultural taboos that must be observed by whoever must break kola nut, must not be an adulterer, fornicator, or a thief, must be humane, and treat others including widows and orphans fairly. He must be generous and must not kill by whatever means, and if he's who is to break kola nut is found guilty of all these, the law of Karma or retributive justice awaits him. Breaking Kola attracts spiritual and physical benefits such as, serve as healing potent, and as such must be done according to the approved cultural rubrics for a fruitful reward.

### **3.1.2.2 Poem 2 Owusu, a dirge among the Akan speaking people of Ghana**

Valiant Owusu

The stranger on whom the citizen of the town depends  
Father, allow my children and me to depend on you  
So that we may get something to eat  
Father on whom I wholly depend

When father sees me now, he will hardly recognise me  
He will meet me carrying an old torn mat and a hurdle of flies  
Father with whom I confer  
My children and I will look to you  
Father of whom I wholly depend  
Killer of hunger,  
My saviour  
Father the slender arm full of kindness  
Father the rover whose footprints are on all paths

Unlike the usual Akan dirge that recalls, praises and celebrates the lineage of the Akan speaking people of Ghana, this particular dirge, mixes the Akan lineage with mourning for the dead, who, in this case was a kind stranger. The virtue of the compassionate stranger is discussed. The poet addresses the deceased as a caring and dependable ancestor. In the poem, we are taken through the past and present experiences of the widow who now recalls her ancestors. She and her children suffer terrible hardships, destitute, now that the man is dead, he was a confidant, a provider, "saviour", kindhearted man who has made a remarkable impact in the lives of many people in the community.

### **Poem 3 - Leopold Sedar Senghoro 'I will pronounce your name'**

I will pronounce your name, Naett, I will dedain you, Naett  
Naett, your name is mild like Cinnamon, it is the fragrance in which  
the lemon grove sleeps  
Naett, your name is the sugared clarity of blooming coffee trees  
And it resembles the savannah that blossoms forth under the  
masculine ardour of the midday sun

Name of dew, fresher than shadows of tamarind  
 Fresher even than the short dusk, when the heat of the day is  
     silenced  
 Naett, that is the dry tornado, the hard clap of lighting  
 Naett, coin of hold, shinning coal, you my might, my sun...  
 I am your hero, and now I have become your sorcerer in order to  
     pronounce your name  
 Princess of Elissa, banished from Futa on the fateful day.

### **Leophold Sedar Senghor's I will Pronounce your name – A Discussion**

This is an example of Senghor's poem that glorifies everything, African, the continent's culture, and peoples including women and spirituality. In this poem, traditional poem of deliberate invocation of the praise singing quality of oral poetry, with its constant repetition of "I will pronounce your name", Naett and descriptive quality woven around simile and metaphors, exploring serious imagery to praise the Black woman in the poem whose name is compared to Cinnamon, an East Indian tree that has serious and fine fragrance, and grows all round the year. She is also compared to the coffee trees, while the productive capacity of the African woman is visible in the metaphorical comparison to the savannah, and the fruit bearing tamarid tropical tree, a coin of Gold, shinning coal, night and sun, Senghor ends the poem with the eternal quality of the black woman which is compared to the antiquity, the Futa Djallong Kingdom of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries.

#### **3.1.2.4 Poem 4 David Diop's The Vultures**

In those days  
 When civilization kicked us in the face  
 When holy water slapped our cringing brows  
 The vultures built in the shadow of the talons  
 The bloodstained monument of tutelage  
 In those days  
 There was painful laughter on the metallic hell of the roads  
 And the monotonous rhythms of the paternoster  
 Drowned the howling of the plantations  
 Of the bitter memories of extorted kisses  
 Of promises broken at the point of a gun  
 Of foreigners who did not seem human  
 You who knows all the books but knew not love  
 Nor our hands which fertilise the womb of the earth  
 Hands instinct at the root with revolt  
 Your songs of pride in the charnet houses  
 In spile of desolate places of African torn apart  
 Hope lived in us like a citadel  
 And from Switzerland mines to the sweltering sweat of Europe's factories

Spring will be reborn under our bright steps  
David Diop's The Vultures – A Discussion

David Diop is thorough and picturesque in his description of European imperialists in Africa, the devastation, exploitative and inhuman effects of colonial rule is beautifully expressed in the poem. Just as the poem combines the image of Christianity and imperial domination, he damns the dual operations combinations of Christianity and imperial exploitative tendencies as deliberate Western strategy to dominate and destroy African's economy, and in the process get her disempowered. The unhealthy and tedious effects of imperial philosophy in all guise, be it Christianity or education is revealed in the poem, "civilization kicked us in the face", "holy water slapped our cringing bows". Diop is exhaustive in his description of the forceful and reluctant meeting of the African and recipient cultures, he described the West as "vultures" who has come to devour, to steal, to destroy and to kill, "blood stained tutelage". The poem is rich in Christological imagery, as it describes Christianity as "monotonous rhythm", deceptive, used by the West to exploit Africans. The West hide under the deceptive umbrella of Christianity to enslave Africans, to deceive the people, leaving behind "the bitter memories of extorted kisses", "broken promises at the point of a gun". The foreigners are inhuman, knowledgeable but destructive, David Diop condemns in strong terms Africa's colonial experience, its vanity, enforced labour, violence and visible murderous impacts.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE I**

Explain your impression of breaking kola nut.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have argued that oral African literature is vital to the development of Western education, the Western perception of blacks and African culture, and how Africans who received Western education used it to redeem the battered image of Africa, including the fact that African has a thriving culture of oral literature long before the advent of colonialism. We have also explained some selected poems written by Africans to correct critical Western perceptions of Africa.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- oral African literature and education exists long before Western incursion into Africa
- the impression of the West about Africa is deliberate and damning
- Africans who were educated at home and abroad reacted by writing poems to correct the battered new image of Africa by the West

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) What is the relationship between orature and written literature?
- 2) Explain the efforts of African writers to justify the existence of African culture.
- 3) Discuss the themes in *Breaking Cola Nut* as translated by Lawrence Emeka.
- 4) What is the impression created about the Akan speaking people of Ghana and their ancestors in *Owusu*?

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## **UNIT 2      ‘INCURSION,                      CODE-MODIFICATIONS’                      AND TRANSITIONS IN ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1.1 Modern Incursions, ‘Code-modifications’ and Transitions in Oral African Literature
  - 3.1.2 Non-culture Specific
  - 3.1.3 ‘Code-modification’
  - 3.1.4 Naratology and Conflicting Views
  - 3.1.5 Interpretations of Figure 5
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is designed to take you through another stage of oral African literature that is, though may not be common but important to advancing your knowledge of the subject matter and towards a more professional and practical orientation of your discipline. This aspect will encourage you not to approach your subject cold but with a high degree of enthusiasm considering the interesting nature of the format that will force your awareness of the often ignored or unnoticed in oral African literature. Our instances that we have used are what you are familiar with and within your familiar terrain of oral creativity.

In this unit, you have been taught that the oral narrative of similar story is capable of shifting, multiple application even if it originates from similar ethnic culture as seen in the various Yoruba versions of how the Tortoise became bald. The figure 5 reveals that Western cultures (i.e. English Language) do not have provision for words translated from oral African source to the English Language as such words lost their aesthetics in transit. These and others are the novel ideas expressed in our present unit.

Another vital way to develop ones skill and understanding of oral African literature is to be aware of certain uncommon or often ignored but important aspect of oral African literature. The practise of oral African literature is meant to put to the test and practise the minute or what appeared insignificant but unavoidable in the overall performance of oral African literature. We have incorporated the aspect so as to strengthen the aesthetics of this unit. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- apply all what you have to learnt in your volume to the practical expression of oral African literature
- admit the ever presence of incursions in oral African literature
- explain the concept of ‘code-modification’ in oral African literature
- identify ‘code-modification’ in the oral poetry of your people
- discuss ‘code-modification’ in the oral prose or narrative of your community
- provide a table of ‘code-modification’ using an aspect of the oral literature of your people

### **3.1.1 Modern Incursions ‘Code-modifications’ and Transitions in Oral African Literature**

There is no doubt that oral African literature with its rich communal use of language, and mandatory native verbiage geared towards satisfying the socio-cultural, economy, religious and political experiences of the people is no longer new to the African modern world of increasingly intrusive Western culture. With the modus operandi in which Western ‘incursion’ moves into the interiors of most parts of African villages and communities, staging serious confrontations against oral African values and indigenous education, the obvious which we can longer deny is that the farther Western culture penetrates African interior in our modern world of technology, the more the legendary practises and aesthetic cultural exercises and transmission of the African peoples get withered, and recedes more into the background. The value that had been attached to our culture dwindles and this is already apparent in some of our common ways of life like, way of dressing, marriage, greetings and general way of children upbringing. Such incursion, into our enduring values has affected and still affecting oral African literature and culture.

### **3.1.2 Non-culture Specific**

In preliterate African societies of the period, oral Artists often reflect the culture and tradition of their people in their manner of dressing and appearance during performance. They often dressed to reflect the typical culture they represent. Even, when they present stories in modern time, their stories, and personages no longer reflect the original legendary character in such a story. They allow improvisation of materials to dominate scenes of stories and presentations, the way it is done in modern cinema’s and home videos. Oral Artists of the modern time are preoccupied with improvisation. For instance, when contemporary oral Artist represents the vibrancy of Sango the Yoruba god of iron and metallurgy, they hardly wear the current costume of Sango with all the paraphernalia that will put the audience in better and correct perspective. This was not the case with the

oral Artist of the ancient Yoruba society who will go bare footed and fully prepared for his profession.

Contemporary oral Artists have commercialized the oral 'trade' which was more of culture specific and geared towards moral teaching and entertainment only in social events like child's naming ceremony, house warming ceremony, funeral wake keep, birth of a baby, and coronation of kings and chiefs. The performance of the oral Artist in such occasions were done without charging any fee, though they may receive some money voluntarily given, it could be gifts in kind, like food such as palm wine, tubers of yam, plantain or cocoa yam.

The situation is different with the oral Artist in modern time. He charges fees, even prints complementary cards, advertises his 'trade' in the radio and television sets, many of them even dress in expensive modern attires, rather than locally woven and clothes specifically meant for such occasions to make such ceremonies like coronation of chief or kings, house warming and marriage ceremonies real and culture specific. Camera men and recording video men are also usually in modern times invited to record such events in traditional societies. Such recordings are taken note orally by the audience, friends, well wishers and family members who are present at the occasion. The sitting arrangement in traditional societies, there was no discrimination among participants at ceremonies as all were made to seat in locally made mats and local palmwine is usually their favourite drink in such ceremony but with the infiltration of Western practises, fashionable chairs are let from popular rentals for such occasions, interior decors are hired to beautify usually rented hall with expensive modern accessories, with hardly any traditional imprints, and assorted drinks like wine and beers are stored in freezers. Rather than invite the oral Artists to man such ceremonies, contemporary musicians are often invited on fees to play to the gathering, and such situations, hardly reflect the traditional setting that such ceremonies should be. Such incursion of Western practises into African 'traditional passage' is not limited to the cities. It has penetrated into the backwaters of coastal rural dwellers as mark of civilization, and never seen as a conscious attempt to 'kill' the indigenous African tradition and culture with the high level tolerability for such infiltration, forgetting that culture shows itself in Arts, literature, music, dance and drama, social organization and political systems. And all these cultural expressions must be thoroughly observed so that they could have the desirable effects, influence and shape the life of the individual in his society and in turn the individual makes a cultural contribution to his community through participating adequately in its life and in some cases through creativity. It is unfortunate that the crises of cultures which paved way for foreign incursion into the African culture has dominated the reasoning of Africans to such an extent that the whole situation has inferiorised the experience and practises of our forefathers, the imitative strong force of African cultural values.

### 3.1.3 'Code-modifications'

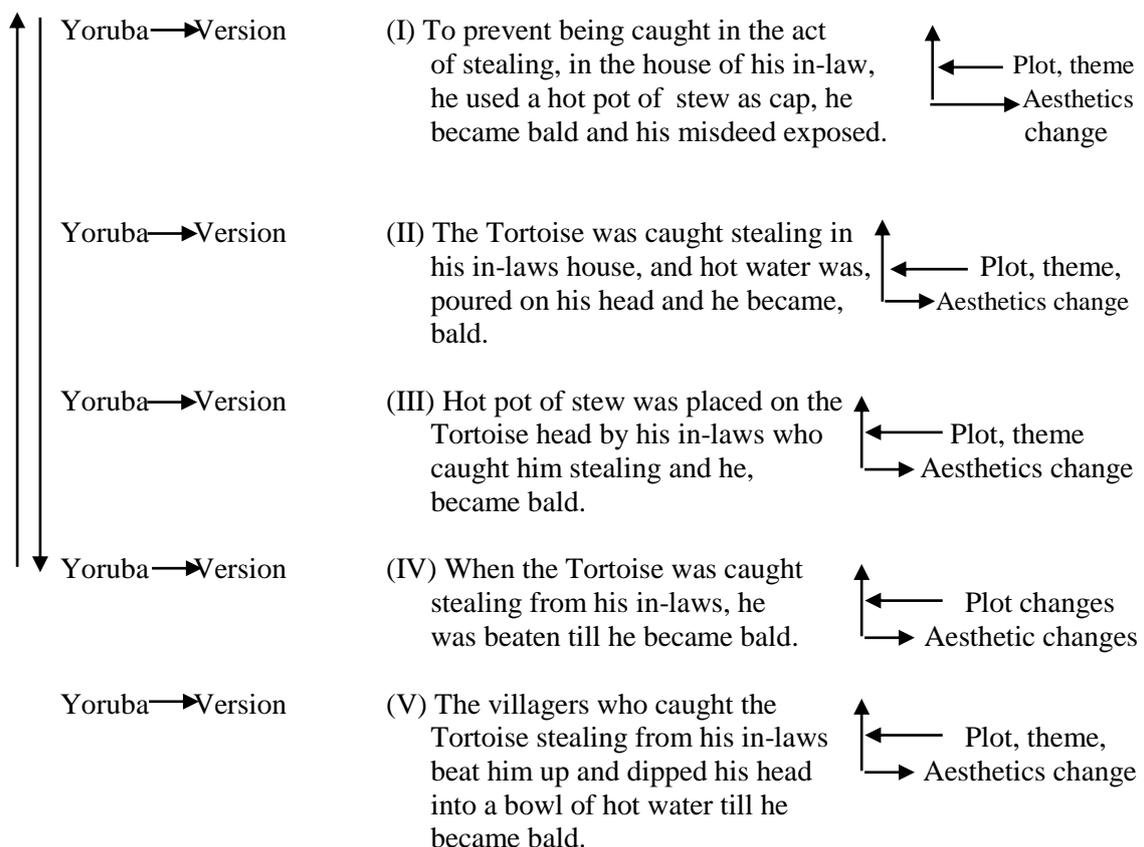
Indeed, oral African literature in the modern time has gone through 'code-modifications' and this involves 'code-mixings', the embarrassing result of the fusion of both the language of the native Africans and the English Language, French, Portuguese and other inherited colonial languages. That is why many modern oral Artists are for instance, not often deeply traditional or cultural in the way they portray the oral African culture. In their method of system of delivery, they mix language codes to express oral African concepts, or embark on modifying the 'codes' of the African indigenous language and culture, and of course, such modifications are not often without a mixture of elements of Westernization, through communication; and unconsciously, they found themselves adhering to the complex nature of the modern society, thus making the oral 'communication and passage' from the oral Artist to the audience complex, unnecessarily difficult and devoid of ethical code and communication, forgetting that communication that involves cultural communication should be done ethically with patience and respect while remaining focused on the story, but otherwise, the oral Artist becomes the modern radio which is often taken for granted as a result of its monodirectional communication perspective, whereas, the oral Artist should receive instant feedback from his audience from the way they react to stories, situations. But if the oral Artist is not focused in his artistic handling of his story he may be viewed by his audience as the 'poor relation' of the society, quite different from the excellent oral Artist who informs, educates, entertains to correct societal ills. When not conscious of modern incursion and the needlessness of 'code modifications', the oral Artist fails to be an efficient and effective weapon and an agent of positive change in the overall development of his society. Today, people finds it convenient to converge at a common place, such as village or market squares to participate in the Art of storytelling due to inconveniences arising from competing modern demands like work schedules, and other social factors, hence, finding it difficult and unnecessary to meet at the venues of the enactment. The oral Artist is not a distorted or inferior mind of the foremost culture bearers of traditional societies, he is the avenue through which the society listens, thinks, deliberate, visualize and get up in unison for social cultural advancement and change where necessary.

Stories must be narrated in a manner to organise the imagination through the artistic combination of voice, gestures, song, drumming, through he has direct access to the minds of his audience through a creative process that mirrors, the audience, reflect each member of the audience, to initiate a process of change, standard of behaviour, attitude, and then manage a change by using the story to create an 'enabling force' to bring about a social change, build the peoples consciousness and mobilize for a culture conscious and disciplined society by the use of folktales, legends, myths. These are the vital reasons, the oral Artist must beware of modern transitions, incursions, 'use of code-modifications' so as not to trivialize his art as a result of Western convention that is infiltrating Africa and if given a chance it will affect the oral performance and nature of the oral rendition and the audience as well as the generality of the society.

### 3.1.4 Noratology and Conflicting Views

Conflicting transitions, and narrative representations is another observable issue with oral African literature. Some myths, and or tales for instance, the Yoruba ethnic nationality has been told and retold with obvious conflictive views and apparent (mis)representations in the oral tradition, folktales too of similar story and language origin have been told with similar problem. This is not peculiar only with the Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria, West Africa, it happens among the Akan and Ewe, people in Ghana, the Hausa, Igbos, Efik, Tiv, Ibibio, Ilajes, Idoma, Ebira, Bemba speaking people of Zambia, Tutu and Tutsi of Rwanda. For instance, an obvious example of narrative (mis)representation among Yorubas is the story of how the Tortoise became bald, we can trace the difference from the effect the change in the story(ies) has/have on the plot(s) that it/they gave or that became the resultant effects.

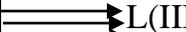
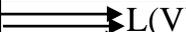
Fig. 4 The different Yoruba versions of the folktale of how the Tortoise became bald are presented in simple plots below



#### Interpretations of Fig. 4

The above represents the story of how the Tortoise became bald as told in Yoruba oral trick star tale. Yet, told from the same Yoruba oral source, we noticed different naratological views of the tale as indicated in the plots (i) to (v). Such development often affects plot, theme and sometimes the aesthetics of the story and the audience in the change that occurs in story patterning.

Fig. 5

<i>Source of Tale Oral African Pool</i>	<i>Orality (folktale)</i>	<i>Levels of Story</i>	<i>Plot Status</i>	<i>Audience View of Aesthetic</i>	<i>Language of Oral Folktale Rendition</i>	<i>Standard British Translation</i>
0(+) 0(+) constant	How the Tortoise became bald	 L(I)	fluctuates	varies in degree x	Yoruba	Limited (+) (+) + non-existing
0(+) 0(+) constant	How the Tortoise became bald	 L(II)	fluctuates	varies in degree xx	Yoruba	Limited (+) (+) + non-existing
0(+) 0(+) constant	How the Tortoise became bald	 L(III)	fluctuates	varies in degree xxx	Yoruba	Limited (+) (+) + non-existing
0(+) 0(+) constant	How the Tortoise became bald	 L(IV)	fluctuates	varies in degree xxxx	Yoruba	Limited (+) (+) + non-existing
0(+) 0(+) constant	How the Tortoise became bald	 L(V)	fluctuates	varies in degree xxxxx	Yoruba	Limited (+) (+) + non-existing

Source: Adapted from Stanley ORIOLA (2007)

KEY

- 0(+)  
0(+)  
constant - oral source of tale is constant
-  - same story of similar language origin, but of different version
-  - plot of story fluctuates according to the nature of the story/naratology
- x - nature of plot/theme affect audience perception of the story

Limited (+)  
(+) + non-existing – story ‘code-modified’ with recipient culture may be exaggerated, devalue levels of meaning, translated forms may be handicapped, words translated could have exaggerated effect in transit.

## Interpretations of the (Table) figure 5

From the table in figure (2) 0(+)<sup>0</sup>(+) constant means the folktale or any oral rendition from the communal pool of oral African has its original value from the oral source conventionally constant and culturally unique to its source. The  $\longrightarrow$  arrow indicates that the tales extracted from the oral source of similar language can have different version from the same language origin. The fluctuating arrow  indicates that the plot of a story fluctuates according to the nature of the story even if it is the same story from the same language or culture as in the example of the Yoruba folktale of the Tortoise given above. The x mark means that the story affects the audience reception/reaction to the aesthetics of the story. In the process of codemixing and codemodifying a story such a story will be affected the following ways, words drawn from the source culture (i.e. oral Yoruba folktale of the Tortoise) may be exaggerated if the oral Artist is determined to reflect the source level (Yoruba) of meaning while narrating or translating the story to foreign languages, (English, French or Portuguese), the by product of such effort may become metaphysically symbolic and burdened with complex images, thereby making the story to become objectionable as reader's pedagogic circumference may be forced to a limit. The validity and authenticity of orality suffers as soon as the native content is expressed in a foreign language. The value of orality is 'constant' when expressed in the original cultural (origin) context (Limited (+)(+)+ non-existing)

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE I

Explain your understanding of 'code-modification', incursion and transitions in oral African literature.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have learnt that

- you need to understand the existence of incursions and code-modifications' in oral African literature
- you can expose the level of transitions in oral African literature
- transitions, incursions, and code-modifications have negative effects on oral African literature

### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) What is your understanding of modern incursion in oral African literature?
- 2) With the aid of a tale from the oral culture of your people, discuss the concept of Western incursion or interference?
- 3) What is code-modification in oral African literature?

- 4) Using the oral poems of your community, plot a table similar to the one in figure 5, to justify the implications of code-mixing and external interferences in oral African literature.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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## **UNIT 3 POETRY IN ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is designed to teach you, and enrich your idea, of the existence of the types of poetry as a genre of oral African literature, against the erroneous belief that poetry exists only in English Literature, whereas, the ode, lyric, ballad, epic, elegy, dirge and praise poem all exist though with distinctive ethnico-regional varieties in oral African literature.

A way by which you can be effectively grounded or adequately ‘schooled’ in oral African literature is to be taken through its genres, as we have done in this unit. We do not expect you to gloss over oral African literature without adequate knowledge of the forms of oral African literature. Understanding the different genres and styles will help build solidly on your foundation of oral African literature. To enable you achieve, this, and convince your instructor or the waiting audience, you are encouraged to ‘swim’ freely in the rich oral culture of the African oral world. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the oral poetry of your people
- identify the oral poetry of your community
- outline the themes in ballad
- assess the style of praise poetry of your people
- attempt a discussion of the oral lyric
- do a critical discussion of the elegy with example from your oral source
- differentiate between the epic, using adequate examples
- state and explain the feature of the Ode with example drawn from the oral pool of oral African literature

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1.1 Poetry in Oral African Literature**

Like its Western type contemporary literary, oral African literature manifests itself in the three genres of literature, poetry, drama and prose. Long before the advent of Western education, preliterate African societies had often exercised their overall cultural experience in the forms of poetry, drama as well as in prose form, though, may not strictly be in the sense of the Western type. Unlike the Western poetry that makes use of rhythm, metre, scansion, meter, foot, metric feet, metrical lines and devices of sounds, oral African poetry manifests itself in the forms of the Lyric, ballad, ode, epic, dirge, as well as praise poem. Oral African poetry originated in the form of songs, although the oral African literary genres often inject songs in their narratives to make oral stories lively and to achieve audience or communal participation whenever the oral Artist is doing his artistry. But, the various types/genres of poems already mentioned are used by the oral Artist for accomplishing the effective communication of ideas and feelings as well as achieving the effective criticism of his community. In order to understand the oral poetry of preliterate societies, we must first realize that every occasion of significance in the African culture sighting of a new moon, the sun, ritual bath in rivers, hunting expedition, marriage ceremony, periods of birth, death, mourning, victory and losses, harvest, draughts, rain, farming, plenty and want to mention a few called for the making of poetry.

In that case poems and poetry types in oral African culture do not exist in vacuum, but are created by conditions that evolved in preliterate societies and are passed on from generation to generation. With the advent of writing, many of these poetic forms have been reduced to writing.

### 3.1.2 The Lyric

This form of poetry has been said to be the ‘brain child’ of the Greeks, and Romans, but recent researches into oral African literature in Africa shows that the lyric is also part of the oral African literature in poetry forms. It is usually a short poem sang with traditional instruments in rural African setting. It is primarily the expression of the private feelings of the poet in oral African culture.

#### 3.1.2.1 The Lyric Poem of the Zulu in South Africa

Assagai is our strength  
The strength we acquired  
In our pointed hard wood  
That penetrates the hard ribs  
of animals in the plain of the hills  
Assagai of the pointed  
face of the forest the  
power of our arm  
The arm we throw  
To flail Assagai piercing  
Our forest and hilly paths  
Thank you Assagai, Thank  
you ancestors who strengthened  
our arms with you Assagai

Anonymous lyric poem of the Zulu in  
South Africa

The anonymous lyric poem of the Zulu praises the hard wood, locally made spear of the Zulu's, “Assagai” which was used for hunting expedition and preventing the Zulus against wild animals, and for general self defence of the Zulus against enemies, the “Assagai”, is a weapon the Zulus inherited from their ancestors.

### 3.3 The Ode

The ode has its origin from the Greeks as a poem in song form. However, Ode is popular with many oral cultures, including Africa; whether the private or public type, the Ode with its lofty or elevated style has elaborate structure. Private ode celebrates its meditative, very personal, reflective and subjective, but the public ode is often used for ceremonial occasions like house warming ceremony, to welcome returnee victor (heroes) from battle field, and funeral ceremonies. The commonest ode in the Africa oral literature is the public type, but both forms are common in Western literature as seen below, John Keat's Ode to Nightingale, Sappho's “Ode to Aphrodite” and “Ode to the Duke of Wellington”. We are concerned with oral African literature, hence, the example below.

### 3.1 The Ode of the Ekwulobia People in Anambra, Nigeria

Ode to our barn of yam  
Seasons across seasons  
So you are the native  
Voice of our season of yam  
Season across season  
You yawn, yawn yawning  
Your seasonal yawning our pride  
The pride of our strong arm  
Our barn of yam, our food  
Our health  
Basket of ages  
You are our beauty  
The one who alone knows  
The language of hunger  
If farmer's backyard  
Without a barn of yam  
Deserves no other name  
Than lazy bone of the season  
An outcast he should be unknown in the clan  
Our barn of yam

The worthy inheritance of our children  
Greater than a bag full of clothes, money,  
Our gold, our hope, dependable inheritance  
A man who dies without leaving behind  
A worthy ban of yam died intestate  
have lived a wasted life – uncelebrated, unmourned  
risks ancestral queries in heaven  
our ban, the hope of our children,  
hope of our ancestors who whenever  
they call visiting make our bans  
their main path, select the  
robust yam as reward for our  
ancestral spirits. Our ban who survives  
all seasons. Oh! great tubers of yam, great ban, our  
pride hope of our generation, ancestral connect.

Anonymous songs “Ode to the ban”, Ekwulobia  
in Anambra State, Nigeria

The above oral Ode of the Igbos in Ekwulobia in Anambra State of Nigeria is usually sang in appraisal of the rich ban of Yam of Igbo farmers in the Eastern part of Nigeria. The poem praises the ban of yam which is filled with yam tubers such that it begins to yawn and almost unable to accommodate the tubers of yam

harvested across the seasons from the farm. To an average Igbo farmer, their pride lies on having a very rich farm of yam and then a great ban where yams can be stored across seasons. Farm work, according to the poem is not an occupation that the lazy can venture into “the pride of our strong arm”. And with abundant yam in bans, the people’s economic hardships will be taken care of. Any farmer, therefore, who do not have a ban of yam is lazy and unwanted in the Igbo rich cultural society and will not be given a chance to uphold his head in the gathering of the clan. A rich ban of yam is considered a worthy inheritance for the succeeding generation, greater than any other material wealth, valuable than gold as the pang of hunger has no replacement other than food, and tubers of yam are the best solution to hunger and famine. Anyone who must earn the favour of his ancestors must have a rich ban of yam or, else, the ancestors will not come to feast, on the yam when they come to visit the family. In Igbo culture, anyone who dies without leaving behind a rich ban of yam for his children to inherit has died uncelebrated and unmourned, even his ancestor will query him in heaven. Tubers of yam is a desire of the ancestors, and the means of establishing spiritual connexion with the Igbo man and his ancestors.

### **3.4 The Ballad**

The ballad as a form of poetry was an oral narrative form popular with many cultures around the world, including Africa. This is a story chanted in the form of a song and it involves the oral Artist and his audience who responds accordingly to the chant. Stories that are woven into ballads are taken from the folktales, the supernatural, family or communal histories as well as politics, legendary events and quarrels, private conflicts relating to love, assertion of rights but with a minor detail.

#### **3.4.1 The Ballad of the Pygmies of the Congo**

When time came calling  
Gazing into the sky sky blue bright sun  
Gazing into the sky sky blue bright sun  
The sun high high above giant home for a man  
High high above  
We see far above our height  
Our little height little  
But eyes seeing through the cloud sun bright  
But, the Tortoise, the Lion and the Hyena,  
Each onto a rope from Heaven descending on rope  
from the blue sky into the Earth  
With gifts of alligator pepper, cola nut, bitter  
Cola, heaven dew palmwine  
Zooming, zooming, zooming  
Down the rope  
With request to marry our queen

With request to marry our queen  
Queen of the pygmies beautiful  
Queen of the pygmies beautiful  
Queen of the pygmies beautiful  
The queen to be marred to the sky  
Where in-laws abode is  
With a promise to height increase  
With a promise to height increase  
With a promise to height increase  
But the queen of pygmies gave a  
nod of disapproval to inlaws  
for reason of minimal bride price  
and rejection offer to increase the  
height of the pygmies

The ocean protest  
Protest the sea  
The trees protest  
Protest the wind  
Protest the queen of virgin pygmies  
In-laws protest the short nature of the Virgin Pygmies  
Returned with their bride price  
Returned without the virgin pygmy  
To mother sun in Heaven  
Mother sun decreed  
Mother sun decreed  
Mother sun decreed  
Disapproving of virgin pygmy  
Mother sun decreed  
Disapproving of virgin pygmy  
Who prever mother sun to make them taller  
To giving them any groom from Heaven  
Pygmy virgin shorter shorter  
Pygmy virgin shorter shorter  
Pygmies, king, queen, children  
Shrink, shuter, shorter  
Too short to be married  
Too short to be married  
then came a loud voice from Heaven  
protesting, decreasing every Virgin Pilgrim  
To concubinage.

Anonymous ballad of the Pygmies of the Congo Basin

The popular oral narrative of the pygmies of the Congo Basin tells the story of the how the pigmies became shorter and their virgins find it difficult or impossible to get a non-native to marry them. The virgin pygmies and her people gazed into the sky for a choice of eligible bachelor when she was ripe enough for

marriage because the sky was the abode of men who are taller, besides they had the desire to be married by men from the giant race, the sun, but the Tortoise, Lion and the Hyena who were then living in the sky showed interest to marry the Virgin Pygmy, so they came down with a rope. They also brought bridal gifts of alligator pepper, cola nut and bitter kola and Heaven dew as palmwine. They also promised to increase the height of the queen Pygmy if she agrees to marry them, but she refused for reason that the bride prize was meager, and the nature, ocean, sea, trees and wind joined her in the protest against her suitors. Her suitors became angry and left for heaven, and mother sun visibly angry at the refusal of Virgin Pygmy and decreed that she remain, instead as a concubine and that was how Virgin Pygmy remained unmarried and all Pygmies lost the opportunity increase their heights up till today.

### **3.4.2 Agragh Ballad of the Bari-ghat – Arab Speaking People of Libya, North Africa**

Why the *Agragh* (Scorpion) Stings  
 Stinging, stinging  
 She releases venom in the millions  
 Whenever she stings, she stings  
 Man's heels to retaliate  
 Man's willful murder of her husband in a forest farm  
 She mourns all her life vowed to avenge his death  
 Vowed to retaliate his death from the first  
 to the last generation of man  
 so she goes on stinging, stinging  
 Flailing her sharp tail  
 twisting, and waging her poisonous tail  
 She stings from Mount Hogan, Ghat,  
 Obare, Sebha, Houn, Murzourch,  
 Benghazi, Trabulus she stings in farms irrigated,  
 in offices, houses, everywhere  
 She attacks man, deposits her venom of vengeance  
 her anger incurable  
 She vowed to sting every man of  
 every generation till the last man  
 Oh, Aghargh!  
 Oh, Aghargh!!  
 Oh, Aghargh!!!  
 The weird scorpion  
 Everywhere in the rocks,  
 mountains, villages and towns  
 who will pacify the angry weird, Aghragh  
 that stings everyone  
 everywhere

Translated by al-Shabaab

The North African-Arab ballad explains why the scorpion stings. Scorpion, Aghragh in Arab Libyan language that is commonly found in everywhere in Lyba according to oral poetry, vows to sting everyman to the last generation so as to retaliate the human murderer of her husband in a forest farm. She wags her poisonous tale everywhere, in an almost ubiquitous manner in the Arab world. The poem cites names of towns and villages “Ghat”, “Obare”, “Sebha”, “Houn”, “Murzarch”, “Benghazi” including the great Mountain Hugan that formed North Africa as places where scorpion can be found. The scorpion could not be pacified, only goes on killing people from the poison of its stings.

### 3.5 The Epic

The long heroic poem which is narrative in nature tells the story of a hero whose exploits have great impact for the nation or the whole of humanity. The style of the epic is usually elevated (Epic Style). Examples of the epic poems are Homers *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Indian’s *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, Anglo-Saxon Poem, *Bowulf*, John Mitton’s *Paradise Lost*, Italian Tasso’s *Jerusalem Liberata*. The epic can be primary or secondary in nature. The primary epic are usually legendary or mythical in nature, narrating the heroic exploits of a great warrior who helped his people to victory or in the founding of a nation, town, or community as in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

But, secondary epic is an imitation of the primary epic. Generally, epic makes allusion to Literature, history and great events with themes that are national and universal in perspective. Oral traditional African poetry is rich in epic poem, hence a few of the many examples across Africa are Ebira epic poem, Mwindo Epic of the Congo, Epic of the Mali, Elima Ngando epic of the Bakongo people, Ozidi saga of the Ijaw people, Sundjiata epic of old Mali, Igbo epic poem, Hausa, Gyaakyeamo epic of the Akan, Daniya epic poem of the Hausa, Yoruba Iroko epic, Bahima epic poem of Uganda, Tswana epic poem of the South Africa Bantu-speaking people of South Africa. Example of epic poem is given below.

#### 3.5.1 The Eve in Me (A Christian Epic)

The serpent did a good job in the wood?  
Leaving me on the path of storm  
This burden in me, worse than holocaust  
As the Eve in me almost lost the courage  
To walk through the fires of time  
This fatality of my feminity  
But the lord’s venom I embrace  
As a member of the rebel of the first garden  
Though, in pain we share the guilts  
And condemnation  
The Lord’s gift to Edenic tenants  
My conception, my sorrow multiplied

And my desires sentenced to Adam  
Who must rule over me till I return to the dust  
But for him is the ground cursed  
For defiling the Garden of Eden  
Our misdeeds hidden behind a fig tree  
Our nakedness covered with fig leaves  
And the skins of animals our apron of shame

I love to hate  
To tell this story of my new definition  
I, a woman  
Enchained by Adamic sins  
And sentenced to the bitterness of salty tears  
That forced us to lie on our bellies  
Our manackled freedom imagined  
The grave is far and near  
But, we must not die with the story untold  
So, we invite nature

To share our songs of sorrow  
We summon the flowing, river that meanders  
And relate our tales of woe  
We request the wind to stop the Lianas from bumping  
Into other trees  
As the Parrot is restless over  
Our songs of sorrow  
The pulprus and mudskippers slither  
To and from in the depth of the sea  
The crickets in the undergrowths are sad  
About the gender-power-impulse  
We whisper the wind to bear a testimony  
And convey the plights of the abhorrent women –  
eaves dropped  
To those who care to listen

I am foredoomed  
We are foredoomed  
I, a woman guilty from conception  
tried in vain to foil our Academic sins  
Which became my sole inheritance  
The tormenting IMAGE of a beguiling serpent  
Who first stripped me naked before Adam  
My head forced below my knees  
Forced to stoop only to him  
Even it imbecile from his looks  
And SHE a genius by all definitions  
She is weighed down under the labour pain  
of the original fall

That left her picarooned  
I, a woman  
On a journey down the path untrodden  
Wandering and meandering  
Like a snake that crawls over a rock  
But, see it so apparent now

My co-tenant in the garden of sin  
How Adam is polished  
And adorned in glory of riches  
Despite a partaker in the first sin  
His medals of leadership in  
Gold and jamestone  
Hung around his neck, ankles and wrists  
His boots laced and polished  
He sits on polished granites and  
Survives on volcanic candles  
Full of the fury of power  
Ordering the sun to withdraw her illuminations  
His mental space false propositions  
Put to work against me  
The order of ethical discourse betrayed  
Sociosymbolic contacts halt  
communications interdicted  
To make Adam and Eve irreconcilables  
And, I the Eve... sex object, sex machine  
For my anatomical difference

I am a woman  
Battered to the exclusion of the male-Adam-ego  
My soul bleeds like the West Indian slaves in chains  
In manacles  
I am a woman, the Eve  
My voice stolen  
Caged and decreed to plead 'guilty' still  
But not all pains attract tears  
Sweet are some pains and  
the pain of the righteous  
Despite the flailing horsewhip I endured, I have the courage  
To see through the dark cloud  
And into high heavens to  
embrace the receding laughter of freedom  
where lies my elusive strength and beauty

I can see the immense power in him (Adam)  
Take the shape of a monster  
As Adam invites power in him  
Take the shape of a monster

As power sits in a garment of fame  
With blood shot eyes  
I searched his eyeballs for a mote of conscience  
But there was none  
Only a terrifying figure terrifying the Eve in me still  
    Ego boosted  
    - Ego boosting  
    - Ego brooding  
And monosongs of bitterness  
    my heart bleeds as Adam insists  
    that my virtue must lie in wait  
    under his feet  
I spread my arms for Adam's embrace  
The arms he curiously ignored  
To the photographic mockery I embrace  
And, into the open arms of a green horse whip  
Flailing my skin on all sides  
And my weeping desires  
Suffer naked setback  
As the wings of tradition  
    Religion, and  
    the law  
        complete my  
        story of woe

And the trade-knife serating down my back to my  
buttocks  
For a new scar that will tell a permanent story of me  
My soul rebels against  
The witch that I am speculated to be  
Or the Abiku spirit imagined to live in me  
My compulsory rites of widowhood  
As horsewhips against my flesh spring high  
As if to touch the ever blue sky  
Million miles above my head  
I ignored my pains and  
Laughed with a wider amazement, realizing that  
I am trapped and chastised for womanhood  
And for a dream of  
When Eves will  
Be let loose from their manacles  
To acquire a new name  
And sing a new song  
    I am a woman  
    And Eve is my name  
My hope I hope is still green  
In this dark cage of life  
Wild cry for me unnecessary

In this razor blade edge of life  
The cage which bars are too  
Strong for me to break  
I, overpowered by the economized huths of men  
But if my creator so approve  
I choose to be a prisoner to this cage  
The cage of life into which from the beginning  
I was sentenced from birth  
Thus, it becomes traditional, and as it was that  
When as infant I was lifted from the red blood  
All eyes curious of what  
Gender I was made  
They asked  
Of what gender this one was made?  
And from the rear, they stared  
Guessing and asking  
    Is this anus purple?  
    Oval or crescent?  
    Pentagon or Hexagon?  
    Triangle or Square?  
    Cylinder or Pyramid?  
    Complex like a machine?  
But as cold congrats  
From the women proclaimed  
Eve –

My Eve – feminine gender  
All backs turned at me and my moment  
of conspicuous femininity  
My apparent indignity announced  
That was how thick darkness  
Overpowered the pride of the Earth into which I was born  
So when I was lifted from the RED BLOOD  
    I went violently  
Violently in protest for a world that knows no love  
But have all knowledge  
But NOW  
My strength lies on the new laughter of courage  
The laughter that will set me free from my original sin  
The priceless laughter nature deposits in me  
That I may truly be happy for a moment and say  
    Never again is the gender war!  
    Never again is the gender war!!  
    Never again is the gender war!!!

Like the promise made by God after the flood of Noah  
The swagger of Rainbow as covenant  
For the New Adam and Eve

But Never again!  
Never again!!  
Never again!!!  
Should women's dignity be exchanged  
In compromise for man's will

The Christian Epic was composed by Stanley ORIOLA in 2014

The theme of the Christian Epic is universal. "The Eve in Me" deals with the origin of the suffering of man and woman (Adam and Eve), particularly of women generally and how they lost the garden of Eden, and ran into disfavour with God when Satan, the serpent deceived Eve (them). The epic poem is essentially about how the sin of disobedience of the tenants in the garden of Eden became that of the woman for which every woman suffers, and even get oppressed by his man co-tenant in the garden of Eden. The fate of Eve in the poem became that of the universal women and Adam that of men generally.

The epic poem begins on an ironical note, predicting how the burden of mother Eve became that of every woman Adam which symbolizes the universal man too is not exempted from the burden of the consequences of the sin of disobedience. It seems that women bear the consequences of disobedience in folds, first through God's pronouncement, and then she is condemned under the earthly 'love' and control of the man, "my sorrow multiplied", "my desires sentenced to Adam who must rule over me till I return to the dust".

The consequence of the Edenic disobedience, stripped men and women of their dignity, and humanity. It was so serious that nature became aware of their pain, but the sin of the age became generational inheritance, and endemic nature, such that every society, including African society still take advantage of the "original fall" to treat women as underdog despite other obvious pains such as labour pain for which God sentenced her. Even the generation of Adam, man with whom they committed sin became women's conscious oppression, taking every advantage of her, in culture, religion, politics, education inclusive. Now, the post-Adamic contemporary woman feels excluded, caged, enslaved, such that the society suffers inequality to a level that makes woman feel unsafe; as nor the law, tradition, or religion can rescue her. She is recognized as a gender who must be chastised, overpowered and made to suffer glaring indignities in all fronts, yet women hope that the society will outgrow the problem of gender inequality the more humanity becomes civilized, women receives God's mercy, she will be free from the guilt of the original sin.

### **3.6 The Elegy**

This is a poem that mourns the death of an individual or the death of a number of people. The Elegy was originated in the Greco-Roman world, usually written in elevated language. It is usually on a serious subject of war, death or love. This

form of poetry deals with a definite theme, especially of love or death, when the first phase of the ill feeling of the sad event has passed. It reveals the philosophy of life or circumstances that surrounds the dead. Example of an elegy in oral African literature is the Odingboro the Elegy of the Ebira-speaking people of Kogi State in Nigeria.

### 3.6.1 The Odingboro Elegy of Ebira People in Nigeria

Odingboro o o, Odingboro  
Odingboro o o, Odingboro  
With destiny  
And family friends and  
relations on your burial  
came calling to lead you, a warrior,  
on the great path of your ancestors  
But on your funeral came  
the furious wind  
the furious wind  
the furious wind never before seen  
came calling with venom of fire  
of a million tongues setting houses  
trees and your lovers ablaze  
A taboo, this is  
A taboo, is it  
A taboo unheard of o o o, Odingboro  
A taboo unheard of o o o, Odingboro  
A wind of a million tongue spitting embers  
of fire-creating an infernal madness  
abhorrent to history, o o, Odingboro  
see your coffin held high in torrents  
of fire, the infernality of all souls at your  
burial ceremony set on fire.

Great warrior Odingboro  
but it was a no taboo  
That your people saw you off  
The path of your ancestors  
O, Odingboro see your coffin in flame  
held high in the tongue of fire  
And every head at your funeral  
in flames of fire o, Odingboro  
We the left over not at your funeral  
Owe you no grudge o brave warrior  
Odingboro.

The elegy discusses the theme of death, it is about an Ebira legendary warrior named Odingboro who later died. But, all those who attended his funeral were

burnt, including the coffin or casket of the deceased when a mysterious wind came from nowhere and consumed all who were present at his funeral ceremony. Those who had gone to the funeral ceremony of Odingboro were not only left to mourn Odingboro but their loved ones who had gone to attend the warrior's funeral.

### **3.7 The Dirge**

This is a song of lamentation chanted during or after the burial of a loved one as in the example below.

Who says Trees don't have premonition?  
Trees have intuition; feelings and premonition  
We heard from whistling Echoe  
of the Iroko Tree  
That you have left on the lonely path  
To your ancestors  
The Mahogany bowed in obeisance  
To announce your sudden departure  
As the wall-gheco and lizards  
Engage in unusual amazing skills  
Behind the wall of the house  
Premonition tells us that  
Unusual has happened to you  
Leaving your fame  
And heroic exploits behind  
Your kindness and  
Your bag of humour us all  
We have as testimony of your patriot-goodness  
Adieu great one

Anonymous

The poem is a lamentation combined with the poet's nostalgia of the achievements of the deceased when he was alive. The poem begins with how nature announces the departure of the hero, the reaction of the Lizards and Wall-gheco are visible premonition that a soul known to the poet has gone. He recounts the virtues of the dead as humorous, sociable and a heroic patriot.

### **3.8 Praise Poem**

As the name implies, a praise poem is designed to eulogize the virtue of chief, king, a war hero, or anyone who has done something very amazing and worthy of note, the subject could be a plant, tree, bird or an animal. Usually, the correct recital of oriki makes the object to strive to greater heights and gladdens him. If a praise poem is in honour of a progenitor, it gladdens him in the world of the

spirits as he showers blessings on his offsprings on earth, it makes ancestors to be proud of their pedigree and can make one feel the sense of nostalgia or homesick if far from home.

### **3.8.1 Praise Poetry of Onikoyi**

Onikoyi, the warrior who never  
received an arrow in his breast  
Child of the water lily. Child of the squirrel  
The bird's foot shall never  
touch the water, the river shall never beat rest  
Onikoyi the warrior  
Who frightens death himself  
Child of the vulture perching  
on the baobab tree  
child of the Eagle sitting on the  
silk tree  
child of the Hawk pounces down  
he will eat the eyes of a brave warrior  
Onikoyi loves nothing but war  
When others drink wine, he drinks blood  
When others plant yam, he is planting heads  
When other reap fruits, he is reaping dead  
Warriors

Anonymous African Poem

The theme of the poem is war. It is a praise poem of Onikoyi, a war hero and general, generalissimo who is skillful in the art of warfare, hence compared to the water "lily", "vulture", "eagle", "squirrel". He is himself a fright, so nothing frightens him, as he is capable of frightening even death. The Onikoyi is greater than every known warrior, and the sight of blood excites him, he "drinks blood", "plant heads", and "reaps dead warriors". He is a clever warrior per excellence, unrivalled hero who is valiant in battle.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have discussed poetry not as an exclusive reserve of Western education, but something that is also preciously obtainable in oral African literature, as well as the types in indigenous African literature. Sample poems are also provided as appropriate from different parts of Africa including the oral poetry of the Zulu. Assagai people, Ekwolobia praise poem of yam of the Igbo speaking Amabra people of Eastern Nigeria, anonymous ballad of the Pygmies of Congo, Epic poem relating to how Adam and Eve ran into disfavour with God and were banished from the garden of Eden, Ebira heroic oral elegy of Odingboiroo, Yoruba praise poem of Onikoyi and so on.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt:

- poetry is also an essential part of oral African literature
- what lyric poem is all about in oral African literature
- the meaning of Ode
- what ballad is all about in oral African poetry
- the different themes in the given oral poems
- thematic aesthetics of the dirge, elegy, as well as the praise poem

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) With the aid of adequate examples, explain the existence of oral African poetry in preliterate societies.
- 2) With suitable examples from oral African literature discuss the lyric, and Ode.
- 3) Discuss the themes in the ballad of your people.
- 4) What is an epic? Justify your answer with any poem of your choice.
- 5) Return to the oral tradition of your people and translate an elegy and a dirge.

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## **UNIT 4      DRAMA IN ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is designed to take you through another genre of oral African literature which is drama. Its elements which we have discussed in this unit include setting, dramatic personnae, plot structure, stage, dialogue and songs.

It is important to note that almost everything about oral African literature is dramatic, practical and demonstrative. You may think that it is not necessary for you to study the aspect of drama of the oral African literature, that is not true, as it is essentially a good part of your study that will help your mastery of your discipline. In oral African literature, you do not need to go in search of the stop-sign as you may come in contact with situations that may require that you exercise your knowledge of the dramatic genre of oral African literature. Should such situation truly occur, we expect that you demonstrate your already acquired skills. In this unit, below are some of the objectives of this unit.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify and relate the oral drama of your people
- discuss the Adimu Orisa play
- outline the merits of any oral drama of your people
- list some elements of oral African drama
- relate the oral drama of your people with specific reference to setting, dramatic personae, language, plot structure and stage
- explain the aspect of drama of your village and indicate the dramatic qualities seen in it.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Drama**

Drama is one of the genres of oral African literature, unlike the poetry and prose genres of oral African literature; the dramatic aspect is the type that explores the totality or more of dramaturgy in its narrative pattern used by the oral Artist or narration in its enactment. All the oral genres share from their various elements, such as chants or songs. Although, there are performances that exclusively belong to the dramatic genre with its story telling and poetic recital coupled with interactive and integrative manner. Although, the use of songs and chants are similar to the poetry form of orature but are also characteristic of the dramatic form. Oral dramatic narration is foregrounded by its dynamic ritual form. An example of oral African dramatic performance is the Adimu Orisa festival of Lagos; a ritual dramatic festival that celebrates rite of passage and its existence relates to cultism, deities and spiritism with all its paraphernalia.

### **3.2 The Adimuorisa Ritual Drama**

The Eyo and Awo Opa are similar ritual plays performed at the same time, the Eyo originated from Iperu and Awo Opa was brought into Lagos from Oyo town as the exclusive performance of the Royal family. With the approval of Chief Apena Ajasa by King Dosumu of Lagos, the cult became also a public affair, and it yielded to a more sociable adaptation to marking funerals and house warming ceremonies, even traditional marriages and lately political affairs. The Eyo play was first staged for funeral purpose by King Dosumu of Lagos in April 13, 1875.

### **3.3 Elements of the Adimuorisa play as an African ritual drama**

#### **3.3.1 Setting**

The setting is the scene of symbolic mourning of Adimu where the traditional dialogue with the deceased takes place, Eyo pays homage to the deceased.

The different Eyo groups are paraded around the Nnamdi Azikwe Street, Idumota area of Lagos. This marks the climax of the drama and the grand finale of the festival and the audience watches the formal encounter between Adimu and Eyo as the symbolic submission of the Eyo, his final exite and scape goatism.

By tradition, the Adamourisa play is a festival held in some designated areas and streets of Lagos and the streets constitute the stage where the play is enacted. There are also dramatic personae like Adimu Eyo, Mummy Oniko Ologede, Agere, Alaketepupa. The Adimu is the tragic hero who represents the Orisa-nla who made the barren woman, Olugbani to be procreative.

### **3.3.2 Stage**

The stage is not limited to a location, but selected streets around and in Lagos Island. Such places commonly used within the Island are Iga Idungaran, Agodo, Idumota and Imoku. The performances on the stage usually take a chronologically ordering. First, there is the exchange of formal homage, next is the display of ritual paraphernalia like Abebe, hat, staff (opabata), mask, bata, glasses, white symbolic apparel, etc are displayed. The deceased lie-in-state is usually done at the deceased private residence (if a chief) or the popular Glover Hall, all these depend on the social status of the deceased.

### **3.3.3 Plot Structure**

It has a simple plot. Spiritually, the reincarnated Orisa nla, Adimu, is summoned to connect man to the spirits through a rite of passage to facilitate the crossing over of the deceased to the ancestors. Adimu is the chief mourner, sacrifices are offered to the gods for the atonement of the sins of the deceased through general cleaning and cleansing by the Eyo group.

### **3.3.4 Dramatic Personnae**

The Eyo is a tall masquerade that represents the ancestral founder of Lagos. He speaks in the goithural Awori dialect. It is a respected masquerade who awaits spiritual elevation into the rank of the Yoruba dialect. The costume is made of Raffia-mat. The masquerade is usually urshered in with incantatory rituals, the material for his costume are usually damask clothes in place of banana leaves that was often used in those days. Other dramatic personae are Agere, an entertainer (witnessing masquerade), Olori Eyo or Olupa Eyo (The royal Police).

### 3.3.5 Dialogue

There is the extensive use of dialogue, poetry, social incantation and songs. The social dialogue merged in ethical-cultural communication and greetings to pay homage to the Eyo masquerade's greetings.

Ope ado	Thanks be to ado
Iba ado	Worship be to ado
Iba Akinsiku	Worship be to Akinsiku

Below are other examples of the exchange of greetings between the cultist and Eyo according to orature

Cultist	Ago oro Eyo
Eyo mo yo fun o	I rejoice with you
Mo yo fun ra mi	I rejoice with myself
Emi agogoro Eyo!	I am the imposing Eyo

Cultist	Pan ti wa?	Why have you come?
Eyo	Panti se	Reason is I have a duty
Cultist	Opa asileka siko?	Where is the staff on the shoulder?
Eyo	Ti ehin loju	It is the rear part which weighs more in the precinct of Iraiye
Cultist	Ni mode iraye	
Cultist	Ni ho lo pade anikanjiya?	Where did you meet the lone sufferer?

### 3.3.6 Songs

Songs are important to the Adamourisa play song connects the people to their ancestral spirits; through social re-ordering that eulogizes the performers, such that whatever they could not have been able to do, they could do with ease. Below is a popular Adimu Orisa festival song of the Yorubas

O ti f'abebe  
Fe 'ku lo  
Oti f'abebe  
Fe 'ku lo  
Adimu se ohunna lo sope  
On ti f'abebe  
Fe ku lo

He has warded off death  
With his magic fan  
He has warded off death  
With his magic fan  
Adimu has vowed to  
ward off death  
With his magic fan

The Adimuorisa play is significant to the Yoruba and the society as a religious ritual, and purification ritual during funerals and rite of passage. It is also for the purpose of praising the deceased and eulogizing his activities when he was in the world. It is also a coordinating social ritual of the society. It is an avenue to appease the ancestors to improve the people's economy, health and grant longevity to the individual. It is often used to ward off evil from the society and shower blessings on the people. The Adimu Orisa encourage sense of kingship, honour for the dead, inter tribal and historical relationship with, for instance, the Oyo, Ijebu Remo, Rini, Iperu that also have similar practise, even older than Lagos in some cases. It is also used as social and political rallying point among Lagos indigenes and non-indigenes.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt

- oral African drama share similar qualities, elements with written Western drama
- the elements of oral African drama
- about the Yoruba Adimuorisa drama/play

In the next unit, you will be introduced to prose in oral African literature.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) What is drama?
- 2) Differentiate between setting and stage in oral African drama
- 3) Reproduce one of the ritual drama/play of your community clearly indicating the elements seen in the drama
- 4) Chose a written African drama of your choice and the ritual drama and compare with any two dramatic elements of your choice.

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## **UNIT 5      PROSE IN ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this unit, we have introduced you to the prose aspect of oral African literature, an aspect that completes the genre of oral African literature as we have in written Literature. The previous, last two units in succession have taken you through the poetry and dramatic forms of oral African literature.

The prose genre of the oral African literature complements the poetry and dramatic genres of indigenous African literature. In this unit, we have also taken you through some of the elements of the prose genre of oral African literature such as setting, points of view, themes, characterization. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the indigenous prose fiction of your community
- list and explain the elements in any prose genre selected from the pool of oral tradition of any parts of Africa
- itemize the moral lessons in any oral prose fiction chosen from any part of Africa

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1.1 The Prose Form of African Orature

The prose form is a genre in oral African literature, though share the characteristics of the poetry and dramatic forms. This means that the prose genre use songs, incantations, proverbs, poetic and dramatic expressions to tell a story in a prosaic form, though such stories, in the age of writing has been reduced to written form. Example of the prose narrative of the oral African literature is the Mayeku tale recorded and translated variously from oral tradition, but we have based our comments on oral African prose Mayeku and Onekanselu as recorded and translated by Stanley Oriola and Egwu Anyanwu performed by Oranmeken cultural group and respectively Mayeku was recorded in the year 2000, duration of performance was about one hour, Onekanselu was recorded in 2000, duration of performance was about 35 minutes.

#### 3.1.1 Oral Prose (I) Mayeku

(Performed by Oranmeken oral African group, Ilaje-riverine area of Ondo State, Nigeria. Year of Recording 2000. Duration of Performance, about one hour)

Recorded and translated by Stanley Adelodun ORIOLA

Beginning

Narrator: We welcome you to our tale from the land of tales.

Chorus: Fabulous

Narrator: Here is a great tale.

Chorus: A great take indeed from the land of tales. We welcome our tale bearer from the land of tales.

Episode 1:

Here is a tale of Mayeku, how and why death vowed to kill man, animals, birds as well as sea mammals. Death was never addressed as death but as mystery killer “yeku”. In those days, it was common for man, animals and everything that has breath to stop breathing and left to decay. After many years the deceased were thrown in the outskirts of the town called Mayegun, a place of skulls. But when the mystery killer of man and animals continued to kill and nothing could stop it, humanity thought of the need to protect the dead by digging holes for corpses.

While birds and animals left their dead to decay on the surface of the earth and sea mammals left theirs to float or get sunk in the seabed. The general effort to stop the mysterious killer continued. The birds who could fly also flew high to farther trees and across great seas in the Eastern, some to Northern and Southern parts of the kingdom to secure freedom from the strange occurrence (death).

Birds and animals by their unique nature began to strategize, searching for defence mechanism that will secure their lives. The porcupine injected many arrows around its environment to get it more secure, the monkeys hung on to the Iroko trees to be far from the ill-wind. The Eagle flew high into the sky, The Lion roared thunderously to create fear around its environment for security reason.

The Elephant tread ponderously “ploom”, “ploom”, “ploom” in the forest perhaps, its mighty appearance, swinging tussle and ponderous tread can secure it and the members of its family from the invisible incurative. Some Parrots decide not to live in their nests so as to avoid being trapped by the danger loitering around. The partridge dug deep into the earth, tried to hide itself in a dug hole, yet parts of its body still exposed to the evil of the day. But the invisible killer smeared the Partridge from behind and killed it. The Parrots that had flew far in search of security from the unknown killer ran into and got trapped by a hunter’s snare, got killed. The Elephant that had moved thunderously in the forest got caught, stocked its foot in a thicket, struggled to be free, but lost its breath in the struggle.

Likewise, the Eagle, Porcupine, some birds and animals got killed all throwing the animal kingdom into frequent mourning daily. There was no animal or bird that could ravel the mysterious killer. But, after the third mourning among the animals, the Chameleon came out and announced to the mournful gathering of the birds and animals that since he has the natural ability to reflect the colour of its environment, he will assume the colour of the mysterious killer among the animals, confuse it to put an end to its killer-ego. So, it assumed the colourless colour of the killer, endlessly and from that time the Chameleon kept assuming the colour of its environment in the attempt to entrap the killer of birds and animals in the kingdom.

In its last attempt, it assumed the colour of the cobra, the latter became angry stung and killed it, and as usual, the animal and bird’s kingdom were again thrown into mourning. Since the period was a time there was unity, among birds and animals, whenever death occurred in the midst of animals, or birds, mourning was done together, and their dead were buried on a common ground, individual grave was forbidden because the animals believe that there is only one heaven for all, hence, it was needless to separate the graves of the deceased. Another reason that was given was that death, the mysterious killer kills anywhere, anytime and indiscriminately.

The invisible killer was the major problem confronting the whole world as such, both animals and birds agreed that it was possible to search out death so as to stop the killings. So a search party was organized to go in search of death in the spirit world. The search party comprising of birds and animals, as well as sea mammals the mother Eagle, Mother Fox, Mother Chameleon, Mother Sparrow, Mother Tortoise, Lion and Lioness, Mother Peacock, Leopard, Jackal, Wolf, Tiger, Hawk. Sea mammals were represented by the Whale, Pulprus and Mudskippers.

The elders had a night long deliberation with the search party. The elders pleaded with the smaller birds and animals that the selection was not based on favouritism, but on the qualities that included swiftness, craftiness, strength, endurance, perseverance, discipline, hardwork, cleverness, brilliant, magnificent, and must not give in to fright easily, must be polished, graceful, flighty, heedful, and above all must be willing and ready to die anytime death came calling. The search party then sings while the other birds and animals looked on.

Narrator	Eyi ki rike?	What at a frightening tale?
Narrator	Eyi ke kirii?	What at a frightening tale?
Narrator	Eyi ki rike?	What at a frightening tale?
Narrator	Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Narrator	Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Narrator	Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Chorus	Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Chorus	Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Chorus	Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Chorus	Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Chorus	Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Chorus	Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Chorus	Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Chorus	Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Chorus	Ma ye gha	I will stay alive

There are three routes to the dome of death, one is through the sky and another through the water. The sea mammals will take the hungry path of the sea to the dome of death while the birds will go through the famished sky and the animals will travel through the famished road of death to death's abode, in view of this development, the search party were regrouped into three with the Eagle leading those hungry path of the air. The Lion was chosen to lead the second party through death's hungry land away, while the whale led those of the sea through to death. The triangular journey began with each leaders in front of the party. As the parties began the mournful song that will usher them onto the path of death, all the variegated feathers on the trees sang in unison, the animals too respond with determination and the fishes in the near by stream swim to and fro, prompting their fins, and gills amazingly.

Narrator	Aye hi eyiha	What a kind of life
Narrator	Aye hi eyiha	What a kind of life
Narrator	Aye hi eyiha	What a kind of life
Narrator	Aye hi eyiha	What a kind of life
Narrator	Aye hi eyiha	What a kind of life
Narrator	Aye hi eyiha	What a kind of life
Narrator	Aye hi eyiha	What a kind of life
Narrator	Aye hi eyiha	What a kind of life
Narrator	Aye hi eyiha	What a kind of life
Narrator	Aye hi eyiha	What a kind of life

Eyi kirike	What a frightening tale?
Eyi kirike	What a real frightening tale?
Eyi kirike	What a real frightening tale?
Eyi kirike	What a real frightening tale?
Eyi kirike	What a real frightening tale?
Eyi kirike	What a real frightening tale?
Eyi kirike	What a real frightening tale?
Eyi kirike	What a real frightening tale?
Eyi kirike	What a real frightening tale?
Eyi kirike	What a real frightening tale?
Eyi kirike	What a real frightening tale?
Eyi kirike	What a real frightening tale?

Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Ma ye ku	I will be dead

Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Ma ye gha	I will stay alive
Ma ye gha	I will stay alive

The search party going through the air were the first to embark on the journey, they were air lifted by the wind which they had appealed to help transport them to the dome of death, the ubiquitous killer spirit.

Kum, uuuuuuuuuum	They were airlifted

Repeat earlier sequence

Eyi ke ki ri?	What a frightening tale?
Eyi ke ki ri?	What a frightening tale?

Eyi ke ki ri?	What a frightening tale?
Eyi ke ki ri?	What a frightening tale?
Eyi ke ki ri?	What a frightening tale?
Eyi ke ki ri?	What a frightening tale?

Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Ma ye ku	I will be dead
Ma ye ku	I will be dead

Ma ye gha	Ma ye gha
Ma ye gha	Ma ye gha
Ma ye gha	Ma ye gha
Ma ye gha	Ma ye gha

## Episode 2

After three days of traveling in the air, the search party including Mayeku, a war general, man's representative among them arrived the land of the ubiquitous killer death and his household. Death appeared with blood stained mouth, looking calm and unassuming, he was such a friendly spirit, human and animal skulls and beaks and carcasses of birds and sea mammals are its interior décor. He stood a distant from the visitors who had flew in from the earth, offered them seats made of skulls of animals birds, sea mammals and man. The earthly visitors refused to take their seats for fear of being killed, besides they found it irritating to seat on the skulls and carcasses of their fellow brothers and sisters already killed by death. Their fairy host understood their intention, smiled and asked why they had come to visit him unannounced, "I hope you have not come to kill me", he asked the party who looked askance, but the Eagle was quick to answer his question, "As you can see, we are not armed, only came to hold a meeting with you, and seek the possibility of buying our freedom from you, the freedom of our yet unborn generation so that we will all have no further curse to dig graves for any of our relations and loved ones – so that you! death can stop killing us". Death hung down his head in despair, then said, "if only you have what it takes to beg me and my entire household". Every member of my family have God gifted duties as ordained by the Almighty God, and none among us dare disobey our creator as does you man, and animals, but only I am not happy as you refused to take your seats, nevertheless, I will introduce every of my children and entire household to you after which we will then continue our meeting.

Death had not began to introduce the members of his family when the group that traveled by land led by the Lion arrived, and the sea mammals as well. With the three groups in the dome of death, they arrived the arena with mournful song.

Narrator	Maku maku nu le uku	If death persists in the house of death Let death kill
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Chorus	Oyeku yeku nori gho mu o	And if it be possible let me cheat death by any impossible inch
	Maku maku nu le uku	If I will die in death's abode
	Oyeku yeku nori gho mu o	fate let me cheat death by any inch
	Maku maku nu le uku	If I will die in death's abode
	Oyeku yeku nori gho mu o	fate let me cheat death by any inch
	Maku maku nu le uku	If I will die in death's abode
	Oyeku yeku nori gho mu o	fate let me cheat death by any inch
	Maku maku nu le uku	If I will die in death's abode
	Oyeku yeku nori gho mu o	fate let me cheat death by any inch

### Episode 3:

Death then summoned the choristers in his abode to usher in his visitors formally them “kom, kom, kom, kom, kom, came the sound of drums in solemn but rhythmical tone. This was immediately followed by a strange mournful song by choristers who all dressed in black regalia, weeping as they sing and filled out from a nearby grave. The coffin bearing choirmaster leads with a coffin bearing assistant choirmaster swinging sideways behind. The third was a skeleton bearer was riding in the wing of the wind in the midst of a thick dark smoke all around (Narrator resumes song).

### Narrator

Iku e juye, iku e juye o ma se o o o	It's a pity death is unavoidable
Iku e juye, iku e juye o ma se o o o	It's a pity death is unavoidable
Iku e juye, iku e juye o ma se o o o	It's a pity death is unavoidable
Iku e juye, iku e juye o ma se o o o	It's a pity death is unavoidable
Iku e juye, iku e juye o ma se o o o	It's a pity death is unavoidable
Iku e juye, iku e juye o ma se o o o	It's a pity death is unavoidable
Iku e juye, iku e juye o ma se o o o	It's a pity death is unavoidable
Wo waso uku wo fe ye ku	You wear the flaming garment of death and wish to avoid death
Wo gba ya uku wo fe ye ku	You deprive death of his wife, you want to avoid death
Wo reni bebe uku wo fe ye ku	You thread the path of death, and wish to avoid the path of death
Wo ja uja uku wo fe ye ku	You fight the fight of death you wish to avoid the fight of death

Wo wole uku wo fe ye ku

You go into the abode of death, but wish to avoid death

Wo se ti didi wo fe ye ku

You are incorrigible, wish to avoid death

#### Chorus

aaa o o o ma se o o o o, uku e juye

Unfortunately, death is unavoidable

aaa o o o ma se o o o o, uku e juye

Unfortunately, death is unavoidable

aaa o o o ma se o o o o, uku e juye

Unfortunately, death is unavoidable

aaa o o o ma se o o o o, uku e juye

Unfortunately, death is unavoidable

#### Episode 4

Death summoned every member of his household to the meeting. He began by introducing them. My first born, Lodgebodge is to kill every erring firstborn in every household of man, animals, birds and sea mammals”, concludes death. He introduced booby, he makes it possible for every disobedient creature to get entrapped in deadly snares. Hoodwink only kill night crawlers, he pointed at another member of his family he called mishap which operates by killing careless man, animal, birds and sea mammals, typhoon kills sea fearers, novel creates newest type of death, hugger mugger kills war mongers, and fighters, venerate kills the aged and very important personalities only, hoyden is death’s messenger that gives death notice to those suffering from ill health. After he has introduced them, he then announced that death is a special messenger appointed by the Almighty God and satan to kill, but not for no reason. Then, the Tortoise spoke at length on behalf of the animals on the need to spare every race of God’s creation from being killed. He continued, “Please consider our plights, we almost have no other things than to dig grave for the members of our family, and the delegated murmured in support of his oratory. But, when it was time for death to speak, he said, “As you all know, I am ubiquitous and that is my special God given attribute, you will have to go and seek permission first, from God, once God sets you free, you will all be free indeed. Besides you all have my properties with your generation, some of them are stealing, lie telling, fornication, adultery, killing, covetousness, drunkenness, extortion, fighting, lesbianism, smoking, night crawling, quarrelling, bribery, idolatory and other forms of corruption are my properties.

I have a superior order to kill whoever possess any of these properties of mine even without a prior notice. Let your generation do away with them and they will forever be free. He concludes, “so you all can see that I death is right and correct to kill, and you are right to die”. The meeting ended with the parties set on journey back to the earth (The narrator sings)

Narrator

Abe be, a bebe nowo  
Iku, iku e de gbe be wa

We plead with death, but death  
Insist he must kill

Chorus

Iku joo, o iku joo  
O de saanu wa, gbo ebe wa

We plead for pardon please death, please  
Lenient death we plead for leniency

Iku joo, o iku joo  
O de saanu wa, gbo ebe wa

We plead for pardon please death, please  
Lenient death we plead for leniency

Iku joo, o iku joo  
O de saanu wa, gbo ebe wa

We plead for pardon please death, please  
Lenient death we plead for leniency

Narrator

Your property our  
Nature please death  
Your property our  
hobby please death

e ru e a kanda wa, jo iku  
e ru e amuyangam wa, jo  
e rue a yesi wa

Your property our pride we plead  
We plead, we plead  
death we plead, we plead

A be be, iku, a bebe, jo

Chorus

Please, please death lets not  
cry weep any more  
Pleeeaaase

Jo, jo, ifopin si ekun wa  
Jooooooo

Episode 5

And all the birds and animals set back home world singing dirges, and when they arrived home, they met the community mournful, and joined the mournful trail. It was since then that both man, animals and birds continue to mourn, as they refused to return death's properties in their possession, and death continue to kill and has not stopped up to now.

Narrator

Hmnnnn our tale

Chorus

Hmnnnn a great tale it is

Narrator

Hmnnnn our tale

Chorus

Hmnnnn a great tale it is

Narrator                Hmnnnn our tale  
Chorus                 Hmnnnn a great tale it is,  
                             Hmnnn maaayeeekuuu

### 3.1.2 Oral Prose

(Performed by Oranmaken African Oral Group of Nigeria. Year of Recording 2011. Duration of Performance, about 1 hour)

(Recorded and translated by Stanley Adelodun Oriola)

Narrator:        Here comes a marvelous tale  
Chorus:         Fabulous  
Narrator:        Here comes a marvelous tale  
Chorus:         Fantastic

#### Episode (1)

This is the story of Onekeiselu, an Oba who doubles as a warrior and keeps a harem of women as wives and wanted more. His preferred choice of women are the very beautiful who are right in everything. His insatiable will to dominate made him keep women swarming around him at all times. None in the village dare marry a beautiful woman because, the Oba will kill the man, use his skull as seat in his palace and take his wife. The Oba's continuous search for beautiful women continued. This overbearing attitude of the Oba forced the beautiful women in his village to go on self exile. And any woman he gave a wand of restriction automatically becomes the Oba's wife because the wand restricts the woman and wards off other men from even thinking of falling in love with such a wand bearer.

In those days, intermarriages between man and spirits was possible and a regular occurrence because the gap between the world of man and spirits was very thin. The overbearing nature and insatiability of Oba Onekeiselu traveled like wild wind on the dry season, rushing and pumping trees against trees, hills and mountains and forcing sea waves to rise high causing great disasters.

The damaging image of the Oba traveled beyond the frontiers of the spirits, animals, birds and the mermaid worlds underneath the sea. The chief mermaid and revolving spirit that heard called for emergency meeting that involved all animals, sea mammals, birds and other creatures. The meeting was scheduled for the zero zero lunar moon. That was usually the Twelfth month of the year in the spirit world. It was also a time that spirits allowed strangers from other worlds to freely pass through the invisible divide that separated the spirit world from humans, animals and other creatures.

It was also usually a time that vital decisions that will affect spirits and other creatures are presented, read and considered in the council of the spirits whenever the Chairman comes visiting once in a year. The chief mermaid promised to host all in the gold city of the mermaid kingdom. The kingdom of animals was asked to send three representatives to attend the meeting. They must all have the ability to survive, both on land and water, those who must represent the birds too must be able to survive on land and in water. Although, quite naturally in those days, all birds animals could survive on land and water and could even fly in the air. But, the chief mermaid, Itokun promised to open the gate in the sea bed to enable his visitors walk through the boarder gate that connects land and sea. The spirit was the first to arrive the venue of the meeting, he had asked the furious wind to hand him on to its windy wing for quick and easy journey. “Vruuvummmm, Vruuuuummm, Vruuuuummm”, they arrived the venue in the seabed gold city of mermaids.

Narrator (accompanied by instruments) as song sequence continues as the narrator develops his tale with new facts)

Eyi ke ujoko?	What a meeting?
Eyi ke ujoko?	What a meeting?
Eyi ke ujoko?	What a meeting?
Eyi ke ujoko?	What a meeting?
Eyi ke ujoko?	What a meeting?
Eyi ke ujoko?	What a meeting?
Eyi ke ujoko?	What a meeting?
Ujoko agbaya norun	A meeting made in heaven
Ujoko agbaya norun	A meeting made in heaven
Ujoko agbaya norun	A meeting made in heaven
Ujoko agbaya norun	A meeting made in heaven
Ujoko agbaya norun	A meeting made in heaven
Eyi Ujoko paja were	What an emergency meeting
Eyi Ujoko paja were	What an emergency meeting
Eyi Ujoko paja were	What an emergency meeting
Eyi Ujoko paja were	What an emergency meeting
Eyi Ujoko paja were	What an emergency meeting
Eyi Ujoko paja were	What an emergency meeting

## Episode (2)

The meeting began, with the Chairman council of spirits addressing the assembly. The council chairman held the staff of office high in the air. He began, “the reason we are gathered here this moon is to address the allegation of the abuse of office, power and oppressive reports about Oba Ayesetonakan in the human world; especially the issue of the oppression or women by the Oba. What should we do?”, he asked and hung his head in despair. Huhuhnnnnnnnnnn, Huhuhmnnnn, Huhunnnnn the spirits chorused in unity. The chairman held his

staff of authority high in the air and asked an influential woman spirit in the gathering to speak. She rose thunderously from her seat, while other spirits hummed, in acknowledgement of her presence: “shall we hear the red list of the human king’s allegation from the council chairman first?”, she asked; and other spirits hissed (accompanied by instruments)

Chorus

Huhuhumnnn	grumbling continues

Episode (3) (narrator resumes)

The council chairman began to roll out the human king’s allegation based on the questions from the individual spirits and the existing allegation already leveled against the Oba.

First Allegation: The Oba consciously and deliberately seduces and abducts the wives of other men like him and killed the men-husbands.

In the spirit world, blood represents the soul of a man, then, one of the spirits asked, so are his hands really soiled with blood? The chairman looked intently into the mid air and answered “Huhuhumnnn!”, Huhuhumnnn!!, Huhuhumnnn!!!, all the spirits gave a very disapproving response to the king’s action. And, another asked, does that include the men he killed in battle as a warrior?” Those were the men he killed and then took their wives as his. As a valiant warrior, he has over fifty thousand heads blood in his possession. Huhuhumnnn, Huhuhumnnn, Huhuhumnnn, Huhuhumnnn, spirits again were alarmed at the sinister record of the human king. At last, a honourable multiple headed spirit reminded the assembly that the woman spirit has not spoken, and she was then beckoned at to move forward and speak. She leaned backward in her chair and heaved a sigh of relieve, then began.

Why are men so violent, so dangerous, so inhuman and callous?, one would think that with the soft skin that covered their soul, they will have soft human heart but they have hearts of stone.

Why should one deprive his fellow of what is not his? But, are women now mere articles that are traded for ephemeral pleasure, are women now articles that can be sold and bought at will?, Has the mighty man forgotten his transient nature?

After her many rhetorical, she concludes with a question, steering at the chairman, so what are his guilts? The chairman replied the human kings is found guilty of many heads, guilty of stealing, abduction, abuse of power, he should be arrested and treated like a thief that he is, but first, lets send one of our intelligent female officers to arrest him for immediate prosecution.

As the enchanting female mermaid, Igodo stood up, took a bow before the assembly and agreed go to the human world to arrest Oba Onokeselu, the assembly rose immediately (accompanied by instruments), the narrator resumes.

Narrator

A le o Onakenselu a  
po lori ebi joye,  
a fo binrin jogun e wu  
awotele

Chorus

a le o, a su medon  
ile aye ma mi yora subuke  
a ye ma nuwon

Well done Onakenselu, the killer  
of family heads, the wicked  
inheritor of women the women you  
made underdog of

tread cautiously  
our earth is a slippery lot  
Onekensulu remember, remember  
the transcient nature of life

Well done Onakenselu, the killer  
of family heads, the wicked  
inheritor of women the women you  
made underdog of

tread cautiously  
our earth is a slippery lot  
Onekensulu remember, remember  
the transcient nature of life

Well done Onakenselu, the killer  
of family heads, the wicked  
inheritor of women the women you  
made underdog of

tread cautiously  
our earth is a slippery lot  
Onekensulu remember, remember  
the transcient nature of life

Well done Onakenselu, the killer  
of family heads, the wicked  
inheritor of women the women you  
made underdog of

tread cautiously  
our earth is a slippery lot  
Onekensulu remember, remember  
the transcient nature of life

Episode (4)

Igodo set off for the human world, she was accompanied by the Itohun, a male mermaid. Other spirits began to sing, in those days, it was traditional for spirits to sing, dance and drum, especially whenever any of them was sent on a dangerous errand that required crossing the spirit to the human frontier. Such song and drum accompanies them on such journey. The narrator sings.

Narrator

Hee iye, Igodo wo ma

Chorus

Hee iye Igodo wo ma

Ku a jo o Igodo

ku ajo o Igodo omo  
Pupa woju bi oorun

Hee iye, Igodo goodbye  
safe journey

Wo ma ku ajooo  
Igodo, o mo pupa bi ohan gangan

Hee iye, Igodo goodbye  
safe journey

Hee iye Igodo safe journey, Igodo the  
beauty bright safe journey Igodo the beauty  
per excellence, beauty bright sunny beauty

Hee iye, Igodo goodbye  
safe journey

Hee iye Igodo safe journey, Igodo the  
beauty bright safe journey Igodo the beauty  
per excellence, beauty bright sunny beauty

Hee iye, Igodo goodbye  
safe journey

Hee iye Igodo safe journey, Igodo the  
beauty bright safe journey Igodo the beauty  
per excellence, beauty bright sunny beauty

Hee iye, Igodo goodbye  
safe journey

Hee iye Igodo safe journey, Igodo the  
beauty bright safe journey Igodo the beauty  
per excellence, beauty bright sunny beauty

Hee iye, Igodo goodbye  
safe journey

Hee iye Igodo safe journey, Igodo the  
beauty bright safe journey Igodo the beauty  
per excellence, beauty bright sunny beauty

Hee iye, Igodo goodbye  
safe journey

Hee iye Igodo safe journey, Igodo the  
beauty bright safe journey Igodo the beauty  
per excellence, beauty bright sunny beauty

(The chorus continued the refrain for the rest of the song sequence)

#### Episode (5)

The enchanting (beautiful) Igodo appeared in the human world, moving elegantly towards the palace of Oba Onakenselu. Immediately the Oba saw her, he smiled broadly and moved towards Igodo with a swaggering gait, with open arm saying “my beauty per excellence, you’re welcome to my great palace where the beauty of women define by their humanities, you are a beauty per excellence, the bright scorchless nourishing morning star, I will marry you immediately. He beckoned at his servants to wear a magic wand on her left wrist. Suddenly, he noticed Itohim, and asked, please who is this?, Igodo replied, he is my younger brother.

“No No, No No, he shook his head disapprovingly, I’ve never tolerated this in my palace, a man to accompany such a beautiful lady? No!! No!!!, my domain is a harem of power, a harem of beautiful ladies per excellence, beauty only, not men”. Oba Onakenselu ordered that Itohim be arrested and imprisoned for daring to accompany his morning star to his palace. Igodo pleaded, yet he refused. Oba Onakenselu asked his war general, the Lion to keep watch over the prisoner and starved him.

A day that the Oba took in Igodo the enchantingly beautiful mermaid into the very private part of his palace, her presence radiated “zoom-zoom, zoom-zoom” and neutralized all the charms in the palace, and the king became and powerless. Igodo let loose her brother, and all the women in the bondage of Oba Onakenselu.

(the chorus continued, accompanied by drums)

Narrator

Hee o, Oba Onakenselu  
a de fo ghan re ke  
pe ile mi yo je fi me don  
pe ile mi yo je fime don  
Hee o, Oba Onakenselu

Chorus

fi me don  
fi me don  
Onakenselu  
tori Onakenselu  
oruko re re yen

We warned you  
the Earth is slippery  
we warned you earlier  
be cautious

be cautious

be cautious

be cautious

be cautious

be cautious  
be cautious  
be cautious  
a man does not make a town  
(Onakenselu) and that is your  
name  
a man does not make a town  
(Onakenselu) and that is your  
name  
a man does not make a town  
(Onakenselu) and that is your  
name  
a man does not make a town  
(Onakenselu) and that is your  
name  
a man does not make a town  
(Onakenselu) and that is your  
name

Episode (6)

That was how Onakanselu was arrested by Igodo and taken to the spirit world where he was fully disempowered and imprisoned. That marked the beginning of the conflict between man and mermaid, the latter vowed to always arrest man. As Igodo and Itohim were leading him away handcuffed, the song resumes.

Narrator

O o o Onakenselu, aye re re  
Heee Onakenselu a fugba woje  
Ji le yo re subu a a o mase  
A fugba wo dole

O o o Onakenselu here comes your end  
Heee Onakenselu, at last the slippery  
earth threw you off  
The mighty man of valour who lost all

All Group Ah, Onekenselu

Narrator Hip-Hip-Hip  
Chorus Hurrah!  
Narrator Hip-Hip-Hip  
Chorus Hurrah!  
Narrator Hip-Hip-Hip  
Chorus Hurrah!  
Narrator Hip-Hip-Hip  
Chorus Hurrah!

## 3.2 Elements of Prose-Fiction in Oral African Literature

### 3.2.1 Setting

The setting narrative (1) Mayeku was in the forest, animal kingdom, in the seabed world of mermaids as well as the spirit world. Narrative (2) Oyeghe was also set in the spirit world, Animal kingdom. The setting of the narratives make things happen, promot the characters into action and force them to reveal their hidden thoughts and brings them to realization. The locale of both stories include wind space. The stories are timeless, but the setting makes us to appreciate the story. The windy and dark gloomy nature of death's environment is Mayeku provokes and ignites the sensibilities of the audience of the implications of visiting the domain of death of the audience of the implications of visiting the domain of death for reconciliation, particularly to put an end to killings, the major attribute of death. The setting and characters of the narratives reveal each other, the tense and windy, and flanny atmosphere that surrounds the abode of death depicts death's house in Mayekhu. The house of death as seen in Mayekhu may be wrapped in fear but the setting evokes atmosphere of fear in both stories, the setting start us feeling whatever the story teller would have us feel. Mayekhu reveals the inevitability of death, and that is the point. Most oral African narratives usually set out by revealing the setting of the story, fictive and geographical and time are usually combined and used as spring board to propel the story forward, but as the story unfolds oral narratives with its setting moves from one locale to another as considered appropriate, may not be as arranged by logic, for instance, Mayeku, the narrative moved from the Earth comprising of man and animal kingdoms, including sea mammals in the seabed; as well as the fictive setting of the spirits governed by death. Also, Oyeghe had its setting in the human world, Earth, and then the world of the spirits.

### **3.2.2 Character**

Unlike popular fiction, including contemporary classics, where we are acquainted with stereotyped characters, oral African narratives usually create characters that are striking individuals with dominant virtues and vices. The personages who inhabit Mayeku are the Eagle, Porcupine, Elephant, Chamelon, Partridge, Peacock, Leopard, Tortoise, Sparrow, Jackal, Mother Tortoise, Wolf, Whale, Pulprus, Mudskippers, Mother Fox, Coffin and Skeleton bearer, Chief death and the members of his family like Mr. Lodge bodge, Mr. Booby, Mr. Hoodwink, Mrs. Typhoon, Mr. Mishap, Mr. Hugger Mugger, Hoyden, War Monger, Venerate, Novel death, as well as Mayeku (meaning death is inevitable). He is the only man among the characters. Other characters in Onekanselu are Onekanselu, Igodo, Itohim, Chairman of all spirits, Spirits and Wealthy woman spirit.

In these imagined oral African narratives, Chief death played both the protagonist and villain while in Onekanselu, he is the protagonist, while the spirits played the villain. The personalities, human and non-human seemed familiar to us because of our closeness to the oral African pool where the story was extracted from. All these make the stories seem true to life. We find that all characters act in a reasonably consistent manner and oral tradition has provided them with motivation, given them all sufficient reason to behave as they do, and those who behaved contrary to our expectations gave reasons for behaving in such manner. Both stories, Mayeku and Oyeghe reflect the naturally oral and conventional African cultural source, with man and animal characters engaged, with the spirit world, thus satisfying Africa's cosmology realistic in African's total experience.

### **3.2.3 Theme**

Irrespective of the narrative oral genre of literature, there is no oral presentation in Africa that is not told with the full intention of realizing some moral or thematic preoccupations. Mayeku for instance, may be said to discuss the themes of the inevitability of death or transcendent nature of life, might, immorality, the call for discipline and orderliness, the danger of immorality, smoking, adultery and fornication, stealing, and so on. Onekanselu also discusses the themes of pride, arrogance, dissatisfaction, inhumanity, journey, and so on. In every oral African narratives, themes are like anchor with which a ship is controlled rooted, as themes connects the oral narrative from beginning to end technically connecting every part of the story together, revealing the thoughts and feelings of every character as the story progresses, making the audience to sympathise and empathize with the characters and in the process revealing more than one theme, the way series of ocean waves combine to make up a bigger force great enough to pull over a ship.

### **3.2.4 Points of View**

The narrator of a story in oral African culture is usually an Artist, who assumes the all knowing and all seeing, the Eye of God, omniscience narrator, Editorial omniscient and everything in the narration, and sometimes the oral Artist is assumed to be the author of a story. In English novel/novel written in English, a writer or the author of a novel can either assume one of these methods and not everything at once; but in oral African narration, it is possible for the narrator to assume everything because the concept of story telling in oral African culture only differentiate the oral Artist from the specific origin of the story he narrates, as the story does not emanate from him but he only stands out as the mouthpiece of the people's culture; he passes the story on ethically to other people as a fulfillment of the people's cultural mandate. In Mayeku and Onokenselu, a narrator each gives the full account of the story.

### **ASSESSMENT EXERCISE I**

Return to the oral tradition of your people and reproduce a prose narrative and outline the moral implication of such narratives.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have defined oral African prose genre, aspect of the oral African literature, and given two full examples of recorded oral praise genres, Mayeku and Oyeghe. We have also identified the elements of the prose genre in the prose fiction of oral African literature.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- oral African prose genre can be defined
- oral African literature has prosaic genre as does the English prose narrative
- it is important for you to familiarize yourself with the prosaic aspect of the oral African literature
- the elements of the oral prose genre in oral African literature are exciting
- the elements in the contemporary novel are present in the indigenous prose fiction

In the next unit, you will be introduced to

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- 1) What is oral African prose?
- 2) Chose and translate an oral prose from your indigenous culture

- 3) Outline and discuss the elements of oral African prose fiction
- 4) Chose and outline the moral lessons in one of the oral proeses provided in this unit.

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## **MODULES 3      DESIGNS AND FOCUS IN AFRICAN ORATURE**

- Unit 1      ‘Chremasticism’ and ‘Design’ in Oral African Literature
- Unit 2      Functions of Oral African Literature (I)
- Unit 3      Functions of Oral African Literature (II)
- Unit 4      Functions of Oral African Literature (III)
- Unit 5      Elements in Oral African Folktales

### **UNIT 1      ‘CHREMASTICISM’ AND ‘DESIGN’ IN ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0    Introduction
- 2.0    Objectives
- 3.0    Main Content
  - 3.1    ‘Chremasticism’
    - 3.1.1    Initiation as a Rule in African Orature
    - 3.1.2    Communal Participation as a Rule
  - 3.2    Disadvantages of ‘Cheremasticism’ and ‘Design’ to Oral African Literature
- 4.0    Conclusion
- 5.0    Summary
- 6.0    Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0    References/Further Reading

#### **1.0    INTRODUCTION**

This unit presents another novel phase of oral African literature by taking you through an aspect that may seem baffling, yet realistic and practicable within the pureview of indigenous African literature. Thus, in this unit, we wish to remind you of another interesting aspect of oral African literature which is the guiding principles, or rules and patterning that all combine to make oral performance real, practicable, an aesthetically satisfying.

Identifying the characteristic rubrics also addressed as ‘chremasticism’ will help project the aesthetic value of oral African literature. Understanding the mode of composition of oral African literature without a knowledge of the rules will demean the value of both aesthetic and performance. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the concept of ‘chremasticism’ and ‘design’ in oral African literature
- state the oral rules identifiable with the oral literary of some parts of Africa and the conditions
- familiarize yourself with the design of the orature of your people, using a suitable oral narrative
- explain the conditions under which certain oral literary rules may be applied to some oral practise in the culture of your people
- outline the disadvantages of chremasticism in oral African literature

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 ‘Chremasticism’

Like the literatures of the classical world including the Romantic that are all bound by formal rules, oral African Literature is no exception. We have discovered, like its Western conceptions such as John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* which is strictly written in accordance to the classical conception of the epic, the same way Samson Agonistes is patterned along the Greek tragedy, Spenser and Sydneyean too, the Sonnets, according to the Shakespearean and Italian styles the latter in strict conformity to 14 lines rendition; oral African Literature also operates along known ‘Chremasticism’ or rules, though, such rules may not be formal duce to the oral nature of its composition across Africa, but it is visible and correct.

Since the beginning of oral literature in pre-literate African societies, whether in poetry, drama or prose, what looks like designated rules was based on the circumstances that surround the enactment of the oratory of every genre of literature. Such ‘design’ is classified as ‘cheremasticism’. In the age of civilization, such rules which though, many hardly conceive of as rules, as a result of the unwritten nature of such design become indispensable because in many occasions, the practise of orality without strict adherence to such rules will be meaningless, incomplete and will lack the aesthetics as a result of the absence of the conditions that are necessary for such enactment or composition for instance, oral African.

#### 3.1.1 Initiation as a Rule in African Orature

Oral literary exponents will prefer that anyone who will conduct investigations into the ritual existence of some gods, goddesses and deities including Ogun the god of Iron, Sopono the god of poxes, Ifa divination, Osun goddess and so on be an initiate. This is because; it is believed that an initiate will understand the do’s and dont’s of the deity(ies) will be more familiar with the language, and

materials and the general circumstances that surround such oral 'figure'. For instance, he who most practise the Eyo Adimuorisa must necessarily have been initiated into the cult where he will be taken through the specific doctrines including the history and other concerns of the spirituality of its practise. Among the Yorubas, anyone who must practise Ifa, will be asked if he is Ifa initiate or else, he will not be qualify to hold any ritual office or even seat among the initiates. Also, among the Lithuli, any oral Artist must be ready to go through formal initiation before he is accepted into the 'band', this is because an oral Artist is seen as part of the culture and cult, and any formal initiation thus becomes his greatest credential.

Apart from the above, the rules differs in other parts of Africa, according to tribes and other specific conditions. For instance, among the Kajo Kaji of the Bari-speaking people in the Kuku tribe of Southern Sudanese, an oral Artist must first be confined into an exclusive abode where he is taken through the communal Verbal Arts, and to complete the ritual, he must seat on a ritual mortal for a number of days in a sacred room. The griot tradition of the Barbers of Western Sahara will prefer their oral Artist to endure a number of ritual incissors in a sacred room that is meant for that purpose and he must be married to be considered mature for the oral composition in any form. To them, the concept, 'maturity' denotes being married and then an oral Artist becomes fully matured after he is able to endure the ritual passage to full maturity. In what looks like a credential or certificate to practise; a small garland is then tied to ritual traditional bead and wrapped around his neck. The garland symbolizes a license to practise among the people other than the other common Artists who may not be under compulsion to practise such art, but not seen as 'professionals' in the community. The situation is similar among the Fulanis of Northern Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Dakar, Somali and Niger. Their nomadic nature gives them all the ample opportunity to practise, the flute and Tambourine which is often their crafts. There are no strict ritual observance, as their their normadic nature gives them the opportunity to be close to nature and the culture of the people as well as their professions. Fulanis often engage in 'monopractise' of their Artistry compared to organized social setting under moonlight. The latter is not common among the Fulanis who are naturally oral performers, thus they hardly secure any organized setting where an artist is invited to entertain the audience. Apart from the above, in Nyansaland in Northern Rhodesia, an oral Artist is first taken through the ability to fashion his instruments like flute and weave his hand made local fan, and carve other things as the beginning of his initiation into the oral Art of composition.

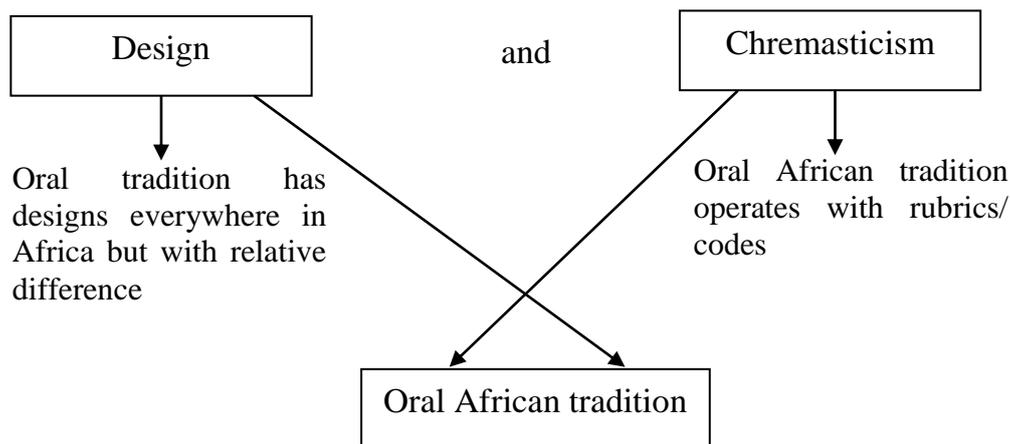
### **3.1.2 Communal Participation as a Rule**

Oral Artistry and general composition is more of a communal thing than being individualistic; as also among the Arabs in North Africa countries like Morrocco, Egypt and Libya. To be more specific, at Obare, Bar-ghat, Hountown and Sebha that are not fully developed as Benghazi and Tripoli in Libya, full attention is given to the training of the oral Artist, but theirs do not involve the very

ritualistic and sometimes the very difficult situations and initiative processes that are considered indispensable among oral Artists from other parts of Africa similar situation is obtainable in Tamaraset in Algeria.

Everywhere in Africa, there are the ‘designs’ and rules which, in some occasions people tend to either overlook or pretend as if it does not exist, but they actually exist, though may be ‘unwritten’ as they are but such condition’s that define the orality, oral performance in Africa cannot be overlooked as they still exist and affect oral African literature in every perspective.

Fig. 6



Interpretations of figure 6

Usually, the oral African tradition is below, as the bedrock from which sprang the design and chremasticism (guiding rubrics) of oral tradition. They are all interwoven, the interconnectivity is in the evolving rules that are precious part of every oral tradition anywhere in Africa; though with cultural and indigenous varieties.

### 3.2 Disadvantages of ‘Chremasticism’ and ‘Design’ to Oral African Literature

- Restrict the general development and growth of oral African literature.
- Prevents interethnic interactions.
- Limits the expansion and interethnic awareness of other cultures and customs.
- It favours the spread of Western culture and education to the peril of African culture and education.
- Oral Artists are unconsciously wooed into and initiated into full cults and cultism.
- It complexitises the practise of oral African literature and culture.
- It blurs people to the social and educative functions of oral African literature, as it may be seen as a cult.

## SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE I

What is the concept ‘chremasticism’ and ‘design’ in oral African literature?

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have discussed some of the things you need to know about ‘chremasticism’ and design in indigenous African literature. Detailed explanation as well as the disadvantages of ‘chremasticism and design’ in oral African literature were also discussed.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt:

- about the concept of ‘chremasticism and design’ in oral African literature
- that ‘chremasticism’ has its own disadvantages

### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Define the concept, ‘chremasticism’ in oral African literature.
- 2) State the disadvantages of chremasticism to oral African literature.
- 3) Present the oral narrative of your village and identify its chremasticism to the oral narrative.

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## **UNIT 2      FUNCTIONS OF ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE (1)**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1.1 Orature as a historical document
  - 3.1.2 Orature as cultural theatre
  - 3.1.3 Orature as autobiographical and record of personal experience
  - 3.1.4 Preservation of moral and religious experience
  - 3.1.5 Orature and philosophy
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This Unit has been designed to take you through the functions of oral African literature. In pre-literate societies' orature, you will remember began as a cultural practise, with almost a homogeneous view of distinctive societal functions, which includes upholding societal moral standard, propagating the people's cultural heritage and maintaining certain connection with the people's ancestral lineage. Thus, the need to design this unit to teach you these essentiality.

The knowledge of the functions of oral Africal literature should not be trivialized, as it strengthens the value that is attached to oral Africal literature, particularly in our contemporary age of science and technology, where Western culture have taken a front seat in most African homes; rendering African culture and norms almost irrelevant. Hence, the need to continually stress the functions of oral Africal literature. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss orature as historical document
- explain oral Africal literature as a cultural theatre
- attempt a discussion of orature as autobiographical in nature
- get familiar with the ability of oral Africal literature to preserve religious and moral experiences
- explain how orature is a tool of African philosophy

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

Oral Africal Literature leans on specific purposes and situations, and such are the functions which it performs in the society variously. Some of the functions of oral Africal literature are:

The importance of orature is no longer in doubt even as cultural patterns have been changing or giving way to new ones as society is becoming complex and cosmopolitan as a result of contacts with the West. Some of the functions of oral Africal literature are:

- 1) Orature as historical document
- 2) Orature as cultural theatre
- 3) Orature as autobiographical and record of personal experience
- 4) Preservation of moral and religious experiences
- 5) Orature and philosophy

#### **3.1.1 Orature as a Historical Document**

Oral Africal literature (in the forms of ballads, epic poetry) are veritable avenues for the celebration of issues and peoples that are historical and are of historical values. Oral literature celebrates the histories wars and success of towns and communities and of heroes and heroines. The oral use of language and choice of words to discuss histories of towns, communities, villages and nations is a clever part of oral Africal literature. For example, the “Sundjata” epic of old Mali is oral epic of the historical Mali Empire of the thirteenth century in the kingdom of West Africa founded by the powerful ruler, Sundjata or Sundiata (1230 – 1255). The poem is about the history of Old Mali, precisely about Sundjata, the praise-singers in the courts of rulers of the period often reserve the memory of the great exploits of great rulers in the form of poetry and such is passed from generation to generation. Other examples are the oral poem of the Zulu king and Chief Saka whose historical deeds are presented in highly figurative language.

Example: It all started with the conversion, is an oral document of the Xhosa’s wars of resistance against white colonialists in 1850 – 1851 and 1877 – 1878. The people protest the seizure of their land and the unwarranted economic domination by the West, the Apartheid Regime the Blacks have been protesting in South Africa till today.

#### **3.1.2 Orature as a Cultural Theatre**

The festivals in orature formed a cultural theatre where most of the rites were often performed. Poetry too are performed, its creation and recitation are part of the imaginative expression of the people. In preliterate African societies, nearly

everybody can recite something in the indigenous culture and language. Although Africans have always had traditional poets who emphasize the communal culture where they belong, the physical and spiritual essence of their world. The cultural absoluteness, are expressed in the monarchical rule, praise singers, kingships and other forms of indigenous education that have survived the changing times, the encroaching modern institutions notwithstanding. The monarchical institution is the symbol of traditional authority. The king in Africa culture expressed in its orality is the custodian of the authority on behalf of his people, he is the flavour of the people's cultural life.

Example is the myth of the Bagre which reveals the ritual processes of the initiation of youngmen and women of the Lo Dagaa tribe of the North Western region of Ghana. The initiation process was necessary to lift the traditional restrictions on young men and women from eating new fruits and crops before the crops are ritually harvested.

### **3.1.3 Orature as autobiographical and a record of personal experience**

Orature, from time immemorial to the present is avenue to express the individual's life and experience that are very personal and unique to the individual, his value, immediate and remote feelings, about his community and nation, his fear, anxiety, family life, and other series of encounters that are personal to him. The *Owusu*, poem of the Akan speaking people in Ghana that recalls and celebrates the achievement of the Akan lineage, woven around the metaphor of a deceased non-native Ghanaian villager celebrates the Ghanaian ancestors.

### **3.1.4 Preservation of moral and religious experiences**

Moral and religious experiences are part of the roles of oral poetry. Orature in all its forms are the avenue through which the culture and traditional religion of the people are deeply expressed and practised. Traditional African religion is the rallying point of, an avenue through which succeeding generations are educated about the cultural nuances and customs of the people, as religion in oral African culture contains the seed of life which is an essential nature of indigenous African philosophy.

Example is the Somali oral poetry "As camels have become thirsty" is a poem of lamentation in which a man abandoned by a lover woman married another became overwhelmed by grief, suffered psychological and emotional torture, the longing for the lost love of the poet is deeply expressed.

### **3.1.5 Orature and Philosophy**

Oral Africal literature is interested in man and his society the way he feels and thinks about life, and his time, his distinctive expression and impression of the world around him, the material and spiritual bodies of his universe and other planets that surround him, the sun, the stars and moon, his hidden thoughts about his being and existence, and total ideologies of his age in comparison with the age ahead of him, his reliance about certain material things as well as bold questions and questioning about existentialities that will go a long way to serve as lasting solutions to the shroud issues of man's failure, success, moral and immoral existence, even issues that go outside man's philosophy like the afterlife of man's universe, the nature of gods, goddess and deities, possibilities and limits of human knowledge or wisdom. For instance, the Ewe oral poem about death insists that death was a gentle and accommodating being living among other creatures on Earth. But, the day he was wronged by other deities he became angry, left their midst, the world, preferred to live a life of vagabondage, became vengeantful and began to kill and vowed never to spare even pregnant women. He vowed never to bring down his life-killing club until, he has killed every generation of man, orality did not mention the nature of the wrongful act against him before death became a killer mystery.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE I**

List and discuss the functions of oral Africal literature.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have discussed the functions of oral Africal literature.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt:

- that it is possible for oral Africal literature to serve as a historical document
- how oral Africal literature functions as a cultural theatre and is autobiographical too
- the moral and religious experiences of oral Africal literature
- the relationship between orature and philosophy

In the next unit, you will read more about the functions of oral Africal literature.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- Discuss oral Africal literature as a historical document.
- Explain how oral Africal literature functions as a cultural theatre.

- Write your impression of the moral and religious experiences of oral African literature.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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## **UNIT 3      FUNCTIONS OF ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE (II)**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1.1 The social function of orature
  - 3.1.2 Orature as avenue for entertainment
  - 3.1.3 Indigenous education
  - 3.1.4 Comunal interaction and socialization
  - 3.1.5 Learning field of African culture
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This Unit continues the functions that oral African literature performs in the African society. This unit is another important stage in the level of discussion of the oral African literature. Oral Africa is a 'living' literature, living in the sense that does not entertain any strict distinction of its genres as poetry, drama and prose are all performative, active and call for the active involvement of not only the professional Artist but of the entire members of the African society, present, the dead as well as succeeding generation of the African community.

The necessity for the aspect being introduced to you is obvious and unavoidable, if we mean otherwise, we then mean that we are in the league of those who say that oral African literature and culture do not exist, but if not, we must admit its functionality.

You may have been taught some of these things, but in our own treatment of the various aspects of oral African literature, we have included various examples that remind you of a need to be continually nearer to your culture eboth in theory and practical.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- demonstrate your awareness of the functions of oral African literature
- identify some of the functions during practical oral performance of your people
- show a mastery of the knowledge of the culture of your people
- explain the social functions of oral African literature
- identify the functions of oral African literature to specific aspects of your oral culture and education
- do a convincing discussion of oral African literature as agent of communal socialization and productive interaction
- discuss orature as the 'learning field of Africa'.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1.1 The Social Function of Orature**

In the African cultural compound, it is cultural for people to gather under moonlight and tell stories in the evenings. Through such avenue the people socializes, engage each other in relevant communal and family issues, and friendly gossips as they listen to and take part in the oral performance as the aged or elderly in a family or community leads the social gathering while serving as the oral Artist for the moment. Usually, in African culture, the people take advantage of every occasion or gathering to socialize and engage in relevant communal discussions. Example is the Yoruba people of Nigeria's hunter's chant. Ijala Ode though a chant but addresses the varied economic viability of the Elephant, his physical, enormous nature and wonderful frame which all combined a mixture of awe and of great economic value to man. Trickstar tales of the tortoise are often told in such avenue.

#### **3.1.2 Orature as Avenue for Entertainment**

The different aspects of oral African literature by nature, be it poetry, drama or prose explore every avenue to entertain the community, sometimes, singing, dancing and drumming are involved, for instance, among the Igbo, the New Yam Festival that is celebrated periodically among the Easterners is specifically indigenous and deeply cultural to the Igbos, such that every Igbo from all works of life usually return to their roots to take part in the New Yam festival. The cultural activity is both performative, cultural and entertaining. Likewise, the Pgyimies of the Congo basin in their poetry of the moon, a replica of moonlight play from other parts of Africa is also an avenue in which any virgin or man who is ripe enough to have a husband or take a wife as the case may be looks around to take part in moonlight dance and looks around for a husband and wife, as the case may be. The entertaining aspect of oral African literature cannot go out of fashion, no matter African's level of civilization, the Adimu-Orisa festival often celebrated among Oyo's, Ijebus and people of Lagos though began as a ritual thing, but became an avenue for entertainment among Lagosians of the time of King Dosumu of Lagos, and has flourished greatly in modern Lagos as real

sociable and entertaining show that accommodates audience of different age group, and people from all works of life. Example is the anonymous poem of the Igbo speaking people of Eastern Nigeria, Breaking Colanut. The poem depicts the philosophical spiritual, social, economic and cultural symbol of the people.

### 3.1.3 Indigenous Education

Oral African literature is generally known to be avenue for the exhibition of the people's culture and promotion of indigenous education. Ever before Western education was imported to Africa alongside colonialism and Christianity, Africans had a way of educating their people, though the system of education may not take place in the four walls of a classroom or in informal setting still Africans are gracefully 'schooled' in their 'open air', under trees, market square where the people meet to entertain and discuss their culture, tell stories, legendary tales about known and unknown mysteries of the world that surrounds them, the wonders of their traditional existence of necessity in every oral African performance is the way stories and tales are education centres, essentially towards building new ideas that have moral basis into the life of who all owe the society a duty to transmit the usually moral packed indigenous education to succeeding generation; thus fulfilling the educational function of oral African literature.

### 3.1.4 Communal Interaction and Socialization

Most oral African practises are spiritual and physical exercises and are not entirely an indoor affair. Infact, they are conducted in open spaces that can accommodate a great number of people. There are some oral performance that involves nearby communities as it is the culture in African societies, such tales for instance, the Ekwesi festival in Eastern Nigeria where every participant are by custom should dance to be seen by neighbouring communities. Whenever such takes palce, social interactions in all forms, become inevitable among the participants, and such gives room for communal expansion, through intercultural, intercommunal marriages through wide involvement in such cultural exercise. For instance, among the Assagai of the traditional Zulu in South Africa, tradition insists that when a virgin is to be given out in marriage, immediately she leaves the fattening house, she must be accompanied by Oral Artists who will sing the praise song of her lineage, accompanying her to neighbouring community with pomp and peageantry. This is often done in groups of virgins not less than five at a time while people will shower the virgin with material gifts in preparation for her new home.

### 3.1.5 'Learning Field' of African Culture

There are different avenues for learning African culture, the first is within the home where one lives with one's parents, relations, extended family members, another is the immediate community as well as when one runs into contact with an elder on the foot path, one can also learn about the people's culture where one

undertakes a job as apprentice like Ifa divination, hunting, weaving, pottery, farming, and in the process of learning other forms of traditional occupation. In addition orature is like a 'learning field' or school in which one has gone to learn the underlining philosophy of the people's culture in all areas, and such includes moral, religion and economy; how to drum, dance, show courtesy to elders and so on. Example is the short anonymous Elegy of the Bahama speaking people of Uganda, Lekhuem that praises a war hero who decorated his compound with the skulls and skeletons of those he killed in the field of battle. He had a pot in which blood was also stored. He was also said to drink woman blood in preparation for a battle. His extreme bravery is still being discussed in Bahama-Ugandan culture in the modern time.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE I**

Mention and discuss at least three functions of oral African literature.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have discussed some of the functions of oral African literature. We have also included the discussion of orature as African's agent of socialization.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt that

- You will need to be familiar with the oral aspect of the Literature of your people.
- You should admit that since oral African literature and culture exist, then it means that it has functions in the society.

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- 1) Discuss the social function of oral African literature.
- 2) With appropriate example, discuss educational function of oral African literature.
- 3) We have, but a 'learning field' in Africa that which system is unique and conventional to the Africans. Discuss.

### **7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING**

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## **UNIT 4      FUNCTIONS OF ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE (III)**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1.1 Orature as a diary of Africa
  - 3.1.2 Orature as a weapon of warfare
  - 3.1.3 Orature as avenue for praises
  - 3.1.4 Orature as song and song patterning
  - 3.1.5 Orature as a pool of proverbs
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

We have designed this unit to end our discussion of the functions of oral African literature. Like those of the previous units, it is also tailored towards making you a practical discussant and contributor to the culture of your people. Adequate examples have been provided here from the oral African culture we discuss so as not to make the unit attractive, moreso as oral African culture and literature is practical in nature and practicable too.

Realizing that a discussion of the functions of oral African literature cannot be exhaustive, we have hit the nail on the head by narrowing down our discussion to some significant and unavoidable functions that lend weight to the culture and indigenous education of the African peoples. We have also tried to inject a sense of humour into our discussion as a way of trying to measure up and represent African culture and tradition correctly, considering the entertainment dimension of oral African culture, even while the culture interprets some strict societal functions, you still find traces of entertainment. The whole idea is to make you realize that oral African culture is not a ‘dry bone’.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss oral African literature as the diary of the continent
- explain how oral African literature serves as the weapon of warfare

- identify oral African literature as avenue for praises
- familiarise yourself with the ‘songstar’ nature of oral African literature
- assess the rich cultural proverbs of oral African literature

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

The fourth unit, as indicated continues the functions of oral African literature. Orature is the nucleus of the existence of Africa peoples and cultures. Without being exaggerative, it’s existence and relevance are closely tied to the continent, her beginnings, that of her people and continuity. Below are other functions of the oral African literature.

#### **3.1.1 Orature as a Diary of Africa**

Just as Western culture has the written tradition of keeping diaries, oral African tradition also practise similar tradition, except that of oral African tradition may not be written, but codified cognitively and that is what makes oral African literature oral. Its dates, months and years may not be in form of the Western numerics, but often in the remote and nameless past or timelessness. Mostl, when tales are narrated about some events, oral African folktales begin with timeless time expected to be taken note of by the human cognitive domain of an Africa. Folktales often begin with “once upon a time”, and sometime, timing in the concretized or make real by attaching the oral timelessness to any natural object, mostly the sun or moon or any geographical indices like the fourteen “luner moon”, night or day and so on.

When that is done, the generation of African or African audience who is recipient of the culture, takes note of the timing, and begins to relay the folktale to the fictive timing, days, months, years or timelessness that may be referred to in the story. Such continuity in African culture may be indication of oral diary in the oral African context.

Example is the commonly recited mythical fulanic creation story among all cultures that explains the origin of this world. The account told orally explained the process of creation, how traditional values and evil originated. The account revealed the different stages which led to the creation of man when Doondari descended the second time, then man became proud, disobedient and lost paradise, and through that, difficulties and death became man’s companion in the world. The poem ends with a hop of eternal glory for man.

#### **3.1.2 Orature as a Weapon of Warfare**

In moments of intertribal, interethnic, or local boundary warfare in which incantations are used against enemies, the rich cultural wealth of oral African verbiage are known to have been used as potent weapons against enemies or rivals in the time of conflict. This has been demonstrated in many great and

historical interethnic battles among the Yorubas and among other African indigenes. Such oral incantations are known to possess great venom such that it has immediate effect on the person, village, town or community to whom/which it is directed. Sometimes objects such as eggs, leaves, roots of plants, sand, pebbles are used in the process of incantation. A situation can even warrant the person who is making the incantation to merely face a particular direction, the East, West, South, North, or the sun, moon, the sea, rock, mountain, a tree and one can assume any posture during such process.

There is also blessing, as there is curse in the power of the word. Incantation is the spoken word, it is different from the ordinary word, it is a verse or formulae believed to have magical effect in manipulating people or things. African peoples see it as a source of magical power and the attainment of metaphysical manhood. When incantations are used, the effect can be immediate, and almost always the result is instant in an incantatory combat. Even when hunters come face to face with animals that are carnivals or spirits, the voicing power or incantatory assertion of the word is often engaged as escape route to, either conquer or escape danger.

### **3.1.3 Orature as Avenue for Praises**

Generally in African culture, avenue is provided to the rendition of praise poetry, not just for the sake of it. Praise poetry has a significant purpose in the life of the individual as much as his community. The importance of praise poetry in the African culture and orature is considered seriously such that oral African literature gives praises to everything in nature, both human and non-human; including the sun, moon, sea stones, rocks, mountains, trees as well as animals, even gods, goddesses, and deities all have their praise poems, as thus towns and communities. In oral African literature the correct recital of praise poem compels the object to thrive to greater heights, honours African progenitors, connects man to his ancestral spirits, and makes one perform a feat, which, otherwise, one may not be able to undertake, ordinarily. It is in view of the value attached to praise poem that the pygmies have praise poem for the sun, the Yorubas for the Elephant, the Luthli for the moon, the Akan for trees. Among the coastal riverine Ilaje dwellers in Ondo State of Nigeria, orature of the coastal dwellers often invoke mermaids from the river and sea to man's habitat by reciting/ invoking the praise poem of Oranmaken, their forefather, in connection with his wife, Igodo, an enchanting female mermaid that orature says Oranmaken overpowered on the coastal Ilaje and married when he and his followers journeyed coastward from Ile Ife, the Yoruba ancestral home, a journey that was dictated by Ifa oracle at Ile Ife.

Another example is the Sundjata, also variously called Diata, Djata, Sogolon, Maghan in oral literature which means Lion who was said to be the son of a Buffalo mother – an ugly hunchback creature called Sogolon who carried the pregnancy of the child for fourteen years, and seven years after his birth, he did not walk. Then mysteriously, he was said to uproot a baobab tree raised himself

up from the ground, lifted up the trunk of the tree took it home to the surprise of the people who all sang his praises thus:

“Room, room, make room  
The lion has walked  
Hide antelopes  
Get out of his way”.

### **3.1.4 Orature as Songs and Song Patterning**

Orature is an important source of songs of various types. Consciously or unconsciously Africans sing, they draw materials for their oral composition from traditional sources. These songs include festival songs, political songs, folktale songs, ritual songs, songs during or after the death of a loved one, coronations, birth ceremonies, occupational songs, lullaby, and bridal songs, protest songs, songs in the times of famine, war, hunger and happiness.

Songs, long or short in oral African literature are used in many contexts, to express hopes, fear, to demonstrate solidarity and positive action, defeat, to show a sense of tragedy and defeat and resignation to fate. Songs keep oral African literature and the society moving, without the use of songs, the glamour of oral African literature will be lost. In some occasions, songs in orature can be used as invitation to cause trouble or conflict, to ridicule, show opposition, to praise or ridicule. Songs are used to show happiness in orature. Infact, orature do not exist without songs that are used appropriately around every situation.

For example the death of Liyongo had existed as songs in Swahili before the oral poet, Muhammed bin Abubakar bin Umar al-Bakari. The song was a conflict between Daud Mringwari the lord of Pate and his cousin, Liyongo, which by extension was the conflict between Arab and African strands in Swahili cultures up till today.

### **3.1.5 Orature as a Pool of Proverbs**

Moral impact of oral African literature reflects in the use of proverbs. Everywhere around Africa; orature is marked by prescriptive mode of metaphorical expressions to impact moral. Oral African literature is so much in love with proverbs and its appropriate use in discussion is highly regarded. The African audience values proverbs, its precise use of language more than the real story itself. This is where the ingenuity of the oral Artist is praised. A clever manipulation of proverbs is one of the aspects of language which the oral Artist use to create rapport with his audience.

Oral African literary proverbs reflect in rhetorics with its spontaneity to drive home the point of the oral Artist and to forge the beauty of the language of the

oral Artist, who uses proverbs to sustain the attention and interest of the audience.

African proverbs like poems everywhere in the world are short, witty statements with implicit, moral truth. They are a distillation of the wisdom of the people derived over the ages from the careful observation of everyday socio-cultural and political involving human being, nature and animals, as well as metaphysical, proverbs are a short, repeated, witty statements or a set of statement of wisdom, truth and experience which is used to further a social cultural end.

Proverbs give us as clear an idea as we can hope to get about the forces that influence people and the ideas that they hold. Africans are so much in love with proverbs that its appropriate use in discussions are held in high esteem. Some examples of African proverbs and their meanings are outlined below: our examples are selected across cultures in Africa, including the antecedents, (meaning and purposes) of such proverbs originally rendered by Yorubas, Igbos, general Akan, Pygmies, Bankgo, Assagai, Bantus, Tutsi, Tswana and in many other dialects in Africa.

Woman can be the initiate of Egungun  
Woman can be the initiate of Gelede  
Woman is forbidden to partake 'in or see oro'  
Or else oro cult will consume her

### **Religion Antecedents**

This is a proverb that is culture bound and woven around the religious world view and concept of Egungun. Gelede and oro cults in Yoruba that women are culturally exempted from certain cultural practises such as oro. Although, this does not mean that there are no culture in Yoruba culture in which women are used to pacify the gods, but in this overriding concept and world view of the Yoruba peoples this traditional exemption of women from oro cult, we may say is not done out of love, but with the intention to strengthen patriarchy. The oro cult is performed virtually in all Yoruba lands, traditional mythology has it that Egungun and Oro went on errand to a distant land to work while Egungun was more focused, and hardworking, he kept all this proceeds, thus returned home celebrated, Oro lavished all he had and when it was time to return home, he was ashamed to enter the town in the day, so he choose the midnight as his arrival time so as to cover his recklessness he entered in nude at night, humming like the busy bee. For the simple act of being in nude, women are advised to stay off him and up to now, Oro became a cult from which women are traditionally exempted.

Sango has sixteen women but it is the tenderly care of  
Oya that makes her the favourite wife

According legend Sango, a once powerful ruler and much dreaded fiery lived and ruled in the old Oyo kingdom in the 18th century where he had the power to

spare life and to kill it As much as he was dreaded, he was also respected in and beyond his kingdom. Quite naturally, women swarmed around this powerful and much respected king of war, but of them all, his most favoured was Oya. Oya here is a symbol of women in the full glare and show of compassion, care doggedness, respect fortitude, and love which surpass all the beauties and common presence of other women as well as the might of all men. Women within the context of Sango's retinue of wives has naturally approved of polygamous concept and in turn negates and render women under the sacred perpetual control of man and up to now, this tradition has come to stay.

If we do not chop a clitoris from growing, when it grows up, it will continue to receive great scarifies from the penis

### **Cultural Antecedents**

Among the Akan speaking people in Ghana land and in most other peoples culture in Africa circumcision of females is as old as the existence of the settlers, but the practice in recent time has been roundly condemned globally as a barbaric act, hence several global initiative to which many African countries including Ghana and Nigeria participated was seen as an indecent practice which must be stopped. Female circumcision in whatever format be it the suna or fibula or clitoridectomy all of which involved the incision or actual cutting of the edge of the females clitoris involves blood spillage and it is considered fetish, inhuman and very dangerous. Despite all national and international initiatives to stop the act in the new millennium, such Akan proverb as above still glorifies and encourage the practice, ignoring the fact that it is an infringement on the rights of the female child and of womanhood.

The bachelor chooses suffering and says he has chosen a mother; which wife would give one good pounded yam to eat if one were to give her twelve tubers of yam?

Analysis: The use of irony in the Bantu speaking proverb indicates that the bachelor chooses one thing (suffering, i.e. bachelorhood) but thinks or believes that he has chosen something entirely different (i.e. mother or good care). The proverb contrasts the suffering of bachelorhood with the good care a man gets from marriage. It then uses a rhetorical question to underscore the undesirability of the bachelor's choice.

General assertion:

The primary duty of wives is to ameliorate the suffering of their husbands  
directive of female:

marry, to prevent men from suffering

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Discuss oral African literature as Africa's diary of events.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have discussed oral African literature as a diary of event. We have also discussed its usefulness for praises, weapon of war, praises, songs and as rich culture of proverbs.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt that

- oral African can function as a diary of events
- oral African literature can also serve as a weapon of warfare, avenue for praises and source of proverbs

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- 1) How is diary related to oral African literature?
- 2) How potent is oral African literature as a weapon of warfare?
- 3) With the aid of an oral praise poem, discuss oral African literature as an avenue for praises.
- 4) Explain oral African literature as source of song and song patterning.
- 5) How rich is oral Africa in the composition and use of proverbs?

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## **UNIT 5      AESTHETIC      ELEMENTS      IN      ORAL      AFRICAN FOLKTALES**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1.1 Aesthetic elements in oral African folktales
  - 3.1.2 A narrative trickster tale of the Yorubas of Nigeria
  - 3.1.3 Story aesthetics – Tension
  - 3.1.4 Tales and cultural codes
  - 3.1.5 Image alignment perception
  - 3.1.6 Suspense
  - 3.1.7 Symbolic significance of characters
  - 3.1.8 Surprise
  - 3.1.9 Generation of emotion
  - 3.1.10 Unexpected consequences
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

We have written and developed this unit to introduce you to the aesthetic pattering and functioning of the oral African folktales. This will help fire up your waning interest in the indigenous African literature, realizing the obvious truth that there is not just abundant beauty in orature, but that oral African literature is coloured with aesthetics.

Aesthetism is relevant and continually in the total concept, views and representations of the oral African literature. This view is important and we must recognize it at all times so as not to keep ourselves in the stop line, confusion or dilemma. It is an attempt to giving us a direction that will enable us achieve a satisfying feet in our exercise of our culture and culture related responsibilities. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the aesthetic value of oral African literature
- provide oral narrative from the culture of your people indicating its aesthetic value
- explain the relevance of cultural codes to oral narratives
- get familiar with some oral narratives of your people
- list the aesthetic values that are attached to a given oral narrative of your people
- do a critical discussion of the oral narrative given in this unit
- differentiate among tension, image alignment and perception, suspense, surprise and generation of emotion

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Aesthetic Elements in Oral African Folktales

The issue of the aesthetic dimension of oral African folktales within the general or overall aesthetic dimension of oral African literature has never be in doubt since the beginning of orature in pre-literate African societies. The concept of the beauty of oral African folktales can be determined within the constituents of both the Artist/story teller or narrator and the audience.

Folktale as an important oral verbiage in oral African culture, also variously described according to different cultures in Africa, as in *Alo Apagbe*, *Alo Apamo* in various Yoruba dialects, Zambo Kirari of the Hausa, Udjebe of the Urhobo, Kienukumu of the Pgyimies of the Congo, Lukio among the Luthulis, Itopa of the Ebira speaking people of Kogi in Nigeria and so on. The names are evident in the various dialectical representations all over Africa. Folktales are often described among the Yoruba, meaning to weave. It is a telling kind of verbiage that constructs or reconstructs series of events, stories to make a whole (inter and intra-story telling). The weaving theory of the folktale is recognized among scholars and researchers of oral narratives. In most of the oral African folktales, the tortoise is a hinged, bony-shell-flat black creature with a compactly built appearance often associated with the terrestrial. The unique nature of the tortoise is its ability to shut and open its enclosed shell that houses its delicate organs. Its body is covered by a seemingly impregnable shell from where its body can be withdrawn or shut at will, especially whenever he senses danger in its environment. The shell which is its false house protective coverage. The herbivore (green leafy, grasses, weed and insect) eating type of tortoise, “Genus, *melanochenus*” land based type found commonly in Yoruba land feature commonly in folktales. It is the most famous among the close to fifty species of land tortoise that is said to exist in both tropical and temperate regions of the world, especially Africa where it plays the lead genius role (folkheroism) in oral African folktales. In oral Africa literature, almost every common animals found in Africa play one role or the other in its folktale; and oral tales often use them ‘code relevantly’ to justify the relevance and appropriateness of tales so as to realize desirable aesthetics that are realizeable in oral African folktales. The following constitute the aesthetic elements in oral African folktales.

Tales have dialectical and emotional rewards and the audience is involved in the trickster tale in which the Bat, Squirrel, Tortoise or other figures may be involved, to realize aesthetics in folktales. We may explore our focus through the narrative Yoruba trickstar tale summarized below.

### **3.1.2 A Narrative Trickstar Tale of the Yorubas of Nigeria**

There was a time that the chief mermaid sent words round all the animals on Earth and to neighbouring communities that he requested an expert inscisor to give inscisor on every of his children without exception. The frog was the first to appear but was disqualified for lack of comportsment, then the serpent was also disqualified for his fiery and swifty nature, the Parrot was also disqualified because he may not concentrate fully while undertaking such a delicate job of inscisor and may be prone to causing greivious harm on the children of the chief mermaid, the Parrot is loquacious and finally, the Bat as it may not be able to work on the million children at night since the work will take through vigils; and Bats of the period could not see through all day and night. So, the Tortoise was the only qualified expert inscisor appointed for the great job for the innumerable children of the chief mermaid. A day and night was appointed for the great job and nobody must be around to watch Tortoise carry out the assignment as a rule. And, he must be locked indoor with all the children of the mermaid with him in a secret enclosure. After, he had completed one as example and his job was certified good, he was asked to continue with the rest.

That was how Tortoise ate up all children of the mermaid, locked the door of the room where the assignment was carried out. And, next on the line of the rule is that the room must not be opened until he has gone out of sight, the man who must paddle Tortoise across the sea back home must be deaf, dumb and blind.

Tortoise had eaten all the children of the mermaid, locked the door, took a few corpses along, and the paddler who satisfy all the qualities mentioned was brought to him. He had not gone half way, when they opened the inscisor room, they found all their children dead, and the entire mermaid community was thrown into mourning, and an expert swimmer was sent after him, every effort to return Tortoise was abortive, even before the community could dispatch their best swimmer to capture and return the killer Tortoise, he threw off some corpses overboard to lighten the boat, he arrived his gated town and strangers could not go into the town after 18 Lunar moon. That was how the Tortoise escaped justice after the murderous act.

### **3.1.3 Story Aesthetics – Tension**

In the above story, aesthetics is achieved through the followings

## Tension

Folknarratives in oral African is synonymous to a house which architectural design begins from its foundation and then gradually built through to the roof in a naturally given conventional order.

### **3.1.4 Tales and Cultural Codes**

Folktales are programmed through cultural ‘codes’ gradually through some forms of cognitive connectivities and interconnectivities, involving conflicts through its ‘plotted scope’ cum thematic dimensions to get tension heightened with the story overlapping as it moves on. As the tension of the folktale is built, so also that of the audience increase as the narrative moves on but with the intention to discover or arrive at aesthetic ‘edge’ of the story or characteristically heightened pleasure, beauty or experience, irrespective of whether the level of the story is inter or intra in nature. The intention of the audience is high, his tension is built up as his mind is geared towards a greater expectation in the story.

For instance, in the given example above, tension is heightened when the Tortoise leaves the mermaid community and an expert swimmer is dispatched after him, though he was unable to return the boat in which he was returning to his community because his paddler, a blind deaf, with dead sensitivity, but sensitive only to paddling forward in a monodirectional order.

### **3.1.5 Image Alignment and Perception**

The narrator subjects the story to ‘image mixture’ to realize image alignment and perception. The image of the trickster is juxtaposed or compared both as winner and as a loser, in a story, but first as a winner and then the Tortoise suffers losses and finally won in the story, for instance on why the Tortoise as expert inscisor in the mermaid community, for instance, one watches the Tortoise as a winner, and in the confusion, audience watches the account of the wickedness, non-challant attitude of the Tortoise on seeing the expert swimmer after him, he had to offload the corpses of some of the fish he took with him to lighten the boat in which he was returning home so that the boat can move faster. This created some confusion and tension in the mind of the audience.

### **3.1.6 Suspense**

In folktale, this is achieved or demonstrated when emotions are generated in a story to reveal the device of a story. This often depends on the ability of the narrator to manipulate the story level to heighten emotion to a level that the story

is suspended on an 'edge' or suffers what we may describe as 'temporary edge suspension' in a story. The audience becomes anticipated too at what next to see happen in the story but with the Artist keeping his audience off guard to achieve 'meta-communicative' idea of the story telling and through that create aesthetic experience, the narrator deliberately manipulates the existing structure of the familiar story already known to the audience, suspense is achieved in the story when an expert swimmer was dispatched to return the murderer Tortoise to the community of the mermaids in the underworld.

### **3.1.7 Symbolic Significance of Characters**

In oral narratives, coded characters are symbolic, within their code-material existence as a reflection of the role expected of such a character, for instance at the instance of the rejection of the earlier chosen characters who competed with Tortoise but were not chosen for the job. The characters were rejected based on their characteristic nature within the oral African fabled characterization. At last the Tortoise played the hero to justify her trickery in folk narratives trickster tale in oral composition. Characters are designated for positions based on the nature, what they are known for in the African pool of folktales, thus, making every character in oral African narrative symbolically significant to the oratorical aesthetics. We see how Tortoise puts his trickstarship to the work in the story.

### **3.1.8 Surprise**

Oral African narrative use the element of surprise to drive home its functionality and relevance as moralizing tale. In the story of the Tortoise as expert inscisor above, the story introduces the element of surprise when, in the inscisor room against the prestigious assignment of beautifying the children of the mermaids, he killed them all, left with some of the already dead, and then choose the dump, blind and deaf to paddle him off the mermaid community back home.

### **3.1.9 Generation of Emotion**

Story telling in oral African literary experience are woven cleverly based on aesthetics. But narratives are arranged by logic in such a manner that tales will not only tell stories but will combine the quality of story telling to skillful dispensation or teaching of morals, to achieve such, narratives that are made to generate emotions as it's plot moves accordingly. In our story, emotional generating areas are, who will win the choice of the competition for expert inscisor who will travel to the land of the mermaid?, how the Tortoise will execute the assignment successfully, his escape without being captured; on whether or not the expert swimmer dispatched after him will return him back or not.

### **3.10 Unexpected Consequences**

Unusual/unexpected consequences. Folk narratives usually have unusual or unexpected parts and consequence. One would have expected that the Tortoise will be caught and returned to the mermaid community to suffer for his murderous acts, but he escaped, and shut the entrance gate of his own community against his paddler, because he already knew that by 18 Lunar Moon time, strangers are forbidden to enter the town.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

With the aid of the oral narrative of your people, justify the view that oral African narrative is woven with aesthetics.

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have discussed aesthetics comprehensively giving an example of oral African narratives and methods through which aesthetics is achieved in the folk narratives. The folk narrative will help you think of a similar narrative in the orature of your people and identify the methods by which you can achieve aesthetics. You may wish to go over your work again.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt that

- oral African folktales are woven with aesthetics
- it is important for you to be familiar with the folk narratives of your people
- there are aesthetic elements (indicators) in oral African folk narratives

In the next unit, you will be introduced to the methods of characterizing aesthetics in oral African narratives through selected tales (I).

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- 1) (a) What is aesthetics?  
(b) Align your answer with any oral narrative from any part of Africa
- 2) Mention and explain at least two aesthetic elements known to you in oral African folktales
- 3) Narrate two different oral tales from the oral tradition of your people, clearly indicating the following aesthetic elements

- (i) Tension            (ii) Image alignment/perception            (iii) Suspense  
(iv) Characters as symbol    (v) Surprise            (vi) generation of emotion

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## **Module 4 VERBIAGE AND CREATIVITY IN AFRICAN ORATURE**

- Unit 1 Method of Characterising Aesthetics in Oral African Narratives through Selected Tales (I)
- Unit 2 Methods of Characterising Aesthetics in Oral Africa Narratives through Selected Tales (II)
- Unit 3 ‘Parenthentic Creativity’ as the Moonlight of African Verbal Arts (I)
- Unit 4 ‘Parenthentic Creativity’ as the Moonlight of African Verbal Arts (II)
- Unit 5 Aesthetic Delimitation in African Verbal Narratives
- Unit 6 Oral Literary Theories

### **UNIT 1 METHODS OF CHARACTERISING AESTHETICS IN ORAL AFRICAN NARRATIVES THROUGH SELECTED TALES (I)**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Methods of Characterising Aesthetics in Oral African Narratives through Selected Tales (II)
    - 3.1 Aesthetics as the Viewing Glass of Oral African Tales
      - 3.1.1 Tale (I) How the Tortoise got a Shattered Shell – Wheta, Volta Region in Ghana
      - 3.1.2 Tale (II) Why the Frog Layed Multiple Eggs – Berbers of the Western Shahara
    - 3.2 Characterising Aesthetics Anthromorphism
      - 3.2.1 Merger of the Circle of Worlds – Cosmological Reality
      - 3.2.2 Time and Instance
      - 3.2.3 Human Interest
      - 3.2.4 Certainty and Uncertainty
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

We have designed this unit to introduce you to the aesthetic indicators in oral African narratives by using selected tales from the productive pool of oral African literature. The method indicated, once read and understood becomes a

measuring tool by which you can assess any given oral tale from any part of Africa.

This unit is yet another statement on the wonderful nature of how you can go into the aesthetic world of oral African narratives and feel satisfied by its method and mode of direction and manner of education. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

- list and explain the methods of by which aesthetics can be characterized in oral African narratives using selected tales
- return to the pool of oral tradition of your people and come back with wonderful oral tales
- explain the concept of Anthropomorphism in relation to oral African tradition
- discuss Africa's cosmological reality
- attempt a discussion of the identity of oral African literature
- identify the human interest of any oral African narrative
- discuss the concept of certainty and uncertainty in oral African narratives

### **3.1 Aesthetics as the Viewing Glass of Oral African Tales**

Oral literature is performance oriented. Appropriate and spontaneous response from the audience is derived through aesthetics that the story offers. The question of audience response and aesthetics in orature is similar to reading a bad play or novel, which for the reason of the lack of aesthetics one gets disenchanted and drops for a better one. In oral African literature when the audience is face to face with the narrative Artist, his aim is not only to follow the oral narrative but to get subsumed into the mysterious world of the narration, using the story as a connecting link or trope into the 'neucleus' of the story. But, such aesthetics in oral African literature can be characterized by using selected tales across the rich pool of oral African literature; but not strictly through the use of any formal categorizational paradigm, but by simple observatory narrative methodology combined with the nature of the narrative. Thus, it is possible to characterize aesthetics in oral African narratives by adhering to the 'movement' of selected tales in oral African literature.

In this case, we shall rely on the tales extracted from the pools of the oral African narrative tales of the Wheta, Volta region of Ghana and Berbers of the Western Sahara.

### **3.1.1 Tale – (1) Wheta, Volta Region, Ghana “How the Tortoise got a Shattered Shell”**

Once upon a time, there was famine in the land of the animals, but all the animals including Anan the Tortoise decided to travel to the land of plenty in the sky. They all journeyed upward but when they arrived in the king’s palace of the land of plenty in the sky, and were asked to introduce themselves, the Tortoise introduced himself as “All of you”. So, everything they were given, their host gave in the name of “all of you”, thus naturally excluding others and the Tortoise took the whole food stuff and consumed all and afterward grew robust while the Bat, Dove and Hare grew lean. Anan the Tortoise pleaded with his friend the Dove to tell his wife, Anansema to arrange the foam in the house, gather them in front of the house so that when he jumps down with loaded foodstuff, he will jump to safety, but angered by the greedy behaviour of the Tortoise, the Bat, Hare and Dove and Spider hang on to the rope that took them to the land of plenty and escaped back to the Earth. Then, Tortoise’s best friend, Dove deliberately misinformed the wife of the Tortoise to gather all the sticks, stones, metals he could reach in front of their house. Already deprived of the only string that took him to the land of plenty, he mustered courage and jumped down, hit himself against the metals in front of his house, and got his hard protective shell shattered. His wife, Anansema tried in vain to reposition her husband’s shattered shell to no avail, she wept grievously, climbed to the top of an Iroko tree, weeping and then threw herself against the same hard surface she had been misinformed to place as platform for her husband and got her own protective shell shattered too. From that period, they continually gave birth to children with shattered shells in their lineage; and enmity was put inbetween generation of the Tortoise and Dove.

### **3.1.2 Tale (2) Berbers of the Western Sahara, “Why the Frog Lay Multiple Eggs”**

In the olden days, it was common for competition to be organized among Animals, similar situation happened in the time of the frogs, mother and father frogs, who were only two at the time. All the animals organized a competition to determine the best runner among all. The king of the animals had promised that the animal who wins the race will take a prestigious seat among all the animals, particularly in king’s palace. At the time, there was only father and mother frogs and a daughter of theirs who lived in a distant land. The time of the race was fixed for the rainy season. The Tortoise had fixed his many children in each of the locations out of the twenty-four locations. As the race began, all the animals were clapping and hailing in acknowledgment of the winning ability of the Tortoise, though the strategy he adopted was not known to the animals. What was only clear to all was that he was leading others in the popular race as the Antelope known for swiftness took ill and was unable to take part in the race. In the determination to win, father and mother frogs ran but mother frog slumped

and died in the process of running, but the Tortoise won the race at last and became the king's adviser among other animals. When the daughter of mother frog got wind of the fact that Tortoise was fraudulent in the race, she vowed to have as many children as possible throughout her stages in life, so her father became her husband to help her quicken her decision, thus, ever since, frogs are known to lay eggs in the multiple for the possibility of using her own children too to her own advantage in future race like the Tortoise.

### **3.2 Characterising Aesthetics – Anthromorphism**

#### **Anthropomorphism**

In oral African tradition of story telling, it is difficult or quite impossible to make reference to African tales without a mention of animal characters, including the Spider in Ghanaian tale, Tortoise that exists generally in the African socio-cultural communal heroes as means of advancing socio-cultural unity among the people. Folktales are effective traditional means of educating the people. They mirror the human societies especially in Africa with intent to expose the ills of the society, supernatural elements and the world of the spirits are also merged with other worlds created by the story teller or transmitted in the story. For instance in story (1) of the Wheta, Volta region, the Ghanaian orature characteristically incorporated the Tortoise, Bat, Dove, Hare and Spider. In tale (2) of the Berbers of the Western Sahara the Frogs, Antelope and other animals featured. The use of such characters, including spirits, constitutes the anthropomorphic dimension of folktales.

#### **3.2.1 Merger of Twin Circle of Worlds (Cosomological Reality)**

In the constituents of folklore in African oral literature, there is usually the conscious merger of the different worlds of the living, the dead (spirits) and the unborn in oral African compositions. Against the different social and cultural backgrounds, the extent to which African cosmology influences the development of concepts. The existence of ritual, magico-religious beliefs, riddles, proverbs are marks of African cosmology. People are never dead in African culture, only change place to join the team of ancestors in another believably real world, the world of the spirits, in a distant universe. Such worlds have relationships with the African human world. This is evident in tale (1) where the Tortoise, Spider, Dove, Hare journeyed to the world of the spirits. Such twin circle of existence are notable identity of oral African literature.

#### **3.2.2 Time and Instance**

Time and instance play aesthetic recognition as the folktales incorporate a sense of situatedness which mark them as the creation of a specific person, of informed sensibility and cultural, not monocultural but multicultural, and identifiable in every oral cultural expressions. Narratives are located in the distant past and

presented in the present (instant) to construct the condition of the African world to complete the circles embraced in the people's cultural enclave. For instance, tale (1) referred to a timelessness and tale (2) happened in the distant past.

### **3.2.3 Human Interest**

In somewhat similar perspective, to the Western tradition of story telling in literary genres, in oral African we may categorise aesthetics with how oral narratives draw on the folkloric knowledge in a way to depict us at our best, our worst potentials, to reflect our affairs, fate, deposit the knowledge to bear upon our own situation, and other influences weaving together, the universe of oneness expressed in our communal cultural dictates; through the exploration of the folk characters put into operation as in tales (1) and (2) above.

### **3.2.4 Certainty and Uncertainty**

Like the traditional African mat or basket weaving, oral African literature in its characteristic aesthetic are woven, with stories stretched and stitched together. The length and volume of the oral narrative is often determined and sometimes pre-determined through plot and sometimes limitless plot by which the story is engraved through certainty and uncertainty. The windy course of the narrative puts the audience at a level of doubts and speculations of how the story will end in spite of the fact that the story normally takes off from a definite and concrete beginning through uncertain course to end. In tale (1) the story began from the animal kingdom, with the animals, including the Tortoise set out for the spirit world, leaving the audience to keep imagining and speculating the likely result of the journey of the animals to the spirit world. Tale (2) leaves the audience speculating about what will be the consequences of the competition among the animals.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Reproduce the oral narrative of your people and apply some of the tale characterizing methods identified in this unit to its explanation.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have identified and discussed the methods of characterizing aesthetics in oral African narratives using selected tales. We have also given two examples of tales to help our explanation in this unit.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that

- you can reproduce tales from the wealth of the oral narratives of your people
- there are methods by which aesthetics can be characterized using oral African narratives

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Reproduce an interesting oral narrative of your people and measure it against our methods of characterizing aesthetics.
- 2) How is time and instance true to oral African tale?
- 3) Discuss the concept of speculation in relation to any oral African folktale.

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## **UNIT 2      METHODS OF CHARACTERISING AESTHETICS IN ORAL AFRICAN NARRATIVES THROUGH SELECTED TALES (II)**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Characterize to Colour Oral Continuity
    - 3.1.1 Kajokaji of the Bari Speaking People of the Southern Sudanese – Why the Lion remained the King of the Forest
    - 3.1.2 Assagai Zulu of South Africa – Why Birds and Animals Kill each Other for Food
    - 3.1.3 Methods of Characterising Aesthetics in Oral Tales – Learning Log
    - 3.1.4 Response – Reaction Shapes Cognition
    - 3.1.5 Forging a Web of Communal Intervention
    - 3.1.6 Naratology as Behavioural Indicator of Stylistic Aesthetics
    - 3.1.7 Corrective/Connective Feedback
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is a continuation of unit one of this module (4). It is designed to prepare you to be more acquainted to the aesthetic value and methods by which aesthetics can be categorised in oral African narratives using selected tales from the pool of oral African narratives. The last unit of our discussion of the subject matter explores from the rich cultural pool of the Kajokaji of the Bari speaking people of the Southern Sudanese and Assagai of the Zulu in South Africa to further encourage you and assure you that it is also possible for you to turn to the rich oral pool of your community for the exploration of tales for aesthetic placement and measurement.

The first methods of characterizing aesthetics in oral African narrative is the will to be an encyclopedia of the various oral tales in Africa; from the North, West, East to South Africa. We have thus explored the rich and robust avenue of the orature of the peoples in the continent to satisfy our yearning demand to satisfy you in the various units, including our current unit. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

- reproduce some tales from the oral pool of your people
- measure the reproduced tales against our methods of characterizing aesthetics
- explain the concept of learning log in relation to the select tales of your people
- discuss how audience reactions shapes cognition in orature
- do a critical discussion of forging a web of individual cum communal interaction in oral African literature
- attempt a discussion of corrective feedback in African orature

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1.1 Characterise to Colour Oral Continuity**

Africans draw extensively from the wealth of ideas present in oral tradition to colour their past and present day experiences. The knowledge derived from such old values have over the years served as the basis from which African beliefs and philosophies are projected, and the success of such projection thrives with collective reciprocity, with a considerable measure of influence, with beautiful folkloric rendition that transcends generations. Even, Western ideologies with its incursion into the African value has not been able to have any significant setback on indigenous oral African tradition with its aesthetic assertion and continuity in the modern time of science and technology. Tales selected from the KajoKaji of the Bari speaking people of the Southern Sudanese and Assagai of the Zulu in South Africa are given as examples in this unit.

Tale (1) KajoKaji of the Bari Speaking People of the Southern Sudanese “Why the Lion Remained the King of the Forest”

Once upon a time, all the animals in the forest with no exception sent invitations round, the birds too were invited to the meeting that was chaired by the Gorilla. The purpose of the meeting was an urgent need to dethrone the self-imposed king of the forest. He was too powerful for the animals and he killed them at will throwing the animal community into mourning; they dig graves everywhere in the forest. The tyrannical and carnibalistic attitude of the Lion was what led to the emergency meeting of all the animals in the kingdom. Besides, the consistent roaring of the Lion and Lioness in the forest, this gives them sleepless nights. The Tortoise was the town crier who went round all the animals to choose a date for the meeting of all the animals. The main aim of the meeting was how to dethrone the Lion and his carnibalistic reign so as to enthrone peace in the

kingdom. The assembly was to hold at twelve lunar seconds. The Sparrow, Partridge, Cock, Lizard, Porcupine, Monkeys, the Eagle, Antelope, Zebra and many other animals and birds were present at the meeting which was chaired by the Gorilla. The Tortoise as the town crier stood to address the assembly, he had not begun when the community received a petition from the community of the Bats. They petitioned that the elders should quickly help them, as they do not know why they were not accepted either in the community of the Birds nor of the animals. The general complaints against the bats are “We have wings like birds, heads like Rodents, we have four small legs, hair like animals, and teeth like Cats”.

The Bats race also denounced the town crier based on the responsibility given to the Tortoise, and urged that his family be wiped out of the community. Within five seconds, the Ants asked that the Tortoise and Lizard be sent on compulsory exile because of the genocidal role they have assumed to the Ant’s community. The Gorilla also confessed that he is also guilty of genocide because whenever he feels the pang of hunger he often killed birds, Rodents and other animals for food. The Tortoise also confessed to feeding on the family of the Ants. The Gorilla who chaired the meeting then concluded that since other animals too were guilty of genocide, and have failed to reach any agreement to put an end to any murderous act in the community, the Lion should be left alone to continue his role, and that every animals should be ready for self defence from the king of the forest. That was how the disagreement among the animals earned the Lion a life-long kingship of the forest till today.

Tale (2) Assagai Zulu of South Africa “Why birds and animals kill each other for food”

Once upon a time, the whole earth was covered with drought and there was severe famine everywhere. A meeting of all animals and birds were called with the aim to discuss the problem and how to find a lasting solution to the general problem of drought and famine. The meeting was fully attended by all the birds and animals, the mountains and hills were filled with birds of variegated feathers, insects and other animals. Fishes also sent representatives to grace the occasion. The Mud Skippers, Crocodiles, Frogs and Pulprus were sent to represent the sea mammals and other reptiles. The assembly of the animals agreed that a bird as well as a Vegetarian among the animals should be nominated to travel to distant land to arrange to food for cushion the effects of the famine in the land. The Tortoise was appointed by the animals to reveal the qualities which must be possessed by the bird and animal that will embark on the journey in search of food in distant land. The Tortoise stood, gazed at the sky, surveyed the assembly, sky, trees, forest and trees full of feathers, tusks, horns, beaks of birds and animals. Some birds perched on each other as there were no spaces around and they wanted to hear directly from the Tortoise. The Tortoise said, ‘bird or animal, who must travel to distant land in search of food must possess the speed of between 70 to 100 kilometres flight per hour. He must have the ability to see the smallest Ant crawling on the ground if he is flying at 2½ to 4½ kilometers above the Earth, and must be the commonest in the sky, swift and agile”. “As for the

animal”, he continued, “he must be very powerful and courageous, he must not be too aggressive, but cool, calm and calculating. He must have the ability to coordinate and adapt easily. He must have the power of resistance in different situation. He must be a Vegetarian. Above all, he must have the knowledge and love of the kingdom, and of all of us at heart”.

As the Tortoise stopped his speech, the birds, and animals clapped; flew into the front space to meet the Harion and Egrets who have just flown down from the Eastern Horizon to grace the occasion. At last, the assembly appointed the Eagle and the Horse to embark on the journey to the distant land of plenty, but both of them pleaded that a few people be asked to accompany them so that they can be able to carry enough food for the kingdom, the Elephant and Giraffe were nominated at once, but they were rejected by the Cricket, and Rabbit because both animals were too big to notice them and that Elephant and Giraffe has been treading on the field carelessly killing some members of the community.

At last the animals and birds could not agree on who should travel to the distant land of plenty to get food for the kingdom. The animals went their ways in search of food, and the bigger animals had to feed on the smaller ones, and the Horse ran endlessly into the forest, up to now the qualities for which the Horse and Eagle were chosen remained with them ever since and every animal individually have the responsibility of going in search of food but to enrich the kingdom with food could not be accomplished.

### **3.1.3 Method of Characterising Aesthetics in Oral Tales – Learning Log**

Folktales in oral African literature are learning log. The essence of every narration in oral tradition is to provide a beautiful atmosphere for moral lessons among the members of the community. Orature, we must not forget serve as the reservoir for wisdom which when acquired through tales that must be transmitted to other members of the community. From the beginning, orature as the reservoir of folktales, have consistently served as the encyclopedia or learning log where the people, young and old go to acquire wisdom already backed up by examples and consequences as in tale (I) that warns against greed, and tale (II) that reveals the danger of disunity.

### **3.1.4 Response – Reaction Shapes Cognition**

Another noticeable method by which aesthetics are characterized is through response-reaction, that places the oral performer or narrator and his audience in face to face kind of interactive response and cognito-reaction that shapes the social awareness of the oral Artist about his immediate community, and serve as a bridge between the audience and story teller. The immediate and spontaneous feed back the story teller gets reveals the success of his ‘wooeing’ strategy, how much he gained entrance into the heart of his listeners.

### **3.1.5 Forging a Web of Communal Interaction**

Oral narrative by its nature is interactive and forges social-communal relationships, interactive souls and body within identical cultural oratoric practices among the people as product of oral African cultural heritage and culture. The oral narration is a body of African literature that is participatory coherent and tradition specific in behaviour with such considered attributes to the oral African literature. Even, in the present time, the present state of folktale and folkheroism in culture crisis-ridden world, the forging of a web of consciousness is a recognizeable aesthetic. This factor is present in the modus-operant of oral African narrative.

### **3.1.6 Narratology as Behavioural Indicator of Stylistic Aesthetic**

Folktales combine terms of behavioural ‘approximations’, co-operation, collectivity, responsibility, and interdependence, performance interaction all combined to encourage the performer, oral African oriented audience indicate attention by gestural reflection, laughter, consistent eye, contacts and engaging in motor habits like speaking in unison, singing, speaking, laughing, carrying the burden of the story along with the narrator, dancing and so on along with the narrator as appropriately behavioural indicator, the carriage of aestheticism. Such actions are normally carried out by the audience voluntarily or inmost cases as the narrator of a story may dictate or direct.

### **3.1.7 Corrective/ Connective Feedback**

During oral narration, the oral Artist expects a ‘connective feedback’ from his audience and the audience from the story teller too, and this helps the audience to learn the new culture. The type of feedback embedded in the story determines the audiences progress in mastering the mainstream culture. If oral narrative contains negative tricks, the learning process of the audience is interfered with negatively. Disaproportionate negative to positive feedback discourages the individual from the culturalk socialization task. When a story is overridden by negativity, negative feedback is generated to get the audience disinterested, disenchanted, disacculturated and may result in withdrawal form the task of acculturation. Thus, when moral positivity outweighs the negative sensitivity, aesthetic moral code dominates.

### **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Using a tale from the pool of oral literature of your people, discuss the concept of learning log in oral African literature.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have discussed the tale of the Kojikaji of the Bari speaking people of the Southern Sudanese as well as the Assagai, Zulu of South Africa. We have also discussed the methods of characterizing aesthetics, using oral African narratives such as learning log, response reaction, forging a web of interaction, narratology, as behaviour indicator to aesthetics and corrective/connective feedback.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- you can retrieve a tale from the wealth of the oral narratives of your people
- there are methods by which we can characterize aesthetics using tales selected from the oral tradition of your people
- how learning log and response reaction are aesthetic to orature in Africa
- discuss the concept of narratology as behaviour indicator and corrective/connective feedback

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Reproduce any oral tale of your village or lineage and measure it against learning log and human interest.
- 2) Discuss the concept of corrective/conenctive feedback.

## 7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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## **UNIT 3 'PARENTHETIC CREATIVITY' AS THE MOONLIGHT OF AFRICAN VERBAL ARTS (I)**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Coinage
    - 3.1.1 What is Parenthetic Creativity?
    - 3.1.2 Categories of Parenthetism
    - 3.1.3 Conscious Parenthetism
    - 3.1.4 Inherited Parenthetism
    - 3.1.5 Parenthetic Creativity in Figure
    - 3.1.6 Audience Modelled Parenthetism
    - 3.1.7 Politics Induced Parenthetism
    - 3.1.8 Modernity Induced Parenthetism
    - 3.1.9 Advantages of Parenthetism
    - 3.1.10 Disadvantages of Parenthetism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this unit is to discuss the concept of Parenthetism and its types, relevance and disadvantages to oral African literature. We have considered the inevitability of parenthetic creativity in oral African literature, and the need to introduce postgraduate students to the art, if we must help to complete their mastery of the discussion of oral African literature. Such inclusion that are often ignored by oral literary researchers and scholars has been discussed in this unit to widen your scope of this novel inclusion and oral African literature generally.

We have included the novel concept of parenthetic creativity to broaden your knowledge of oral African literature. You will now understand that apart from the first oral African narrator of tales, the oral narratives, in the process of telling and re-telling, suffers inclusion and deduction in the process. Whether a story exaggerated, lexical materials are reduced in the process narration, will have both aesthetic value and reduction to the story. Whichever way the story is affected will also affect the audience. Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

- explain the concept of ‘parenthetic’ creativity
- familiarize yourself to conscious parenthetic
- understand the nature of unconscious parentheticism
- discuss modernity induced parentheticism
- assess audience modeled parentheticism
- do a critical discussion of inherited parentheticism
- compare the types of parentheticism
- outline the advantages of parentheticism
- state the disadvantages of parentheticism

### **3.1 Coinages**

In Western contemporary literacy genres such as drama, prose and poetry, writers are at liberty to coin and use language in the way they consider suitable. Such coinages and expressions may align with writers of certain epoch/ age or are classifiable under or with such period and writers. Style of a writer may also conform to another writer, yet a writer may have a distinctive ‘mark’ of identity. But, quite different, but within a line of distinction, a poet may use coinages as he pleases, such as poetic license, and such coinages and creativities in any of the genres of contemporary literature do not bring such works into disrepute but adds to the beauty of such works, and incidentally, writers of similar expressions are often praised for their works and found to often win awards as such works may be categorized as classics of certain categories and recognizable.

Similarly, in oral African literature in its genres or compositions, either poetry, drama or prose, the action of the oral Artist often give birth to creativity but, a form of creativity that we may classify as ‘parenthetic creativity’ which often occur in African verbal Arts, even frequently, though may go unnoticed sometimes, but we cannot deny the existence of ‘parenthetic’ creativity in African verbal Arts, even from the beginning of or creation of myths in preliterate societies up to our contemporary age of science and technology.

#### **3.1.1 What then is Parenthetic Creativity?**

We may state that ‘parenthetic creativity’ is ‘accidental creativity’ or ‘incidental creativity’ or ‘inadvertent creativity’. When the oral Artist is performing his Art, he falls into sudden creations, patterning, finds himself riding on the highway or different wave length of the story he is narrating. Such inadvertent verbiage immediately ‘rewrites’ or changes the original oral course of the story, giving the plot of such a narration a different view, and this, in most cases results in the lengthening of such a narration, but may not affect its aesthetics, but may affect its thematic preoccupations. Many of the ‘parenthetic’ or ‘mistaken’ creativity in African verbal Arts are the unconscious creation of the oral Artist, perhaps due to the fact that he has forgotten the actual rendition of the story yet, this is not to

overlook the fact that many oral Artists may consciously falsify, or re-create a narration with the intention to favour his or a particular lineage, town or a community, and this indeed is common in oral verbiage.

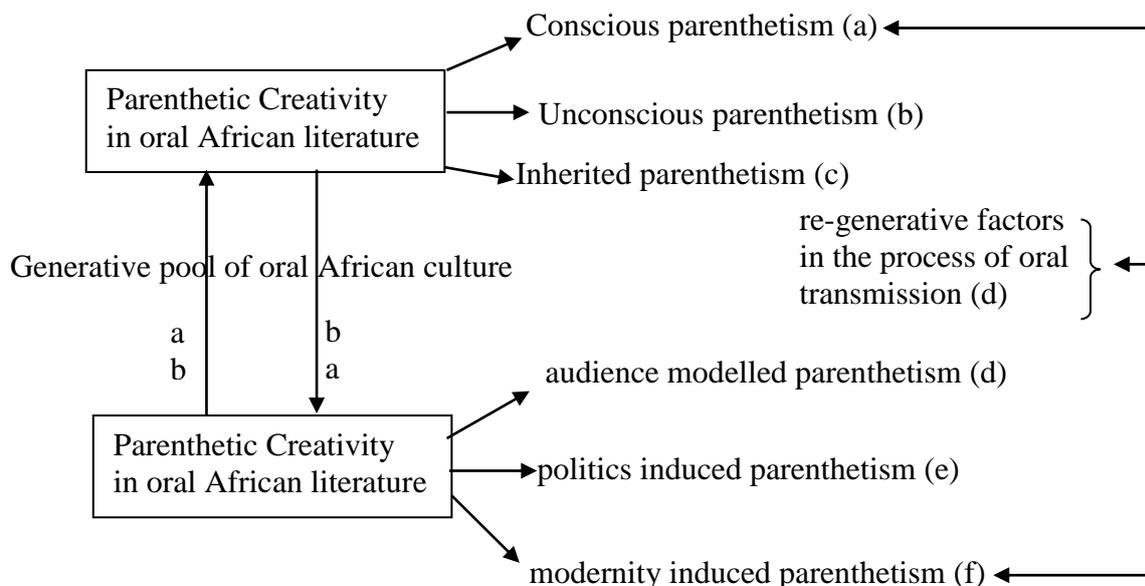
Unarguably, ‘parenthentic creativity’ has been a part of African verbal Arts since preliterate society. Such occurs mostly during oral performance and end up being transmitted across generations.

But, recognizeably an aesthetic part of oral African literature, it may occur consciously or unconsciously within the stream of the story telling in the form of music, name calling, costumes, proverbs, incantations, songs or praise songs, some of which often lead to the lengthening of narration. Although, researchers into oral African verbiage hardly take time to recognize the existence of parenthentism, as they take everything to mean oral creation, yet it revolve from orality but, it’s mode of evolving is usually sudden, not often premeditated, but, mistakenly, near erroneous; but it adds to the beauty of oral African tradition; hence we may refer to ‘parenthentism’ as the ‘moonlight’, wonder, the glaze, of the African verbal Arts. Our focus is on the different circumstances and situation of its occurrence in African verbal Arts.

### 3.1.2 Categories of Parenthentism

We may categorize ‘parenthentic’ creativity in oral African literature into the following:

Fig. 7 Types of Parenthentic Creativity in Figure



Key  
 ab } generative pool of oral African culture  
 ba } where tales evolve naturally  
 a-f - Re-generative factors in the process of oral transmission by an artist

## Interpretations of figure 7

The  $\left. \begin{matrix} ab \\ ba \end{matrix} \right\}$  indicated in the figure represents the generative capacity of oral African culture where oral narrative evolves naturally and generously. The a to f are the factors that regenerated, evolved or formed in the process of oral transmission by the artist. Such factors form the pattern of interference, but with patternings that contribute more to the cultural aesthetics of the traditional oral African literature. They are the factors that recreate, refashion the natural African philosophy of the communal pool of narratives. Such regenerative factors formed part of the aesthetics of oral tradition.

- conscious ‘parenthetism’ post-inherited
- unconscious ‘parenthetism’
- inherited ‘parenthetism’
- audience modeled ‘parenthetism’
- politics induced ‘parenthetism’
- modernity induced ‘parenthetism’

### **3.1.3 Conscious ‘Parenthetism’**

During oral performance, the artist may deliberately create or recreate, add facts to the story he is narrating or deliberately elongate a story or mend it to achieve personal reasons or satisfy certain conditions including the intention to satisfy the audience. This does not occur commonly in orature.

#### Unconscious Parenthetism

This occurs inadvertently in the process of verbiage. The oral Artist unconsciously elongates his inherited story; not premeditated as such often occur within the full action of the narration. Unconscious parenthetism occur commonly in oral African Arts.

### **3.1.4 Inherited Parenthetism**

This is the type of parenthetic creativity that the oral Artist inherited from tradition or as transmitted orally. Any amendment that occur in the story is not the responsibility of the present Artist but he is merely transmitting an inherited inadvertency to his audience.

### **3.15 Audience Modelled Parenthetism**

This type of parenthetism is not the creation of the oral Artist but created by the audience to whom the story is told. The audience receives the story from the

narrator but fails to recall the story exactly as told by the Artist, thereby resulting in parenthetical creativity.

### **3.1.6 Politics Induced Parenthetism**

This type is common in contemporary period of oral narration in which parenthetical creativity occur in an oral story with aim to satisfy political will of a group, family, community or an individual. This occurs frequently in our modern time, especially in myths and myth related stories.

### **3.1.7 Modernity Induced Parenthetism**

This type of parenthetism occurs in modern time. It is often as a result of the pull and push of modernity, the attempt by Artist to improvise in a story, minimize time and timing, and involvement with socio-economic conditions of modernity often lead to parenthetism.

### **3.1.8 Advantages of Parenthetism**

- It is a form of oral formulae identified with the promotion of oral aesthetics.
- Minimizes time and timing as length of stories may be deliberately reduced.
- It gives room for refashioning of oral narratives to suite desirable personality, individual, group of people, town or community.
- It makes orature to be less occultic in nature.
- It makes stories less difficult for the present generation.

### **3.1.9 Disadvantages of Parenthetism**

- It is cumbersome as stories may be acted upon for favouritism.
- It gives room for personage and communal conflicts where stories disfavour a group or individual.
- It gives room for lie telling.
- It allows the distortion of facts.
- It gives room for the corruption of orature.
- It allows for communal participation.
- It makes oral African culture to be socially acceptable to the modern man.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have discussed parenthetical creativity, its advantages and disadvantages. We have also discussed the types of parenthetical creativity.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Parenthetic creativity exists in the oral literature of your people
- You can identify parenthetism in the oral literature of your people.
- There are different types of parenthetism.
- Parenthetic creativity has a number of advantage and disadvantage.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Define parenthetic creativity.
- 2) Produce the same oral narratives of your people from three different people within the same village, community or lineage and watch for any parenthetic creativity in the presentations (you may write or record all the presentations).
- 3) Explain at least three types of parenthetic creativity.

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## **UNIT 4 ‘PARENTHETIC CREATIVITY’ AS THE MOONLIGHT OF AFRICAN VERBAL ARTS (II)**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Parenthetism as Cultural Re-invention
    - 3.1.1 Paradigm of Parenthetism and Implications for Cultural Aesthetics
    - 3.1.2 Interpretation of Figure 3
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is a continuation of unit 3 of the module. It is designed to further your interest of what really constitute parenthetic. Our pattern here is a little different as we speak with you in figure in this unit.

We have introduced a format that is quite different from our focus in the last unit. We make our discussion in this unit playlike by using a detailed figure that is not only comprehensive but a more aesthetic package of parenthetic creativity. The figure is explained with various arrows and given a comprehensive and attractive interpretation.

Below are some of the objectives of this unit.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

- create a self explanatory figure of the types of parenthetic creativity
- discuss how oral source or particularly authentic parenthetism differs from other types of creativity
- explain inherited parenthetism
- differentiate between audience modelled and
- conscious parenthetism
- do a critical discussion of politics induced parenthetism
- attempt a discussion of modernity induced parenthetism

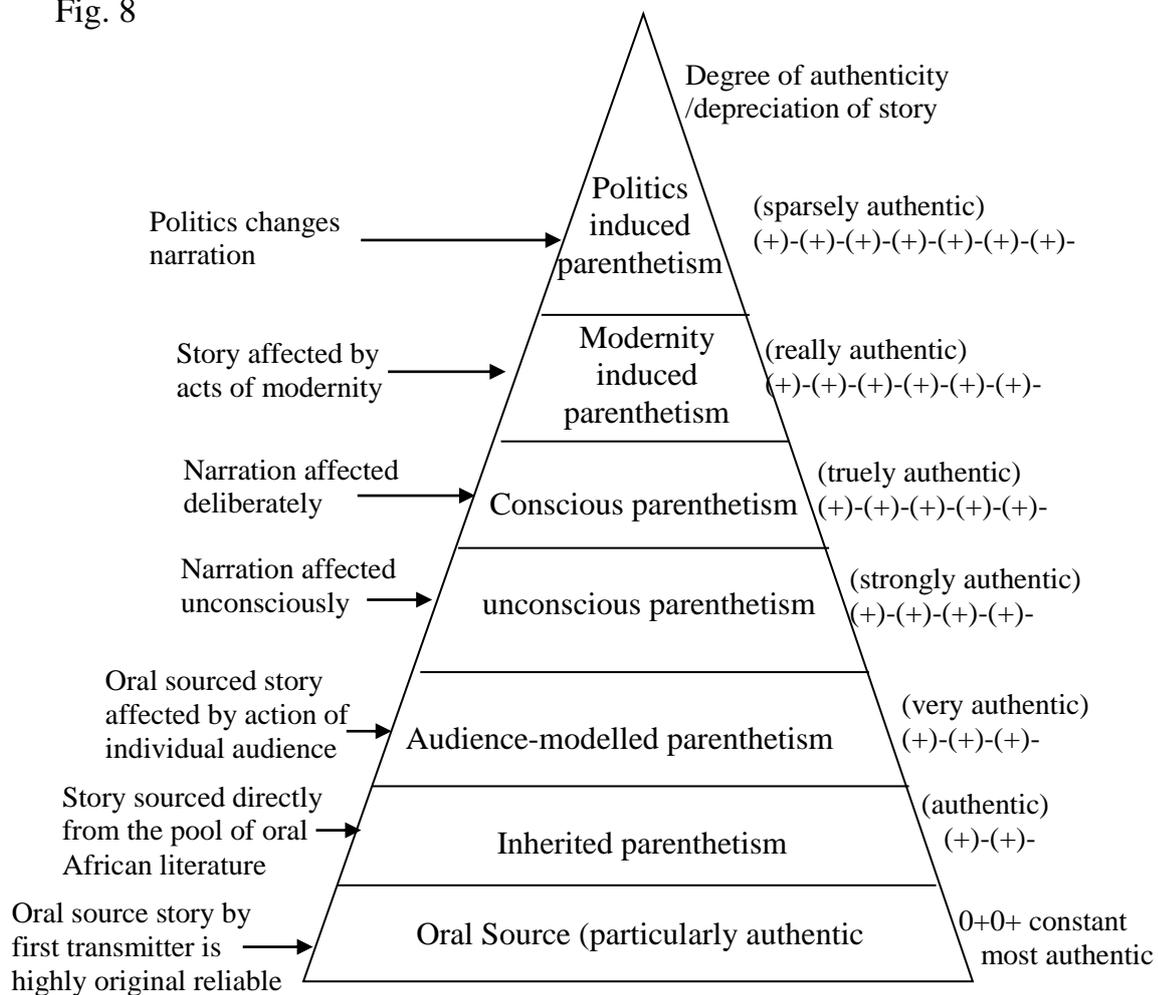
### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Parenthentism as Cultural-reinvention

‘Parenthentic’ creativity has potential for cross-cultural re-invention, certain communicative cultural defects will have to be corrected while clinically engaging in methodical research into the mastery of African cultural conservation, breaking through performative cultural barrier in inter and intra-cultural communicative discourses in oral African literature. The table below further reveals the nature of ‘parenthentic creativity’.

Paradigm of parenthentism (types) and implications for cultural aesthetics

Fig. 8



## Key

0+0+ constant	-	first hand story from oral source is constant, but subject to alteration yet more reliable
(+)-(+) -	-	oral source story still authentic, low level of depreciation experienced
(+)-(+)-(+) -	-	oral source story very authentic, low level of depreciation experienced
(+)-(+)-(+)-(+) -	-	oral source story strongly authentic, depreciation experienced
(+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+) -	-	oral source story truly authentic, depreciation experienced
(+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+) -	-	oral source story really authentic, depreciation experienced
(+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+) -	-	oral source story scarcely authentic, depreciation experienced

### 3.1.2 Interpretations of the Key/Table Figure (8)

0+0+ constant → In the key provided against the pyramid above, the underlined indicates that every narration chosen from the oral African source, irrespective of its genre of discourse, (poetry, drama, prose) is often conspicuously constant and transmissible from generation to generation. As a result of first hand orally transmitted story will not suffer much serious depreciation, thus may be said to be particularly authentic. Its degree of authenticity is usually very high.

(+)-(+) - This stage comes after the first hand oral source story is still authentic, and experienced a very low level degree of depreciation and affectivity. This third stage after the oral source of a story is also really authentic, but experiences very low level of depreciation ((+)-(+)-(+) -).

(+)-(+)-(+)-(+) - At the fourth stage the oral source story is likely to suffer some duplication, elongation, displacement of facts, hence lost a level of originality compared to its stage of originality, hence low level of depreciation also experienced, hence story may be said to be strongly authentic.

(+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+) -, (+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+) - and (+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+)-(+) - are topmost in the pyramid. They suffer more depreciation as orature advances upward the pyramid. The icons represent the fifth to the seventh cubicles of the ladder.

It then means that the cultural context and aesthetic expressiveness of oral stories are best preserved at a lower stage of rendition, when such stories are far from

other possible incursions as indicated in the pyramid, fig. (2). The higher the movement into the pyramid, the higher the degree of depreciation of oral narratives as the stages it transits will automatically devalue such story by either making unnecessary additions to the story to create exaggerated effects or decreasing its level of meaning, as the original value of words drawn from the pool of tradition is conventionally constant and culturally unique to its source.

## **SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have discussed parententism and its types, creating a figure that attempts a logical and coherent order of the existence of parententic creativity.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt that

- there are different types of parententism
- the particularly authentic (oral source) is more reliable than other types of parententic
- politics induced type of parententic is not so reliable considering that it is a creation of political motive
- other types of parenthetism are modernity, conscious, unconscious
- all parententic creativity types have individual attributes or features
- parenthetic creativity types, beginning from audience modelled suffer various damages as they advance up the pyramid
- every cubicle in the pyramid indicate a level of degree of depreciation of story from the oral source
- a movement upward the pyramid is a generational distance from oral source

### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- 1) List and explain the types of parententic creativity
- 2) Reproduce the figure that housed all the parententism types in this unit.
- 3) Present a similar story of different views from your oral source and indicate the parententic creativity seen in the story.

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## **UNIT 5      AESTHETIC DELIMITATIONS IN AFRICAN VERBAL NARRATIVES**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Aesthetic Feature – Characterization
    - 3.1.1 Narratives Conceptualised into Creativity Aesthetics
    - 3.1.2 Weaving Conflicts into Story Variants
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

We have designed this unit to explain that African verbal narratives are aesthetically delimited in nature. Thus, there is hardly any dull moment in African creative verbal arts.

You are therefore encouraged to study this unit vis a vis the verbal narratives of your indigenous culture to enable you get more familiar with the reason we have said that verbal narratives are consciously delimited.

It then means that since African verbal narratives are considered delimited in aesthetic, you should be encouraged to take the path that will always see you through and help its aesthetic patterning. Below are the objectives of this unit.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

- do a convincing explanation supported with examples on how the African verbal narratives are delimited in aesthetics
- reproduce the verbal narrative of your people indicating evidence of its aesthetic focus

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

The oral African literature with the employment of various relevant constructional instruments yields itself to all the dynamic change and interculturality of the oral practised not only to make the African verbal narrative aesthetically satisfying but also aesthetically delimited in all spheres. This explains that the context of African Art serves aesthetic functions unavoidably, primarily and this is not an invention of the modern man but part of the mimetic instinct of man that was brought into play in the various parts of preliterate Africa. Even in modern time, oral African narratives have moved a little further from its old ritualistic experiences such as ritual dance, drama, worships of deities, for instance, the worship of Obatala the sculptor Oduduwa, the Yoruba progenitor, Ogun, the god of iron and metallurgy, Saponu, the god of poxes, Iroko tree and other sacred trees among the pygmies of the Kongo Basin, Roads in traditional Kikuyu culture, worship of the sea among the Kajokaji of the Bari speaking people in the Kuku tribe of Southern Sudanese, and in varieties of other forms in Africa. Oral narratives in modern time therefore have incorporated the use of musics, acrobatic display and social festivals, as evidences of the aesthetic delimitation of oral verbal narratives.

### **3.1 Characterization**

Characterization is an aesthetic feature of such oral forms as poetry, prose and drama. Ritual personage gods, goddesses, deities are represented in orature to characterize the creation and make a convincing representation. The narrator presents the characters to the audience sometimes through dramatic representation, symbolic reenactment through the use of costume for instance the Yoruba deity, Sango's character, (red, yeri Sango's skirt on which flaps of leather called Wabi, the special hairdo of Sango known as the Osu as well as Sango's girdle. Oja Sango on with the laba Sango (Sango's bag) cross the character's chest, he holds a hand prop and Ose Sango's dancing wand, a deftly carved double-edged axe, and a gourd rattle, Seere). The character who mirrors Sango in such narrative must also dance to bata's music at the moment and perform some amazingly magical feats such as emitting fire from his mouth, spitting fire, carrying a pot of fire with bare hands, momentarily, aggressive, restless, power-drunk, power-driven as the audience chants his Sango's praise song and other amazing skills that are characteristic of the Sango character-impersonator as understood in Yoruba myths and narratology. This characteristic feature of Sango, a literary dramatic re-enactment, re-inventing the oral aestheticism, is role play-evolving is to further reflect the aesthetic delimitation of oral narratives. Moreso, the one who characterizes the Yoruba god of Iron, Sango is a known person, one of them in the community who must assume Sango in the ritualized drama and theatre.

The ritual is essentially a very good part of oral African narrative, and it is a continuum as a cultural practise rich in spiritual acstasy, music, praise, chants, incantations, proverbs and drumming. The delimitation of such ritual experiment is visible as members of the oral African societies are turning to primitive forms of drama, introducing stages, formal structures, improvising spaces to further the formal aesthetics of orality and narratology.

### **3.1.1 Oral African Narrative Conceptualized into Creative Aesthetics**

Everywhere in African culture and tradition, circularity (relational) and linearity (analytic) are expressed in the peoples oral culture because the people and their tradition and cultural expression are inextricably bound to the way one conceptualizes the oral African universe, and particularly, this is true of oral African culture as culture permeates the African mind. And, every occasion in the African culture and tradition is considered important and thus, calls for the making of ceremonies, and such ceremonies in whichever dimension, and figurines are called for the making of music, hence, the importance placed upon musical activity as an integral and functioning part of the African society is a feature that music shares with other aesthetic aspects of culture in Africa and on which is emphasized in almost all non-literate societies. In oral African literature, almost nothing is compartmentalized or divorced from aspects of everyday life, including the artist, and commercial artist or craftsman who have their roles and functions, but, all fused with societal competence and the aesthetics activities which are closely related to the overall functioning culture of the society.

### **3.1.2 Weaving of Conflicts into Story Variants**

A survey of oral African narratives across cultures in Africa reveal that no matter how little a situation may appear in African culture, its overall purpose is to tell a story and provide aesthetics for the people. For instance, the Kajokaji of the Bari speaking people of Kuku tribe of Southern Sudanese are known to demonstrate their stories before the audience practically, and where such stories require the character to dress imitatively to assume a mythical character, it is done with all the necessary materials with none or little improvisation. The Pygmies of the Congo too, tradition reveals that whenever they are set to worship the sun, the characters that are involved are required to paint their face-masked like the sun/in the appearance of the sun to promote aesthetics. In many African societies, oral narratives are woven into conflicts and conflicts into the narratives, as in the Sundjata of the Mali people, that is often a mixture of praises, singing, dancing and drumming combined with men dressed in the traditional warrior of the Mali Warriors, performing acrobatic display and amazing skills with locally made spear at hand. Usually, the men are grouped into two as opposing warrior camps ready for warfare combined with wrestling. They are dressed in Malian warrior appearance, with spear in hand, holding locally made fan, with power enhancing charm wrapped round their left wrists, Tambourine, heifer, wands, girdle, short skirts. The entire participants dance, runs to assume Sundjata in reflective tone, dance to the flute and drum amidst praises, chants, songs and incantations completing the aesthetic value of the entire performance with delimitational functionality reciprocal of the peoples indigenous culture and tradition.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have discussed the aesthetic delimitation of African verbal narratives showing evidence of its delimitation.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that

- you can reproduce the verbal narrative of your people and indicate evidence of aesthetic delimitation
- African verbal narrative is ever aesthetically satisfying

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Present two African verbal narratives indicating evidence of aesthetic delimitation.
- 2) How are the following concepts related to aesthetic delimitation in African verbal narratives
  - (i) characterization
  - (ii) dramaturgy
  - (iii) creativity
  - (iv) conflict as story
  - (v) use of drums and songs
  - (vi) relate issues with the terrestrial and celestial/ancestors

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## **UNIT 6      ORAL LITERARY THEORIES**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Origin of Literary Theory
  - 3.2 Origin of Oral Literary Tradition
  - 3.3 Critical Debates on Oral Literary Theories
    - 3.3.1 Theories of oral literature and critical debates
  - 3.4 Other Thoughts-Theories
    - 3.4.1 Mythological Criticism
    - 3.4.2 Sociological Criticism
    - 3.4.3 Cultural Criticism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit is designed to take you through the oral literary theories – the various ideological perspectives to oral literature will give you a solid foundation or make you well grounded in the study and discussions of oral literature.

The knowledge of theory, theoria generally and particularly about the oral tradition is an enterprising one. It is necessary that you have adequate knowledge of theories that formulate; support, explain a particularly knowledge based issue. This will make you to be more authoritative and skillful in the discussion of oral African literature and orature generally. Below are the objectives of this unit.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

- define oral literary tradition
- discuss your understanding of oral literary theory
- explain mythological criticism
- give a review of sociological criticism
- compare cultural criticism with the evolutionary trend
- describe the different positions taken in the critical debates on the theories of oral literature

### **3.1 Origin of Literary Theories**

The word theory is derived from the following Latin and Greek words, “theorema” and “theoria” which means the general or abstract principles of a body of fact, a science, art, belief, policy or procedure proposed or followed as the basis of action, an ideal or hypothetical set of facts, principles or circumstances. But the word, theorem, a derivative of Latin origin (theorein) means to look at, or a formula, propositions or statements in Mathematics, logic deduced or to be deduced from other formulas or propositions, an idea accepted or proposed as a demonstrable truth often as part of a general theory. The adoption of theory in our discussion of this unit, aspect of this module, indicates that this work lends itself to, but not necessarily all the aspects of literary theories. The essence of our limitation in this unit is to give the course a definite theoretical focus.

The reason is, every research across disciplines have critical and comprehensive knowledge of related theoretical, philosophical approaches or perspectives expressed by some famous critics over the ages. In the case of oral literature, you need to be aware of what constitutes the historical trends in literary theories and criticisms. The ancient Greeks devoted a great deal of theoretical reflections to the form, place and value of literature, beginning with Plato and Aristotle. The philosophical treatises of these classical scholars, up to date did not only become the most important critical texts of literary theories but have generated other useful theories in literature across ages. Although, the form of critical learning had existed before the Greek of Plato and Aristotle. If disputable, where do we put such great names and their excellences in the arts and sciences like Musaeus, Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus, Linus? The early philosophers of Greece like Thales, Empedocles, Parmenides, Pythagoras, Tyrtaeus, Solon, Phocylides who all threw their weights behind leisureed learning, and from their philosophical enterprises emerged many of the literary theories we celebrate today. Our business, therefore, is to apply the relevant theoretical models which theorists over the ages have formulated to interpret the works of literature. This is why literary theory and criticism should be concerned with defining, describing, classifying, analyzing, interpreting and evaluating a text or oral form of composition as the case may be.

### **3.2 Origin of Oral Literary Tradition**

The theories of oral literature began with the British who propounded the diffusionist and evolutionist theories. Every society must experience the cultural and social evolutionary trend that is its necessary stage(s) and experience through which the society is mirrored and understood his very origin, essences of being, history, religion, economy, education as well as socialization, communal relationships and interactions. Although, the theories may be said to suffer some limitations especially considering the fact that it discusses man’s beginning,

religion, geographical settlements locations, economy, politics, culture and other significantly evolving aspects of the African peoples and general existence, aesthetics, values, achievements, African traditional philosophy, imagination, thoughts and arts

Indeed, the genesis of the early theories were the ideology of the West that was interested in the search for the origin and nature of man, perhaps with the hidden motive to determine which was the most superior and more intelligent race of the human race. Moreso, the white had already blackmailed Africa and other races of the world inferior, unproductive, without culture, religion and history. There was a need for them to satisfy their raging inquisitiveness or curiosity about which race is truly superior to the other. If man is subject to evolutionary trend, then his culture and religion are bound to be evolutionary in perspective/nature. Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882) who propounded the theory was of the belief that the oral or traditional aspect of one society can compare favourably with that of another society. The diffusionist school of thought contrary to the evolutionists is of the opinion that where there is cultural similarities indicates that it is possible that previously the two cultures had histori-geographical contact with another and such may be responsible for their cultural homogeneity, perhaps, possibly as a result of cultural mingling and intermingling resulting in unavoidable borrowings or loaning of cultural ideologies by two or diverse cultures. Such cultural borrowings resulting from cultural minglings reflect in the area of language difference and interaction, styles of dressing, food types, and other cultural specificities like communal habits like occupations and folklore, theorized by Franz Boas, Radcliffe Brown.

### **3.3 Critical Debates on Oral Literary Theories**

Interestingly, there are many scholars across the world who are researching into the theory of oral composition and its related methodology from diverse fields of learning. Such works as the *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf and the Serbo-Croatian Return-Song* are provoking academic reactions around the world, such conversations are expanding the interesting field of oral composition and theory and generating, re-generating various novel traditions,

In folklore (literature and literacy) and in philosophy (communication theory, semiotics and proliferated to include expanding variety of languages and ethnic differences to include theology, cross cultural communication, interpersonal communication, popular culture and film studies, post colonial studies, studies in rural and community development and hermeneutics, the expansion continues.

#### **3.3.1 Theories of Oral Literature and Critical Debates**

The theory of oral tradition had problems with early scholars who were of the opinion that it leaned on either the “Unitarians” or “analysts” in the popular controversy of that nature. This means scholars who are of the view that Homer

was a single historical entity, and others who viewed him as conceptual or at best oratorical, 'parenthetic figure' or oratoric figure, a perspective which ironically referred to the theory as 'non-existing', "author function", or mere verbiage or of hypothetical origin and hypothetically dead and cannot be proved. The controversial view, originated from some scholars within and outside the theoretical circle of orality declassifying for instance the Epic to mere children's social gatherings like birthday party and other amusement games revealing messages against content through uncontextualised transmission. The school of thought of Parry have argued that the theory of oral tradition exposes how orality optimized the signal-to-noise ratio to improve the quality, stability and integrity of content transmission.

Crowne's hypothesis has been refuted on the basis that the "hero on the Beach" formula was in generous use in old and Middle English poems as well as in Greek and German poems and in Icelandic prose Saga. The work of J. A. Dane in an article "polemics without rigour" argued that the themes in the poetry of ancient Greek was independently Greek, but oral without a tradition connected to the Germans.

The problems that are associated with oral formulaic theory to problematic texts are expressed in Lord's Homeric Studies, *The Singer of Tales*, such as *The Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Beowulf*. In response to Lord's, Geoffrey Kirk wrote *Songs of Homer*, criticizing Lord's extension of the oral formulae of Serbian and Croatian Literature (the origin of the theory's) application to Homeric Epic. The argument of Kirk was hinged on the premise that Homer's poems differs from those traditions in their metrical applicability and creative patterning.

Kirk maintained that the poem's of Homer were recited under a free system, that is, oral tradition that empowered the reciter to choose words freely from the pool of oral rendition like the Serbo and Croatian poets who merely reproduced passages from the cultural pool of the people. In similar perspective, the reaction of Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato* changed scholar's perspectives on Homeric Epic, argued in support of the oral nature of Homeric composition and that the oral formulae was Greek's way of preserving her culture across generations. The 1996 theory of Adam Parry, *Have We Homer's Iliad?* based his theory on the poetic license and willful freedom or discretion of the oral poet to create unnamed characters based on the belief of the acceptability of its traditional(ity) essence. He elevated the Greek model above the Serbo-Croatian and other models. On this basis, Lord in 1968 described Parry and Kirk's essays with Homer as oral poetry. His position insists that Yugoslav poetry is similar to Homers but scored low the reciters of Homeric epic on ground of intellectuality and literary relevance.

The criticisms of the theory have been accommodated into the evolving field for possible modifications. For instance, Larry Benson's written formulaic to describe the status of some Anglo-Saxon poetry which in its formula and themes contain evidence of oral influences; the concept itself grew out of Folley's "pivotal" contribution. Still, a number of scholars doubted the applicability of the

theory, even as scholars continued to react in the face of the continual modifications of the theory.

### **3.4 Other Thoughts – Theories**

We have listed and explained some oral literary theories that will make you more efficient in the discussion of African orature of other lands.

#### **3.4.1 Mythological Criticism**

This is an interdisciplinary approach that combines the behaviour of history, psychology, comparative religion and the insights of anthropology. The myth or mythological critic examines humanity from his common ancestry, cultural epoch based on imaginative and symbolic transcendence. Archetypal mythology elicits universal response while Carl Jung believes that the individual's collective unconscious is primal to all races of the world at the premodial phenomena such as night, fire, moon, blood and the sun. The Swiss psychologist is of the opinion that the archetype is less occult as a symbol or image but a vital element of literary experience. The identification of the archetype is forged based on situations and symbols in literary works. In discussing texts, a mythological critic of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* might relate Danish Prince in the text, for instance to other mythic children avenging the death of their father like Orestes in Greek myth or Melebu in Ondo – Nigeria, Africa mythic. Such mythic characters occur in every culture all over the world.

#### **3.4.2 Sociological Criticism**

Sociological criticism takes essentially cultural, economic and political perspectives to Literature. The relationships between the artist and his society is examined. It evaluates the writer's profession in relation to his or particular milieu, sociological criticism analyses the social basis of literary works, the economic, political and cultural values or worth that are attached and how a particular text promotes such work. The role of the audience or society in shaping the literature is paramount. For instance, the sociological view of a political oral praise poetry of the Hausa might reflect the social cultural view of the period, the nature of the communal origin of such poetry. Marxist view of the society is an influential type of sociological criticism; it explains the economic, political as well as the cultural elements of the society and art, the ideological basis of literature. Marxist literature often judges the work of Literature based on even a more general perception, accommodating economic, political and cultural contents of a work of art based on variety of critical approaches.

#### **3.4.3 Cultural Criticism**

This approach does not give a single approach to discussing a work of literature. The methodology that is associated with cultural criticism is not mono-

directional. Though inter-disciplinary in approach, cultural studies is not concerned with the interpretation of the literary texts only, it leans on other disciplines to discuss the practise and products of culture. Cultural criticism relies on historical, cultural and political issues among other varieties. It has been argued that culture should not be studied independent of evolutionary process that involves the entire society. As much as literature and the arts are inseparable, cultural materialism, dialectical materialism, exploring the documentary technique of historical criticism, combined with social class, gender and political issues. The approach flourished in the United States as New Historicism, its antiformalist, as the concerns political complexities and merger of related aspects of politics, history and Literature. Clearly, cultural criticism rejects the idea that literature exists in an aesthetic realm different from political and ethical categories.

Cultural studies is central to investigating Literature and social power in texts, the moral, political and psychological experiences in a work of art, based on the aftermath of a 'dissection', or deconstruction for the benefit of the members of the society. The overt and covert values in cultural practice are identified across cultures, (oral or written experiences) based on the structure of meaning that binds them together to given them the appearance of objective representation. In brief, cultural studies may borrow concepts from gender, and Marxist criticisms and deconstructionism, with each giving analytical tools that are useful to the cultural critic. Traditional critical approaches often sought to demonstrate the unity of a literary work, cultural studies seeks to portray the psychological, and social political issues it reveals. Cultural criticism often questions what social class created a work of art and who are its audience. Cultural studies, also borrows from criticism and the race theory, a textual analysis to the theorist is also a means of furthering social justice. Cultural studies may be infamous for its habitual use of literary concepts and complex intellectual analysis of far reaching materials which may give a novel insights into social, political and historical as well as cultural experiences.

Cultural criticism offers an interdisciplinary evaluative, transdisciplinary, incorporative, studying culture in heterogeneous way, and also maintains its institutional purity by disregarding disciplinary identity and methodological identity and uniformity. It matches the diversity of culture to shelter the true nature of culture from its formal narrowness to an elevated institutionalization.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

In this unit, we have discussed oral literary theories including the evolutionists and the diffusionists, methodological, sociological and cultural criticisms. We also examined critical debates on oral literary theories.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this work, you have learnt:

- the concept of theory or theoria
- explained the evolutionist and diffusionist theories
- the mythological, sociological and cultural criticisms

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Read and answer the questions below

- 1) What is theory?
- 2) Outline how the evolutionist differs from the diffusionist school of thought.

## 7.0 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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## **UNIT 22 – MARKING GUIDE**

### **ENG – 814 STUDIES IN ORAL AFRICAN LITERATURE**

#### **TUTOR – MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

##### **Module 1, Unit 1 – Tradition of Oral Literature as a Universal Continuum**

- 1) The examinee should give his/her own definition of oral literature based on the experience of studying this unit.
- 2) The question requests the examinee to give and explain any aspect of the orature of his/her community.
- 3) The examinee should provide the moral lessons harvested from the Yoruba creation myth. Examples may include names/naming as symbolic in Yoruba myth, the evil consequence of disobedience, abuse of privilege, greed has bitter consequence. The disadvantages of drunkenness.
- 4) This requires a good summary of any of the creation myths in this unit.
- 5) The examinee should discuss a creation myth chosen from his/her village.

## **Module 1, Unit 2 – Origin and Nature of Oral African Literature**

- 1) A discussion of the dirge of the Bembe speaking people of Northern Rhodesia is required here, but with emphasis on the generous mixture of and use of materials drawn from nature to achieve the metaphorical and rhythmical nature of the dirge. The success or otherwise of the dirge may be added.
- 2) The praise poetry of the community/village of the examinee should be given.
- 3) This requires the significant similarities and areas of divergence of the praise poetry of the Tutsi of the great Lake region of the Rwhanda and the Pygmies of the Congo Basin.
- 4) The question puts the intelligence of the examinee to the test. The examinee should argue, discussing that African orature belongs to the preliterate society, using various examples as justification.
- 5) The examiner requests the definition of oral Artist from the perspective of the examinee.

### **Module 1, Unit 3 – ‘Architecture and Building Blocks’ of Oral African Literature**

- 1) Two of the factors that constitute the ‘building blocks’ of oral African literature are required here. Such factors to be chosen from are orature and language, subject matter, orature as a deliberate artistic construct, order of narratology, figurative use of language, moralistic tale, legendery and audience evaluation.
- 2) Audience evaluation should be explained from the point of view of audience reaction and response to the narrative/artist.
- 3) The difference between merely telling a story and oral narrative that is essentially moralistic should be given here.
- 4) The examinee should choose two of the ‘building blocks’ of oral African literature to explain/justify any oral African narrative.

## **Module 1, Unit 4 – Factors that hinder the growth and development of Oral African Literature**

- 1) The examiner requests the lackadaisical attitude of the modern man towards oral African literature. Reasons for such attitude may include, the problem of translation, effects of the growing readership/popularity of the novel genre in Africa, restrictive nature of oral African literature, orature cannot solve the socio-economic and political problems of the modern man.
  
- 2) The examinee is required to provide orature from his/her communal pool of folktale and attempt a translation of the story or some key words to the standard variety of the English Language to measure or prove that oral source-words will exhaustively capture the source meaning of words the problem of translation affects African orature.

**Module 1, Unit 5 – Factors that hinder the growth and development of Oral African Literature (II)**

- 1) Such inhibiting factors may include inconsistencies, evasive moral in place of truthful lies, women as underdog in orature, inferior representation of life, too culture specific and distortion of facts.
- 2) The question requires any oral narrative in which women are treated as underdog.
- 3) The examineer should review any orature or myth that appears to distort history and facts.
- 4) Any aspect of the orature of the community of the examinee that appears inconsistent should be explained.

## **Module 2, Unit 1 – Oral African Literature as the Source of Written Literature**

- 1) The examinee should draw a clear distinction between orature and written literature using relevant examples from his/her community.
- 2) Examinee should use the examples of poems of some prominent African poets to reveal or argue in favour of the reality of African culture.
- 3) The focus of the poem, main and sub-themes which should include social, spiritual and economic relevance of the poem should be discussed with relevant citations from Breaking Kolanuts.
- 4) Answer should include the spiritual guidance role of Akan ancestors, maternal, economic related roles. The answer is hidden within the thematic pre-occupations of the poem.

## **Module 2, Unit 2 – ‘Incursions’, ‘Code-modification’, and ‘Transitions’ in Oral African Literature**

- 1) The concept, modern incursion in oral African literature should be discussed in the examinees own words.
- 2) The examinee should explain the oral poetry of his/her community, noticing some specific areas of Western incursion or interferences in the selected oral poems.
- 3) The examinee should proof that oral African literature in the contemporary world is now being code-mixed, the aesthetics, social and spiritual implications of such code-modification should be emphasized. It’s disadvantages can also be outlined.
- 4) The examinee is required to choose oral tale or poems of his/her community plot a table showing the implications of external interferences in such oral tale or poem, using the deductive and appreciative method.

## **Module 2, Unit 3 – Poetry in Oral African Literature**

- 1) The examinee should return to the African pool of oral poetry with citations from parts of Africa to justify that pre-literate Africa is rich in orature.
- 2) The focus of the examinee here is limited to the Ode and lyrical poetry from Africa, mainly on thematic thrusts of the selected poems.
- 3) A definition of the concept, Ballad is required, as well as the themes in the examinee's choice of communal ballad.
- 4) The examinee should define an epic in his/her own words using an oral poem as justification.
- 5) The examiner requires the examinee to translate an elegy and a dirge to the English language.

## **Module 2, Unit 4 – Drama in Oral African Literature**

- 1) A definition of drama is required here, but in the Examinees own version.
- 2) A distinction between setting and stage in oral African drama is required but using an example of oral drama to explain the differences.
- 3) The Examinee is required to reproduce a ritual drama from his community and outline the Elements of drama seen in it.
- 4) The Examinee is required to chose a written African drama, and a ritual using two of the elements of drama in this unit to compare the different modes.

## **Module 2, Unit 5 – Prose in Oral African Literature**

- 1) Examinees are required to define oral African prose in their own words.
- 2) Examinees are required to choose and translate an oral prose of his indigenous culture.
- 3) The outline and a discussion of the Elements of Prose fiction of oral African literature are required.
- 4) An outline of the moral lessons from one of the oral proses in the unit is required.

### **Module 3, Unit 1 – ‘Chremasticism and Design’ in Oral African Literature**

- 1) The definition that is required must be in the examinee’s own words.
- 2) The disadvantages may include: restriction of the growth of oral African literature, limits the expansion of ethnic awareness, restricts the growth of indigenous education, invitation to initiation into traditional cults, complexities the practice of oral African literature and culture.
- 3) The examiner has asked the examinee to apply ‘chremasticism’ to any oral aspect of his people.

### **Module 3, Unit 2 – Functions of Oral African Literature (I)**

- 1) The examinee should discuss oral African literature, clearly explaining how it functions as history or history related document. Example of such orature should be given in this answer.
- 2) A discussion of African orature as culture specific should be given, examples should be drawn from any part of Africa.
- 3) The answer that is required here should not be given without a citation of specific orature from Africa, and emphasis should be on the moral and religious experiences.

### **Module 3, Unit 3 – Functions of Oral African Literature (II)**

- 1) This requires the social function/importance of oral African literature with suitable examples from African oral pool.
- 2) Adequate examples are required to argue in favour of the educational function of oral African literature. Such examples may be drawn from any part of Africa.

### **Module 3, Unit 4 – Functions of Oral African literature (III)**

- 1) Appropriate examples of oral African literature that functions as a diary should be explained here.
- 2) The usefulness of oral African literature during conflicts and warfare should be explained with adequate examples.
- 3) Adequate examples of how oral African literature functions as avenue for praises should be given.
- 4)
  - (a) The relationships of the African verbiage with songs using relevant examples should be discussed.
  - (b) Proverbs as relevant axis of oral African literature should be expressed with relevant examples.

### **Module 3, Unit 5 – Aesthetic Elements in Oral African Folktales**

- 1)
  - (a) The examinee's own definition of aesthetic in oral African literature is required.
  - (b) An example of African orature (narrative) should be given, indicating its aesthetic value.
- 2) The examinee may chose to explain two out of the given aesthetic elements in oral African folktales. They are tension, tales programmed through cultural codes, image alignment and perception, suspense, oral characters and symbolism, surprise, emotion generation, as well as unusual and unexpected consequences.
- 3) Two different oral folktales should be given by the examinee who must also indicate the identified aesthetic elements in the narrative.

**Module 4, Unit 1 – Method of Characterising Aesthetics in Oral African Narratives through Selected Folktales (I)**

- 1) The examinee is required to discuss the oral narrative from his pool of orature and measure it against known methods of characterizing aesthetics.
- 2) An oral African folktale should be narrated and measure its themes and plot structure against the concepts of time and instance in orature.

**Module 4, Unit 2 – Method of Characterising Aesthetic Elements in oral African Narratives through Selected Tales (II)**

- 1) The examinee should reproduce oral tale from his communal pool of folktales and explain how such tale serves as human log and interest.
- 2) The concept of corrective feed back in orature should be explained from the perspectives of the oral Artist and audience response.

**Module 4, Unit 3 – Parenthetical Creativity as the Moonlight of African Verbal Arts (I)**

- 1) The definition of parenthetical creativity should be given from the perspective of the examinee.
- 2) The task of reproducing similar narrative from different people in the examinee's community may be written or recorded. The purpose is to reveal the areas where such similar stories exhibit parenthetism.
- 3) Three out of the types of parenthetical creativity given should be explained in the examinee's own words.

**Module 4, Unit 4 – Parenthetical Creativity as the Moonlight of African Verbal Arts (II)**

- 1) The examinee should list and explain the types of parenthetical creativity to include inherited, audience modelled, conscious, modernity induced and political induced parenthetism.
- 2) The figure that contains the parenthetism should be reproduced by the examinee.
- 3) A similar story of different views within similar cultural experience should be reproduced to indicate parenthetical areas.

#### **Module 4, Unit 5 – Aesthetic Delimitation in African Verbal Narratives**

- 1) The examinee should give two different verbal narratives and show evidence of aesthetic delimitations in such stories.
- 2) The relationships between African verbal Arts and the concepts indicated in the question should be discussed with examples.

#### **Module 4, Unit 6 – Oral Literary Theories**

- 1) The examinee should define the concept of theory using his/her own words.
- 2) An outline of the differences between the evolutionist and diffusionist school of thought is required here.