

ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIAN AUTHORS

2016 ANA LITERARY PRIZES JUDGES' REPORT

**PRESENTED AT THE AWARDS DINNER OF THE 35TH INTERNATIONAL
CONVENTION OF THE ASSOCIATION AT THE NATIONAL WOMEN
DEVELOPMENTSS CENTRE, ABUJA ON OCTOBER 29, 2016**

General Comments and Observations

Our Jury of incorruptible judges of the Association of Nigeria authors (ANA) received a total of One Hundred and Twenty entries for the 2016 ANA Literary Competition from writers resident in Nigeria and those abroad. Seven categories of prizes across the main and subcategorized genres of Children's Literature, Teen Prose, Short Stories, Drama, Prose-fiction, Poetry and Literary Criticism were available for competition and prizes.

For the Children's category, our reading and assessment encounters of the entries reveal that some of the works were hurriedly written and hastily printed and submitted probably in order to meet the stipulated deadline for submission. The use of language especially for target level literature should be appropriate to the age of the target readers.

While there are weaknesses of poor editing and proofreading, the standards are also miserably dwarfed by an equal magnitude of poverty stricken quality of paper and binding. These shortcomings are a clear evidence of haste to win the prizes, if possible, through mere pamphleteering that brings to memory a recast of the old emergent tradition of Onitsha market Literature by war returnee soldiers who were desperate to recount their 'storied experience' after the succession of the two World Wars. It is sordidly disheartening that some of the authors could not distinguish the literate parallels of style, language, form and contents that are expected within a story and an essay! Some writers could not even make out the thematic and stylistic difference between the tenor and texture of literature meant for "Children" and those meant for literate adult reading public. The forms of paragraphing, punctuation marks and grammatical cohesion, imagery, and management of characters' dialogue and reported speech patterns are, in some cases, jumbled. All these are found recurring in variegated degrees in the entries submitted across the different prize categories. This unfortunate blight in language, style and contents becomes part of the reasons why, in majority cases, the prizes cannot be won. In some cases, however, the assessment and recommendations of our Jury sieved out the best of works with most painstaking objectivity anchored on objective criteria for good Literature. For this year's exercise, we could not award a prize for Literary criticism based on the entry's abject recession from Standard Criticism of literature! Generally, amidst the lack of quality and adherence to the rule of the game, there are texts that display competence in adherence to the demands of the various Prize categories in the following:

1. ANA PRIZE FOR PROSE FICTION 2016

In the category of prose fiction, we received a total of twenty-four entries, out of which twenty two are already published while two are unpublished manuscripts.

The thematization of the prose narrative works ranges from private to public issues such as love, marriage, corruption, violence and insecurity, among others. The competitors adopt different narrative patterns and discursive strategies in their works to showcase their creative impulse and ingenuity. Among the criteria adopted in the assessment of the entries are literariness of the texts in relation to the figures of language, figures of speech and figures of meaning and other rhetorical tropes adopted in the texts. Another criterion adopted in the assessment is the thematic relevance of the texts to contemporary national and global realities! If literature is a creative historicity and structural representation of life forces using the vehicle of language, style, form and thematization technique, then we expected the works should create philosophical food for thought on the mind of the reader and also create a lasting aesthetic satisfaction.

The Shotlist of three out of which one emerged as a titanic work of prose fiction:

- | | | |
|------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| i. | <i>Avenger of Blood</i> | Winner |
| ii. | <i>On the Bank of the River</i> | 1 st runner up |
| iii. | <i>Prodigals in Paradise/Odufa</i> | 2 nd runner up |

The second round of reading assessment produced three great works which are albeit not to be rated equal since their comparative evaluation makes the strength of two of the three to whittle down considerably whereby one emerges as distinctly great as a work of creative genius in prose writing!

A Brief insight into the Shortlisted three novels

Prodigals in Paradise (2016)

Written by **Henry Akubuiro** and published by **Lasmedia Books**, the novel is written in lucid language with some degree of literariness. There are some instances of figurative use of language that adds to the matter and meaning of the text. The novel is a sort of city novel that is patterned after the literary style of Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*. And for this reason, Henry Akubuiro's *Prodigals in Paradise* (2016) made the shotlist as equal in quality to Otuke Ominiabohs' *Odufa* (2015) as joint 2nd runner up! But, occasionally, the writer, Akuiburo, writes in avoidable complex and ambiguous sentences – a weakness that robs the text of its simplicity and lucidity.

The two writers' psychodynamics of writing that overtly percolates into our reading kinesis is such that literature is a private engagement, a fictionality of personal dilemma! While the thematization of personal issues may satisfy the criterion of meditative problems and may service the need of character's mental dissonance, as in Freudian psychoanalysis, it is limited as the experience may not be largely consumable as a collective psycho-social flux in our complex dynamics of variegated problems produced by unequal access to socio-economic succor! A work of arts must be made to mix with the public and be retrieved from the complex dominance of its 'sovereignty' by the writer, because in global literary philosophy, a literary text is expected to be the conscience and consciousness of the society not just of the author. Indeed, most of the works submitted suffer miserably from this creative/thematic somersault.

Odufa: A Lover's Tale

Written by **Othuke Ominiabohs** and published by **TND Press**, the novel is written in a simple language. The writer uses language in such a way that projects his vision. The ideology of the text is direct and lucid that readers will know what it is all about through its title. This is because the title gives the text out to readers. The plot and subject matter of the novel are in the tradition of Mills and Boons that focus much attention on love and its trials and travails. Thus, much like Akubuiro's *Prodigals in Paradise*, it is a novel that is more of a private encounter of the writer. The strength of the novel which makes it to rank as a joint 2nd runner up with Abuiburo's *Prodigals in Paradise* is, however, in its language aesthetics and not on the thematic relevance to contemporary socio-political discourse tropes.

On the Bank of the River (2016) As the First Runner Up

Written by **Ifeoluwapo Adeniyi** and published by **Panamacchi Books**, the novel is well crafted in language with denotative and connotative semantic implications. Reading the novel, one comes to the knowledge that the writer demonstrates the understanding of the art and science of creative writing. The novel is a sort of bildungsroman (a novel of development) with the protagonist, Enitan, on a search of the identity of her mother. She understands the reasons for the attitude of her mother with her aunt. With the plot and subject matter of the text, the novel shares intertextuality with Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer*.

The writer also presents rusticity and simplicity of African experience and setting. The use of language in some contexts, however, betrays the genuine creativity of the writer. The novel is full of inverted conversation which makes it more of a dramatic narrative that betrays the demands of prosaic narratology which when used makes the author's stream of narratology to dissolve the gap between his authority, his character and his reader! The novel is full of dialogues. Where description is given, it is done in excess. Some of the descriptive power of the text leads to undue digression from the focus of the narration.

The writer, however, combines private experience with the understanding of the public life common to the generality of the populace. Reading the novel, a reader-critic can give it multiple interpretations, thus justifying Roland Barthes's position of onion analogy of a literary text.

***Avenger of Blood* (2014) – the Winning Prose Fiction**

Written by **Franklin Finecountry** and published by **TND Press**, the novel is written in clear and simple language that is rich in metaphorical and figurative expressions. The transparency of the language of the novel reveals its simple and clear-cut thematics that focus on love, crime, punishment and retribution. The protagonist, Reverend Josiah Datubo Stowe (a retired SSS officer), is entangled in the service to humanity and service to God. The need for the retired SSS officer to go back to his profession came when Sharon is kidnapped. He is driven by love and the passion to avenge the ill-treatment of Sharon in the hands of her kidnappers.

The characterisation of the novel adds to the matter and meaning of the text. The names of the kidnappers (Merciless and Musollini) are reflections of the ruthlessness and heartlessness of the people of the underworld. The writer makes a parallelism to the name of the former Italian

President, Benito Musollini who was notorious for his ruthlessness. In the novel, these kidnappers played roles that are consistent with their characterisation in the novel.

The prologue of the novel opens with a suspense that makes readers sit on the edge of their seats to anticipate what comes next. The novel opens thus:

Finally, he was taking the walk, the lone walk, back to his beloved wife and child. He looked at them with longing in his eyes, his heart pounding. He had missed them. Looking at her now, standing there at the doorstep to their home, he felt the full pressure of the 20-month separation. (p. 3)

With the above, the eagerness of the readers is heightened with committed interest to know what caused the separation and why it was so serious on the protagonist and his family. The prologue is a dream that happens to be the means to an end of the entire story.

The simplicity of the language and the transparency of the plot of the text add much to the attainment or epistemic fulfillment of its thematic thrust. The super narrator of the novel engages a brilliant suspense which glues the reader to the story for its gripping denouement in attempt to get satiation from the logical ending of the novel after a prolonged suspense! Indeed, the text has the capacity of influencing ideal readers to devote much time to its reading. The creative craft of plot whereby the story begins from a known problematic ending to an unknown cause also propels the beauty of its aesthetics. The writer adopts mixed narrative techniques that make the text look like a collection of real life experience of the writer-cum- protagonist. The simplicity and transparency of narration can be exemplified in the excerpt below:

It was about 7:15 p.m. The ‘Assassin’ was *operating* in hostel E Common Room at the Saros Park. It was a 10-minute blitz game of chess. He had just dispatched two opponents and was on the third. A crowd of enthusiastic supporters had gathered. He was the current school champion and it was a delight to watch him play. (p. 121)

With a simple but charming narrative style, the writer weaves two events going on simultaneously. The narrative style is cinematographic. The story is woven in chains of causality which is the hallmark of organic plots (or cause and effect) such that one story influences the other in chains of intertextual relationship of consequences. Thus, in general as Georg Lukacs (1962) would have concluded, “The soul of the protagonist (in *Avenger of Blood*) is not too narrow and not too broadly far away from the reality of our situation today in Nigeria.

Declaration by the Literary Jury

Considering the uncommon craft of sonorous/lyrical simplicity and phoricity of mind-pictures in language, ironic blends in the thematic hierarchies of the narrative which enhances the transcending charm and magic of its plot, and considering the relative objective criteria of what makes a novel great, Franklin Finecountry’s *Avenger of Blood* (2014) published by TND Press, is not a mediocre prose fiction but a work of prose narrative genius! It is hereby adjudged the winner of the 2016 ANA prose prize.

2. ANA DRAMA OR PLAYWRITING COMPETITION PRIZE 2016

It is not so resounding that only 10 plays were submitted for this competition this year, unlike the previous years. ANA should do more publicity of this entry in order to encourage the aspiring, budding and established playwrights from our vast repertoire of fecund culture and theatrical traditions. ANA should also deliberately encourage prospective playwrights, and publishers of good plays to submit them as entries in order to make this Prize Category more competitive! While we note the lean harvest of entries, it is even more unfortunate that some of the entries are dismal in quality such that only a few could be adjudged to earn the pre-qualifying criteria for drama. Some of the authors lack the sense of dramaturgy and performing techniques while a few show a great of promise.

The Winning Entry – *Kosoko King of Eko* by Fela Omoyele

This is a historical play which also displays high theatrical acumen on the part of the playwright. It tells the story of several levels of power tussle and rivalry between Prince Kosoko and a King maker/Priest, Eletu. Omoyele throws in a love story, brutal power tussle and magic to make it a rich play. He creates characters that are plausible and full of vigour in pursuing their relentless ambitions. The playwright does not falter in telling his story thus the play remains on course, gripping, compelling and full of vigour.

Kosoko wins the hands of the lady in contest through deft maneuvering while Eletu pays him back by denying him access to the throne. 19th century Eko with all that marked that period are brought to life on stage when slavery thrived and the British colonial and Afro Portuguese presence are manifest. The play reminds us of an epic in which traditional mores of the Yoruba speaking people of Eko are brought to the fore while combatants slug it out through means fair and foul to realize their ambitions. There is no clear cut good or evil: at best the end justifies the means. Kosoko does in the end win the throne but after great hardship and stress. Eletu wins the upper hand a number of times but could not keep finally Kosoko away from the throne.

Declaration by the Literary Jury

This play demonstrates deft handling of stage presence, a good deal of theatricality and command of language. It ranks as the best of the entries for this year's competition and it is worthy of winning the first prize for the 2016 ANA Drama Competition.

3. ANA POETRY PRIZE COMPETITION 2016

Three poetry collections, amongst scores submitted, are deserving of this prize, but weighted hierarchy of artistic superiority rates them as follows:

Thunder Protocol
The Birth of Illusion
Kontradiction

Winner
1st Runner up
2nd Runner up

Obari Gomba, *Thunder Protocol*

This is a 237-pages “interim” collected poems comprising selections from two previous collections and a clutch of new poems. The poetry, written in a variety of captivating styles, thematizes love, politics and the environment. Gomba’s *Thunder Protocol* is a work of poetic power and virtuosity! The poems collected in the book represent the poet’s struggle to balance the demands of his artistic and the needs of his race, time and social milieu. Within them, the poems carry a lingering hope of a just and equitable society and betrays a keen awareness of the varied ills of the Nigerian society. The marker of Gomba’s poetry is its simplicity and sincerity. The poet’s uncluttered syntax and idiom appear as a suitable bardic means of giving vent to his vision and mission, and avail his poetry a disconcerting resonance, musicality and, above all, a place in Nigerian poetry.

Neither the neat division, nor the thematic affinity between the poems grouped together in *Thunder Protocol* is in any way exceptional. What would really be seen to be out of the ordinary is Obari Gomba’s ability to write poems with the same zeal and metaphoric density in an expansive range of style and voice, without slightly losing focus of the over-arching thematic horizon of the poems grouped together. The poet seems adept, indeed snugly at ease, with both short and long lines. Obari handles the short line with uncharacteristic virtuosity and amazing level of rich concession to acoustic-rhythm.

It is not just in negotiating the demands of lineation that *Thunder Protocol* is an unusual book within the annals of recent Nigerian poetry; it is also exceptional in balancing the necessity for writing within a particular tradition and the need to question and modify that tradition. There is indeed an apparent disconnect between much of contemporary Nigerian poetry and the question of subject matter, influence, tradition and political function. Put differently, there is a sort of critical hiatus, even a sociological and cultural chasm between, on one hand, the explosion and the supposed popularity of poetry in the country in recent years, and, on the other, the corresponding maturity in terms of craft, theme, and even relevance of the pervasive poets keen on publication. Though the commitment of many younger Nigerian poets like Gomba is never in doubt, their consideration of subject matter, or, indeed, its relevance in the present socio-economic dispensation and how they handle and carry forward the influence and tradition of the earlier generation of writers, is suspect, if not out rightly bungled and anachronistic.

Jumoke Verissimo, *The Birth of Illusion*

This second collection by Jumoke Verissimo does not only chronologically follow up to her debut collection, *I am Memory*, but also thematic transition. The poems are written in a lucid style with the poet’s voice coming through maturely. The maturity of the voice sets the book apart so powerfully and without fear of contradiction, is unmatched and therefore unrealized in many contemporary poets.

As Al Alvarez would say, the distinguishing mark of good poetry (and writing generally) is the maturity and subsequent development of voice, as, say, distinct from style. Accordingly, the thin line of difference between good and bad poetry is not in formal properties or flowery language, and not, to the same degree, so much a plenitude of plaintive metaphor or poeticized analogy; but it is simply in the way the reader, long after reading would still retain in a passionate, pervasive way the voice of the poet, and what the poet feels. When the voice is unlike any other the reader

have ever heard and speaks directly to her, intermingling in a close manner with the reader in private, such poetry could be judged to be “good”. The poet’s voice here is all the more spectacular, because it is free from symptomatic mannerism or high sounding rhetoric. Verissimo’s voice is, though not wholly immaculate, yet it is curiously uncluttered and unassuming, even unostentatious; at once un-selfreflexive and unabashedly her own. Obviously, like the “mature” poet that she is, she “steals” selectively *ala* T.S. Eliot from the more illustrious poets and philosophers before her; as such, the poet has ultimately accepted and critiqued what the past poets had to say, and also accepted and critiqued the way and manner in which they said and wisely followed their path. Hence, the transparency of her diction and her bold presence on the poem, adroitly directing the reader on from poem to the next, following in its direction, regardless of the reader’s own dispositions, reaching a *denouement* with verve and virtuosity as if in prose-fiction.

The Birth of Illusion is a mapping (not so much as a map) of love in all its damning complexity. It shows that a song (happy or otherwise) could be scrounged out of even the most painful episode in our lives. Yet in delineating the inherent contradictions of love (not to mention its transformation, infatuation, longing, commitment, rancour, separation or grief), Verissimo has evinces a fresh level of transparency, simplicity and directness which do not give away her subtlety of expression.

Saddiq Dzukogi, *Kontradiction*

The poems collected in *Kontradiction* (with it stylized spelling) clearly stand out in a sort of “in-your-face” to the reader, since they vitiate, in a defying, though innovative way the conventional form, following, instead, some streaks of the poetics often associated with American poetry where the poet effaces himself, leaving behind his clear, resonating, voice with no pretension, or complexity. The collection, as such, like Dzukogi’s previous collections has that identity mark and could naturally boast of having a well regarded origin. The poems could also lay claim to having the trademark of not just originality but freshness, with a feel of urgency and deceptive simplicity about them. They seek to tell a tale, couched in the sensitivity and sensibility of the poet’s encounter (and indeed ours) with the many challenges of life in contemporary Nigeria. In more ways than one, the poems are a resounding response to the context, nay the environment in which they are envisioned and caringly composed.

The generous selection of poems in the collection, numbering well over fifty were written largely around common, sometime idiosyncratic themes bordering on both the personal and the political, the public and private: there are poems here on time and the effect of its passing, love, desire, political and economic problems; themes which traverse local, national and global affairs to bestow on the collection a distinctive ubiquity. In short, the collection is replete and quite bulging with almost all the issues one is likely to encounter in a politically conscious, aesthetically alert poetry of the kind and disposition one associates with contemporary Nigerian poetry.

All in all, *Kontradiction* gives us an insight into the poet’s mind, and no less flourishes from our reading (critical or appreciative) as a memorable book of poems. The poems are gifted to the

discerning and discriminating reader in a simple (though not simplistic) demotic tone with well worked out metaphors.

4. ANA/ABUBAKAR GIMBA PRIZE FOR SHORT STORIES

Eight short story collections were received for this prize category out of which three were shortlisted based standard evaluation criteria for the short story genre of literature.

Sholist of Entries

- i. *From Sin to Splendour* by R.C. Ofodile – Winner of the Prize
- ii. *Midnight Cry* by Paul Ugah
- iii. *River People and other stories* by Peter Ukwa

The winning entry is compact and well produced in quality of print. If understanding a text begins with the title, then the title of this work justifies its contents. The story is cast in the form and convention of short stories. The writer begins the story from the middle to give the reader a curiosity to discover the secret affairs that results in unwanted pregnancy which in the eye of indigenous public morality is an abomination/sin. The story is unique in aspect of its evocative power of transforming the entire Onyeagon family members from poverty to affluence like a wishful daydream. The authorial voice is overshadowed by the suspense ingrained in a story that begins in the media res and thus compels the reader's attention from the beginning to the end.

Declaration by the Literary Jury

R.C. Ofodile's captivating language is remarkable while the use of footnotes provides helpful guide to meaning and pleasurable reading by the international reader. The themes stocked in the succinct story are expandable in such a way that conforms to the short story conventions that the advanced reader searches for. Ofodile's *From Sin to Splendour* deserves a first place and is therefore awarded the Short Story Prize while Paul Ugah's *Midnight Cry* gets honorable mention.

5. ANA/MARIA AJIMA PRIZE FOR LITERARY CRITICISM

There were only two entries in this category:

- i. "The Film Script, Nollywood and Cultural Diplomacy: Criticism of Artist's Knowledge of the Film Story" by **Nwagbo Pat OBI**
- ii. "Born on a Tuesday, So What?: A Reading of Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*" by **Su'eddie Vershima Agema.**

Observations by Literary Jury

The Prize for by this category cannot be awarded because the two critical works submitted do not satisfy the objective criteria for standard criticism in Literature. The entry by N.P. Obi lacks exactitude of critical focus in its title, the structuring of the essay is also defective in terms of a wobbling goal and objectives as well lack of clear theoretical framework. The jury expects the critic to identify cinematographic style as cultural diplomacy rather than appropriate it as the individual interest of the film makers. Even though the language is academic, the critical essay cannot be absolved of the afore-mentioned somersault of credible criticism. Even though **Obi's Works Cited** is impressive and scholarly, they are not enough to award the author the prize for criticism in this category.

Su'eddie Vershima Agema's critical essay gives no indication as to the meaning of the primary text's title, and that is besides the unscholarly, uncritical nature of the language.

Jury Decision

On the whole, we can only tangentially concede that Pat Obi's essay deserves **honourable mention** for a good show in this competition.

6. ANA/NGOZI CHUMA UDEH PRIZE FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The Jury received a total of 18 titles out of which five of them are for the Children's Literature prize category, one for the Teen Prose, and two for the Teen Poetry.

After reading through the titles the following scenarios emerged:

A couple of the books were written in a hurry, hastily printed and submitted, probably to meet submission deadline. This shows in the poor editing, proofreading and quality of paper and binding. *Sunny and the Arodan* belongs here, as also does *The Quest for the Gem of Arubia*.

Some authors still do not distinguish between a story and an essay, let alone literature meant for children. This was observed in the tiny font size, near absence of paragraphs, dialogues, and imagery; and little or no illustration. *Angel in the House* falls under this category; just as does *She Made The Trees Walk*.

All but one of the titles exhibited poor punctuation, mostly with quotation marks. It is in this regard that the winning title, *Water Carrier Millionaire* beats the competition.

Jury Decision

The Winner is ... *Water Carrier Millionaire* by Philip Begho!

Philip Begho exhibited creative craftsmanship and mastery of children's psychological makeup in this book. Musa is orphaned at age 10 and the only parting gift from his mother is a book that

he cannot read. His determination to learn to read in order to decipher what message his late mother wanted him to get leads him to desperate and life threatening situations from Yola to Lagos. The good news is that he overcomes at last, becoming not just literate but so well educated as to be invited to share his story at a Soroptomist meeting. Told in the first person narrative, *Water Carrier Millionaire* will inspire as well as encourage young readers not to give up their dream for a better life that comes through functional literacy and well rounded education. I enjoyed the book and hereby award it the Prize.

7. ANA/NECO TEEN AUTHOR PROSE PRIZE

Not awarded, because none of the entries may be adjudged worthy of the winning criteria.

ANA PANEL OF JUDGES FOR LITERARY PRIZES 2016

1. **Professor Nelson O. Fashina** (Chair) ----- Signed -----
--University of Ibadan, Ibadan

2. **Mallam Saliu Mohammed Bappa** -----Signed -----
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

3. **Ismaila Bala Garba** -----Signed -----
Bayero University, Kano

4. **Dr. Owojecho Omoha** ----- Signed -----
University of Abuja

5. **Mrs Joan Oji** ----- Signed -----
Educational Advancement Centre, Abuja

