

ISSUES IN THE EVALUATION OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN LITERATURE

Being text of

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BY

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PROTOCOL

INTRODUCTION

Like the stated theme of this year's ANA International Convention, although shorter, my chosen topic is broad and is designed to proffer a wide, instead of deep and argumentative, posture. This relieves me of engaging in hard and tortuous textual exegesis in the usually bent and twisted critical parlance to uphold a line of argument. Not pursuing any of today's sub-themes, I set out to explore and by so doing remind you, by highlighting, of some historical epochs and extant signposts in preceding critical evaluation of African literature. All these are presented as a prelude to assessing African literature (with)in (the committee of) World Literature(s).

I hope my paper will serve sufficiently to bring to the fore of today's discourse the healthy inevitability of heterogeneity in matters of global cultural discourse and the likely misplaced fallacy of homogeneity or equality against which Aristotle cautioned when he said,

The greatest act of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal

So, my paper strives to reveal the uniqueness of African literature from its inception; to suggest the difficulty of judging it like any other in the world, and to solicit for it a more appropriate, sympathetic assessment paradigm.

The paper will be punctuated by questions and posers instead of any conclusions about the issues raised.

For this purpose, the paper x-rays the key concepts of the Convention's stated theme including Canon, Prizes, Borders, but, most especially, **African literatures** (with its plural 's') and **World Literature**(in its single grandeur).

ON CANONS, PRIZES AND BORDERS

Seen from the perspective of literature as a cultural practice, each of the three terms which feature in the Convention theme (Canons, Prizes, Borders) constitutes a limit and so indicates a set of limitations. For, each is a subjective construct meant to simultaneously include and

exclude. This is so even though the term Canon in its use today still bears the semi-sacred, semi-spirituality of its Biblical origin. For, in literary discourse today, we know that the Canon is established and jealously guarded by a clique of secular, even irreverent self-serving members of the literati, without any written objectives or criteria as a guide. Often, the decision to include or exclude a text in the Canon vary and vacillate across epochs and geography. For example, P W Shelly, the Romantic British poet, and John Donne, the Metaphysical poet, were for sometime not in the Canon of English literature. I was not taught Amos Tutuola as a Undergraduate in the English degree program. But, by the time I started teaching African literature to University students in the early 80s, *The Palmwine Drinkard* was on the syllabus and many students were thrilled by its 'Yoruba English'. With the recent changes in the University curricula today, especially the inclusion of Popular culture as a respectable genre, soon other texts hitherto not patronised, such as James Hardley Chase and similar other crime and sensational thrillers will be unquestioned subjects of dissection and analysis in the English undergrad class. For, the selection and establishment of the secular canon does not seem to have a set of written or immutable criteria. Not so with Prizes.

Most literary prizes on offer today tend to be awarded on the basis of some(-times written) set of culture-specific criteria. Some, however, operate with undisclosed, even suspect criteria and motive. It is reported, for example that William Wordsworth only conditionally accepted the British Poet Laureate in his time. Jean Paul Sarte was said to value more his individuality and freedom from institutional establishment when he rejected the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature. So, often, Prizes tend to have strings attached, perhaps the more pretigious the longer and tighter the string.

THE LITERARY HORIZON

CANONS, PRIZES AND BOUNDARIES: AFRICAN LITERATURES AND WRITINGS IN WORLD LITERATURE, the theme of this year's ANA International conference, throws an equal challenge to writers, critics and sponsors of African literature and the literary arts in general. It simultaneously seems to ask questions such as, Is African Literature parochial/provincial? Is it in/appropriately valued/assessed/rewarded? What is the current/actual status of African literature in (the committee of) World Literature(s)? While these important questions are being asked and their answers contemplated, it is my belief that we are all aware of how Literature, as the product of human imagination and encoder, generator and perpetuator of culture, is fast losing grounds to 21st Century predilection and preoccupation with the social media and the digital culture. For, while Isaac Newton, Galileo Galilee and Albert Einstein are continuously succeeded by many Alfred Nobels, Steven Hawkins with their strings of ditant illuminations, constructions-destructions, comfort, bred by constant inventions, comparatively less and less are

seen, heard and felt of Plato, Aristotle, Donne, Shakespeare and Wordsworth - well known erstwhile vanguards of humanity.

In this age, perhaps more than in any preceding epoch, elders, whose traditional task it is to educate, instruct and groom the young ones into a future built on the past and present traditions, upon which they (the youth) are expected to build and improve, are finding themselves and their knowledge and expertise of minimal, if not doubtful, relevance to contemporary dispensation. Admittedly, the passage across the digital-divide has been wrought with waves of shock across many other spaces and spheres of human life to the extent that some of its ground-breaking achievements may not appear to be properly acknowledged. The latter are many and countless. But, collectively they seem oriented toward making human beings more efficient, more comfortable, to work faster, be more accurate and exact. But, taking only comfortability for analysis, can it be said that 21st Century man is any way more comfortable than, say, the man of the 19th Century? Yes, the new man of today maybe faster, more accurate in calculating the target to attack in a thousand kilometer range. But, things like comfort, confidence, and many other core human attributes, thrive best in a cultured, not fast or speedy, society. For its status as the agent for encoding, expressing and representing man's affections, spirituality and identity, the cultural sphere is, above all, the victim of this wave of visceral changes. Important as the former are in our lives, the 21st Century ethos has tended to privilege other, contesting attributes and pursuits of man such as the glamorous, the comfortable and material benefits to the extent that, to be successful and productive, man must be like a machine - fast, accurate, efficient, exact. 21st Century man has lost confidence in himself and all his effort and achievement are measured - marked scored and graded - by machine and mechanistic principles and devices. Many scholars have rightly posed the question as to what this trend portends: man has unwittingly reduced himself to servicing of and serving his inventions. In one of his memorable poems on the effect of the rise of industrialization and urbanization on central London in 18th Century, Wordsworth laments of "what man has done to fellow man".

What does this spell in/for the future of literature? What can writers/Writers Association do? The publishers, distributors, literary agents, readers and critics may join hands with the writers to re-position African literature in World literature; but, is the increasingly digitalized world according literature a fair or equitable space?

LITERATURE MISUNDERSTOOD

In its general and specialized conception, literature can be said to be and understood as the story or narrative in man's life. In this regard, by its function and what man should know and expect of it, literature, as story, is fully represented by Prof Kerr(2007) as,

"It is the story that conveys all our gains, all our failures, all we hold dear and all we condemn. To convey this to the next generation is the only way we can keep going and keep alive as people. Therefore, story is like the genes that are transferred to create the new being. It is far more important than anything else"

Is it because literature is misunderstood that it has become a pariah of the vocations in our world today? Yet, literature issues from man's basic impulse to make sense of the environment he finds himself; to secure sanity and security, to develop composure and self confidence which will enable him to dream and realise his dreams. This impulse is as basic as it is protean, and so it manifests itself in a variety of metaphoric representations in human preoccupations. Perhaps the most ubiquitous and overlooked manifestation of the literary impulse in man is in all instances of the use of language whose metaphoric essence is often eclipsed by its daily use and ubiquity in our life. We need to know, as Clabourgh (2014) explains, that "even the most faithful account of an event is *made up* in the sense that it is filtered through the eyes, feelings, beliefs and memories of one person". So, inevitable elements of a *make up* (fiction, untruth - metaphor) are always, actually there in every instance of language use, whether verbal or semiotic (communication in/by signs). This assertion automatically includes the scientific world with its seemingly irrefutable claim to 'the truth'. Like the arts, the scientific world also uses signs to represent ideas. The numbers, figures and diagrams all represent things other than themselves. Thus, science and art have the same character of *modus operandi*. That is why, in his investigation of the mathematical dimension of life, Ossaman (in Obafemi op cit) avers that,

Though the light of science and the light of art are inseparable and the same, their bearers speak different languages and only the best among them understand that they are engaged in the enterprise Robert Ossaman, *Mathematical Exploration of the Universe* Cited in Obafemi op cit

Ofcourse, in a more academic sense, literature is further distinguished as "writings that come from the imagination or writing that isn't factual. It's the very fine art of making things up in the most attractive, apt and convincing way possible. It is the telling of lies in order to reveal illuminating and dark truths about the world and our place in it " Clabourgh 2014: Pix

Except in the schools and academia, for the purpose of studies, dissection and examination, literature conceived and produced as fiction has suffered and is suffering globally, consequent to man's predilection for science and technology. Even in the schools, and especially in the academia, the introduction and subsequent preponderance of theories in literary studies in the 20th Century have tended to erode the affective and pleasurable attributes in fiction. Indeed, Mikhail Bakhtin, one of the gurus of literary theory, is known to have insisted that literary studies requires "area other than literature" and that, of the literary critic and his subject ,

"his speciality is not to be a specialist; conversly, an interest in literature is perhaps a requirement for specialization in the human sciences Cited in Oafemi, op cit

For man, the 20th Century experience in all spheres has revealed evermore a yawning lacuna which the failing prevalence of literature has brought to the fore. Democracy may have gained grounds in many communities. The pradox of modern man's pursuit of democracy anmd hi simultaneous suppression of the Humanities subjects in the school has been sufficiently highlighted by Nussbaum (2010). But, this gain is threatened by the resurgence of negative, 'uncultured', proclivity. In this regard, the need for literature's cruciality in an age at the brink of losing its humanity is highlighted by Prof Olu Obafemi in these words:

"Literature should keep abreast of the space-scientific age, the computer and telescopic revolution, and from it unearh the essence of man and purge him of racist centric c anons and impositions" Prof Olu Obafemi

The trend of neglect of literature is such that in almost all schools across the world, among the elite and the masses, the story of readers negative attitude s the constant. Dana Gioia, Poet Laureate of California, and a lecturr has this to say"

"I worry about my students, so many of whom are so preoccupied with social media and digital entertainment that they lack the contemplative space to develop their inner lives" 4th October, 2017 *The Catholic World Report*.

African Literature(s) and Writing(s)

The appellation 'African Literature' in the Conference theme, especially its plural 's', side by side with 'World Literature' (not World Literatures), inevitably recalls the reluctance, if not outright rejection by the Western world, which forerunners of the concept, such as Wole Syinka, encountered in the UK back in the middle of the 20th Century. Although the concept 'African Literature' has come to stay and to be widely accepted and used, one wonders if there is something left out or not included in its referential scope each time the plural 's' is added to the name. For example, the very good American-based journal *Research in African Lietratures* has the tendency, each time I think about its title, to make me ponder on its implication side by side with the journal titled *World Englishes*. While in the case of the latter, it is assumed, in fact it is well known, that the concept is predicated against the existence of an English English; the former has no such background underpinning it. Or, so it seems. And, despite the prevalence of its use to designate degree courses and programs in Universities accross the world, the appellation 'African Literature' (without the plural 's') seems to clumsily compromise Africa's different languages-literature - including European colonial and ethnic indigeneous linguistic medium texts. So, are there many literatures today - as many as there are languages in use - in/of Africa,

or is there one complex African literature? With what prize or losses do we accept either of the two options? Or, can we have our cake and eat it.

CONTROVERSIAL LABELS

Despite their importance and helpful use by scholars, labels, especially for cultural constructs, continue to feature inaccuracies of representation which inevitably inhere in them. How much sense is there in continental or national literatures? For example, despite the sub-continent's geographical uniqueness, one can still ask, how Australian is Australian Literature? And, European, American, Literatures? Because literature is a free and freeing enterprise, truly creative writers have tended to abhor designations that limit and align them to finite constructions in form of continents, nation-states and regions. When in 1966, just a year to his sad demise, Christopher Okigbo was awarded the prize for The Best African Poet in Dakar, he was reported to have declined with the remark that he was simply 'a Poet'. Yet, it can be asserted, with little contradiction whatsoever that Christopher Okigbo was of full African descent. For, the stand-alone existence of the continents can be said to be incontestible by virtue of boundaries of the great waters - Pacific and Atlantic. Yet, creative citizens of the different continents can and do rightly regard themselves and their works as super or supra continental. Was or wasn't Okigbo making a lot of sense when he said he was not (merely) an African poet? More recently in 2013, Starvans, in a submission on American literature had a course to asseverate the point that "the only true country a writer can claim is the language in which he writes" Starvans, 2013. ANA, the association is conceived in form of a Nigerian literature. What is inalienably unique about ANA-generated or ANA-sponsored texts? Beyond the setting and the personae of ANA literature, both of which can be replicated with ease in Niger, Benin or Ghana, what is Nigerian about the books produced by ANA writers?

THE GLOBAL ROOTS AND CHARACTER OF AFRICAN LITERATURE

The concept 'African Literature' in the academics, has been traditionally seen and explored as a complex, multi-lingual, multi-cultural phenomenon historically spread across the continents. Ancient writings in Amharic and the Egyptian Hieroglyphics which may have preceded all subsequent genres and which seemed to have been confined to the African continent, do not feature prominently on University syllabi except perhaps as passing topics in the class. The accessible roots of African literature for scholars in the field has always been texts written in Arabic and some in modern European languages. In this regard, the poetry of Antar bn Shaddad al-Absy in Arabic, those of Alfonso Alvares in Portuguese, those of Juan Latino in Latin and Phyllis Wheatly in English have been sufficiently documented and do serve as pointers to the cosmopolitan, as against any provincial assumptions of African literature. Both bn Shaddad (who proudly paraded his surname 'al-Absy' or from Abasynian - the Arabic name for Ethiopia) and Wheatley, (the proud 'Ethiopian' of her poems) exhibit with pride their African origin. As for their

impact on, and early status in, the so called 'World literature' we only need to know that despite systematic suppression and refusal to acknowledge them, literary historians and scholars have written to point out that Cervante, of Don Quizote fame and other Romance writers of the time, were indebted to the Antar Romance which dominated literature writing in the 5th - 7th AD and was passed on to Europe through Andalusia or Spain by Muslim-Arab scholars. It is also in scholarly records how, for example, Shakespeare's play, *Orthello*, was heavily informed by Muhammad al-Hassan al-Wazez or Leo Africanus' life and writings which had so much African ethos. Before his fated journey to Europe and subsequent capture by pirates and life in the Vatican where he wrote several pieces some of which the young Shakespeare must have read, Leo Africanus was in Bornu, the Chad Basin and in Kano where he wrote a treatise on leadership for the then Kano Emir. Early African writers, if not African literature must have been the most cosmopolitan in their vision and literary production/practice.

WORLD LITERATURE

The idea of a World literature might have been mooted earlier than the 20th Century. However, the concept has been readily traced to the works of Wolfgang von Goethe of Germany in the first quarter of the 20th Century. From the different submissions by scholars on his life, opinions and works, it can be deduced that Goethe's concern about prevalent acrimony and wars among European and non-European nations in his lifetime combined with his firm belief in the efficacy and immense redeeming potentiality of literature to make him conceive, propose and pursue a unifying literary practice of the global communities/nations. The literature he conceived was so important that he preached that,

National literature does not mean much at present. It is time for the era of World literature and everybody must endeavour to accelerate this epoch Goethe, 1927.

In his close study of Goethe's life and work, Birus (2017) arrived at the conclusion that the German sage wished for a literature that could unite European and non-European communities in what he describes as,

a rapid blossoming of a multitude of European and non-European literatures and the simultaneous emergence of a World literature --- mostly in English translation

Goethe seemed to have crystalized his conception and label of World Literature in the last decade of his life. That was a time when he saw that literary scholarship was

breaking through the traditional limits of occidental literature by re-evaluating popular poetry and the literature of the Middle Ages and of the Orient Birus, 2017.

In his analysis, Birus surmises that Goethe's conception was at first based on what he earlier saw and wrote in a letter to Adolf Friedrich on 27th January, 1827, as an "ever increasing rapidity of human interaction". The global scenario then (not very unlike the global information super highways of today) was further described as a "highly turbulent epoch --- vastly facilitated by communication --- constantly spreading activities of trade and commerce".

In his generously liberal conception of World Literature, Goethe not only saw the unity of participating nations, but also the "human spirit gradually attaining the desire to participating in the more or less untrammelled intellectual trade". He, in other words, saw literature as riding on the crest of the waves of an expanding trade and communication in the world. (What is the fate of literature in our era of global information super-highway?)

Goethe also saw popular literature as a key player in the world and so enjoined that,

seek out, get to know and cherish each poet in his own language and within the specific area of his time and customs.

He noted and expressed high hopes for a World Literature that promised to bring the English, German and French together with the hope, as he said, that "the disagreements that prevailed within one nation are smoothed out by the views and adjustments of the others". The ultimate effect of that kind of literature is immensely beneficial and may not just be,

a matter of nations being obliged to think in unison, rather, they should at least become aware of and understand each other, and, if love proves impossible, they should at least tolerate one another.

In literature in general, but specifically in the World literature of his conception, Goethe saw the germinal seed of world harmony, if not world peace. He avers that if this literature of his,

cannot be hoped to produce a general peace, it can be hoped that the inevitable conflicts will gradually become less important, that war will become less cruel and victory less arrogant.
Goethe in German Romance.

That sums up Goethe's conception of World Literature in which it would have been easy, fater to locate African, or any other genre belonging to a group. However, as with many other similar ideas by thinkers in history, the cross-current of events and prevalent socio-political ideologies have tended to pounce on, distort and appropriate them into the dominant, often imperialist, ideologies. Such has been the case with Goethe's lofty conception of World Literature which, for many decades after his demise, was confined to only European nations and languages. For example, against the grain of what Goethe meant, especially with regard to the international character of his conception of World Literature, Werner Kraus, Professor of Romance Languages

and Literature in the German Democratic Republic, defined World Literature in the following Euro-centric terms:

World literature accordingly rises above all literatures as a superliterature, with its masterpieces towering above every normal horizon. World Literature thus turns into a great pandemonium in which Cervantes and Rabelais, Dante and Voltaire nod to each other.

The obvious Eurocentricism in this post-Goethe conception of World Literature seems to foreclose the possible participation of Africa and Africans in the genre. Issued in the last quarter of the 19th Century, the consequence of such an imperialist, racist thinking and pronouncement could be seen at work and perfectly reflected in the Hegelian view of Africa as a continent without history; or the regard of the region as a Tabula Rasa. Such weird thinking also reflected the 1884 Berlin rush to scramble for Africa by the Europeans; to colonize/hegemonize its populace.

As recent as 1930 for example, Courteny Hodgson, a British adventurer on the West African coast, was quoted, without reservation by Linfors, as saying,

*West Africa is too crude, too brutalizing, to nourish the *sfflatus* of a poet or the Scabies scribandi of the novelist* Linfors 2002:2

The rabid Eurocentricism did not go unobserved by discerning people such as T S Elliot who decried the rate at which non-Europeans were having European culture imposed on them in the name of World Literature. He is thus quoted as warning that.

a World culture which was simply a uniform culture would be no culture at all. We would have a humanity de-humanised. It would be a nightmare.

Literature, for the culture that it essentially is, is unique and should be conceded as a unique endowment to a people. It cannot be otherwise. In this regard, it constitutes a people's idiosyncrasy of which Edward Wilmot Blyden says,

a sacred gift, given for some divine purpose to be sacredly cherished and patiently unfolded. Blyden, p2

MODERN AFRICAN LITERATURE

Early African literature was as global as any could be. But, largely due to the character of subsequent interaction with a second wave of non- African peoples from the middle of the 16th Century, the continent of Africa and the people were degraded and devalued. For example, an experience of the West African tropical climate on the coast may explain Hodgson's unfortunate racist remark about a whole territory in 1930. Unknown to Hodgson, it was in the year in which he uttered those uncharitable words, 1930, that talented West Africans in the interior published

books of stories plays and poems which are today's Classics in Hausa studies. The pioneer works of Abubakar Imam, Tafawa Balewa, Abukar Tinau and a couple of others under the tutorage of a British Colonial officer, Rupert East, are excellent literary pieces by any global standard. What standard was Hodgson using to adjudge a whole region as incapable of producing a poem or novel? And, it is the same West African coastal areas that in subsequent years produced Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe to further belie Hodgson's jaundiced statements.

When it is a question of culture and inherent values, Africa and Africans, especially the latter, can be seen to have conceded so much after its contact with Western Europe. Didn't precolonial Africa have things to show, to be proud of? Achebe laboured to educate his African readers that Africans did not hear of civilisation from the whiteman. Africa had abiding dignity and inherent nobility as evident in Achebe's portrayal of people like Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* and the well thought out trends of social, political and economic events in life in the novels. But, Achebe's stories may be faulted as mere fiction. What of these quoted words of Lord Macaulay in his report about a visit to Africa read to the British Parliament on 2/2/1835:

I have travelled across the length and breadth of Africa. I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country.

Macaulay's submission above about his physical visit to West Africa which is part of Africa Hodgson reported on and which also informed Hegel to write that "Civilization started in the East and ended in the West --- Africa has no place in History". The irreparable damage such statements caused for Africans could not be undone even with Hegel's subsequent phrase which says "except for what came to dark Africa from the East"; nor by the subsequent knowledge Africans have had to the effect that Europe itself fed from the same Eastern civilization.

Agysimba (Jahn's other name for it) or Negro Black Africa, has been unique in its experience in the world. It had hosted several African regions and Arab-Asian peoples for many decades prior to the invasion of the region by Western Europe. Unlike many global regions and communities, Negro Africa had a rigorous experience of hosting others as described by Blyden (1888):

Three streams of influences have always penetrated into negroland: one from Egypt, through Nubia, to Bornu, to Hausa; another from Abyssinia, to Yoruba and Asghanti; the third from the Babary states across the desert to Timbuctoo.

Before 1500 AD Africa had had many years in interaction with other peoples. In his documentation of these historic links, Jahn (1966) speculates that the possibility was there to suggest that Juan Latino (the Latin medium poet) and Alfonso Alvares (Portuguese medium poet) might have had their predecessor in form of Afro-Asian or Afro-Greek poets.

Those were no mean poets! They were world class poets as could be found. The Afro-Arab poet Al-Shaddad Al-Absy was one of the Seven Golden Poets of Arabia. His unique Romance writings formed the model of Don Quixotes and other European Classics.

ANA MANDATE: A REMINDER

In his ANA Inaugural Speech in June 1981, Achebe identified one major reason why writers need an association. Writers and their career forever needed protection in matters of "contracts, copyright, translation, royalty negotiation", he said. He observed that by nature writers, whom he described as "refractory individuals", are not readily inclined to groups and groupings, are often difficult to drag into and made to remain under one umbrella. It is partly because of this that writers are not the best of friends with governments. Achebe elaborates:

Writers are by instinct and (one may add experience) somewhat sceptical of governments. We fear them even when they bear gifts; even when their gifts are channelled through innocuous-seeming parastatals like the National Council for Arts & Culture. This scepticism is healthy and appropriate. ANA Review, 2016, pxii

But, writers need a stronger body beyond their individual selves, an association, to assure them of a conducive environment to enable the society to protect them and protect itself as well. For, Achebe opines, the greatest possible social protection comes with a more enlightened and informed society. In Nigeria, the need for more free, performing writers is greater as, Achebe lamented, ignorance had twined and twisted its tentacles in the populace to the extent that we the citizens were to blame: "so prodigious is our ignorance of ourselves and the things that belong to our peace." Achebe's prescient diagnosis foresaw what we are witnessing today in form of the emergence of three dangerous forms of fanaticisms which he said writers should come together to fight. These are Religious fanaticism, political fanaticism and tribal fanaticism. Today Nigeria has been diagnosed as a state on the brink of failure; a state stalked by homebred, self-inflicted malaise: Hausaphobia, Igbo-phobia and Yorubaphobia. One of the recent prescriptions for the nation's condition has been the recommendation of the invention of a New Tribe by some of our intellectuals. Elimination of the mutual fear and distrust across the Nigerian old tribes would do the magic of inventing a new from the old tribe. ANA, from inception in 1981, was charged with the task of banishing ignorance, especially ignorance of one another, by Achebe, who emphatically added that Nigerians needed to know "what belong to our peace".

But, has the government of Nigeria given the writers the recognition, the protection to write freely? Has the society encouraged and ensured full participation by all citizens in reading the

written books? How much have the writers themselves done to make their stories more accessible, more relevant?

Before closing this paper I need to say something about one of ANA's oversight in its operations all these years. This is no other than literature in indigeneous Nigerian languages. In the Inaugural address in 1981, Achebe opened and closed his address with glowing tributes to Abubakar Imam who died shortly before the inauguration of ANA, an event which he was to attend. Achebe said he had been looking forward to meeting Imam whom he had never met beyond his writings, and someone who reminded him of Fagunwa and Peter Nwana, two Yoruba and Igbo language writers, respectively. That ANA's take-off agenda had a strong element of indigeneous language literature drive can be gleaned from Achebe's last remark about the late Imam:

"One last word. When I said in my opening remarks that I had particularly looked forward to the participation at this convention of the late Abubakar Imam, what I had in mind was that his presence would have given a powerful and venerable indication on a new emphasis on, or even awareness of, literature in indigeneous Nigerian languages. There are, however, I am glad to say, other writers here today who will represent in our deliberations the crucial interest of our native tongues, and who will display at the poetry reading tomorrow some of the literary harvest already gathered in the prosecution of that interest." pXiv

How much honour has ANA given to this wish by Achebe?

Perhaps much has been done. But, much more needs to be done.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

ANA has been working for the past thirty six years and the results are modest. Indeed as Denja (2015) avers "We already have a place in World Literature with great writers such as Achebe, Soyinka, Lark and several other younger writers following in their footsteps". But, that is not a reason enough for ANA to rest on its oars. When the tune changes, as it clearly has in recent years, especially with the prevalence of the digital glitz, the dancer must learn new dancing steps.

I would love to share in the belief that no award "confers any excellence on a piece of writing, it only acknowledges the presence of merit in a given writing based on the criteria governing such an award" as a good diagnosis of literary prizes and prizing. I however, while commending ANA for the literary awards it has instituted since 1981, like to request the association to consider working towards achieving the following:

1. Persuading the Government, through the Minister of Culture and the National Council of Art and Culture to institute National Poetry Merit Award to last of 5 years.

2. To encourage state Governors and Local Government Chair/men and women to to also institute literary prizes in the schools under their purview.

3. Visit and seek audience with members of the legislature for a sensitization session on promoting reading and literary production/activity in their constituencies

Finally, on the place of African literature in World Literature I wish to advise writers to strive to write good literature which easily comes with faith in what they do with a dose of fidelity to their cultural base. It is not only that 'Literature does not grow in a vacuum', the fact is that it cannot thrive and luxuriate in an inauthentic, or borrowed culture. This means as writers we must immerse ourselves into our, and not other's culture, and cultural practices. World recognition is easier built on home recognition, and, as Denja (2015:26) also sagely says, " cultural authenticity is very important in the creative sphere because that may be all a writer has to contribute to world literature"

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