

**CONTENDING ABSURDITY; ANALYSING THE  
LANGUAGE OF DISILLUSIONMENT IN ESIABA  
IROBI'S SELECTED POEMS**

**BY**

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# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study is premised on the language of literature in general and language of poetry specifically. It derives from and is predicated on the seemingly developing trend of disillusionment in post-independence African literature. The researcher chooses poetry because “the commonly accepted notion [is] that poetry represents a vehicle through which one’s deepest and most distilled thoughts may be expressed,” (Matambirofa et al, *The Problematics of a Feminist ontology*, 2006: 87).

Furthermore, Mazrui (2006) reminds us that of all literary forms of African literature, poetry is the most indigenous. Most especially if literature is perceived from African orature. The researcher also noted that very few researches have been carried out on Esiaba Irobi’s poetry. To the researcher, it is crucial to carry out this research because it is anticipated that it can be useful to different educational levels in literary studies. In this sense it can be beneficial to university students, academics and other literary practitioners.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Oral literature has thriven in Africa for many centuries and it incorporates a variety of forms that include: myths, epics, dirges, praise poems, songs, chants, festivals and proverbs. Most popular of the African oral forms is perhaps the proverb, a short witty statement that

aims to communicate a response, to offer advice, or to persuade. The proverb is continually hired as an emblematic device, rendering its speaker as the bearer of authority. Yet, as much as the proverb makes anaphoric references to an African culture as its origin and spring of authority, it recreates such African culture each time it is spoken and used.

### **1.1.1 HISTORY OF LITERATURE IN NIGERIA**

Nigerian literature has a long history in the oral tradition. Bade Ajuwon's has significantly dwelled on this in his seminal article, 'Oral and Written Literature in Nigeria'. He explains further:

Pre-literate Nigeria once enjoyed a verbal art civilization which, at its high point, was warmly patronized by traditional rulers and the general public. At a period when writing was unknown, the oral medium served the people as a bank for the preservation of their ancient experiences and beliefs. Much of the evidence that related to the past of Nigeria, therefore, could be found in oral traditions ([www.info-naija.blogspot.com](http://www.info-naija.blogspot.com).)

Using the Yoruba community as a vivid example, Ajuwon explains that as a channel of entertainment, parents and guardians tell tales of morals to their wards, usually during a full moon. The start of the fourteenth century witnessed the intense growth of spoken and written Arabic in the northern part of Nigeria, towards the end of the seventeenth century, Hausa literature was being translated into the Arabic language. During the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries introduced western education as part of their religious agenda in the Eastern and Western parts of Nigeria. Some native Moslems met the threat of these Christian missionaries with protests in poetry in the Northern Nigeria. For instance, Arabic scholars like Aliyu dan Sidi, engaged the oral tradition to write protest poetry against the missionaries. ([www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com))

Contrarily in the South-western Nigerian, Yoruba authors, like D.O. Fagunwa and Isaac Delano, wrote novels fostering the teachings of Christianity and eulogising the moral

contents of the bible. Although, Fagunwa and Delano subscribed to Christianity in their writing. But, both relied upon the Yoruba oral tradition as exemplified in their writing. Fagunwa's literary oeuvre in particular 'show and extensive use of proverbs, riddles, traditional jokes and other lore central to Yoruba belief.' ([www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com) 23. Apr. 2015)

A major intervention in the indigenous literary tradition occurred with the founding of the University College of Ibadan in 1948. The establishment of the English Department of the university re-stimulated interest in literary production. The authors began to work with broader themes, they dealt with such universal themes as religion, labour, corruption and justice; they employed human characters and concrete symbols

Nigerian literature has grown to become an art that has borne the history, collective experiences and views of the Nigerian people. It has raised more issues relevant to our contemporary situation and it has also concerned itself with the way forward if the Nigerian nation is to recover from its present problems, realise its full potentials and regain its position as the giant of Africa.

It is line with this thought, that the writer becomes an apostle with a social commitment; that task which entails revealing society and its views. Overtime, prominent Nigerian writers have taken it upon themselves to include the social conditions of their people, their criticisms against perceived tyranny, and also made their literary arts a social documentation. When Nigerians began writing in English, the language became the burden bearer of the Nigerian historical experience and orature. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is an example of a literary work that has successfully attained this status.

Contemporary Nigerian literature has been addressing issues that are pressing and germane to the development of a nation that has rescued itself from the exploitative talons of

colonialism but unfortunately enmeshed in Neo-colonial shenanigan like brash, primitive economic acquisition and deep-sitted corruption. Corruption in post- colonial Nigeria is endemic and often instigated by the lopsided Nigerian socio-political structures; military interference, apathy and failed leadership are suddenly the themes that preoccupy the Nigerian literary narrative landscape.

Celebrated Nigerian Poets like Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo and Ken Saro-Wiwa have had disillusionment and troubled nationhood as their central thematics. For example, in Wole Soyinka's *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, he bemoans the tyranny and high-handedness of the military government. Similarly, Christopher Okigbo's *Labyrinths* makes a premonition on the results of a failed postcolonial Nigeria whose promises of development are debilitated by corruption, religious fanaticism and mass apathy. It is on this premise that the argument of Esiaba Irobi's poetics would be analysed as towing this path, the path of disillusionment and contention against absurdity which is inherent in the politics and Nigeria nationhood.

### **1.1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR**

Esiaba Irobi was born on October 1, 1960 and raised in the Aba Division of former Eastern Nigeria. During the civil war, Irobi like many Biafra child, was separated from his parents at a tender age of seven. After the war in 1970, he was reunited with his parents and was enrolled at the Wilcox Memorial Grammar school, Aba. In 1976, he earns the Teachers Grade II Certificate with Distinction from the Teacher Training College, Uzuakoli. After teaching for two years at Akabo Girls Secondary School Owerri and Mbawsi Community Secondary School, Imo state respectively He proceeded to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka

where he studied English and dramatic arts. His professors included Chinua Achebe, Donatus Nwoga, and the pioneer scholar of Onitsha Market Literature, Professor Emmanuel Obiechina. (Diala, 2014)

As an undergraduate, he won the Departmental First prize for Drama and Short fiction in 1980 as well as the English Departmental First prize for African Poetry in 1981. In 1983, he graduates with a BA in English/drama. In a few quick years, he produced several volumes of poetry and numerous plays that stood out for their revolutionary urgency. An ardent admirer of the works of Soyinka, Derek Walcott, Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht and Ionesco, he was also more directly inspired by the great master of Yoruba traveling theatre, Hubert Ogunde.

With several literary publications to his credit, Irobi was preoccupied with the frustration and dispossession of the Nigerian youth by the country's ascendancy; military and civilian alike, and by the passionate espousal of a violent ethic as a resolution to the corruption of Nigerian politics. Yet Irobi's political theme is explored against the backdrop of a ritual symbolism that evokes the atmosphere of much of Soyinka's dramaturgy even though earlier on in his career, with an iconoclast's passion to demolish existing structures in the bid to create new artistic forms, Irobi had denounced Soyinka's style. (Nnorom, Azuonye. [theblogazette.nnoromazuonye.com](http://theblogazette.nnoromazuonye.com) 24. Apr. 2015, web. May 2012)

In his final years, Irobi preferred to be identified as a citizen of the defunct Republic of Biafra, where he was raised as a war child. He often believed that he lived on exile in Nigeria, Germany and other countries he found himself.

## **1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The following objectives are fundamental to the study:

- To bring to the fore the language of disillusionment as a machinery for protest used by Esiaba Irobi.
- To articulate the tradition of social commitment and protest in Nigerian literature.
- To depict the Nigerian poetic genre as that which can document, this protest using the language of poetry and aesthetics.
- To lay claim on the fact that the poets' disappointment is as a result of the deplorable condition in Nigeria.

## **1.3 SCOPE OF STUDY**

This study has chosen six poems randomly from three of Irobi's collections: *Cotyledons*, *Inflorescence*, *Why I don't like Philip Larkin*. The poems are: 'London', 'The Sahel Savannah', 'The Valley', 'Sandhurst', 'Horizons' and 'The Rhinoceros'. It is worthy of note at this point to recognize that Irobi has written other poems which illustrate a great deal of disillusionment and they are delivered with pungency even though they are not contained in this study. References will be made to those other poems as occasions demand. This is also without prejudice to the fact that other Nigerian Poets have treated the thematic of disillusionment in their poetry collections.

## **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- How does Esiaba Irobi express his disillusionment with the Nigerian nationhood in his poetry?

- How does the poet subsume disillusionment within the context of socio- political anomy in contemporary Nigeria?
- Why would a poet be disillusioned with his country?

## **1.5 THEORETICAL FRAME WORK**

Irobi's works most often comment on the disgraceful state of Nigeria after independence. Owing to the delineation by the scope of the study, the research will focus on how Irobi uses language to depict absurdity and disillusionment in his poetics.

A theory known as stylistics theory has been chosen as the framework for this research. Stylistics occupies the middle ground between linguistics and literary criticism and it functions to mediate between the two. In this role, its concerns often do not necessarily overlap with those afore mentioned disciplines. It is for this reason that stylistic analysis tilts unnoticeably into literary appreciation. Therefore, literary criticism is most times embedded in stylistic analyses which usually compliment it.

Carrying out a stylistic analysis can resolve many thorny complications in literature. For example, a Writer's use of language, if studied carefully, can reveal her aesthetic personality, her perception of the world perhaps far more accurately than any study of her background and the literary movement she endorses.

Stylistics is a branch of Linguistics which deals with different styles. It refers to the study of appropriate use of words or language in a sentence or writing. Widdowson (1975) defines stylistics as "the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation". He says

further that the link between literary criticism and linguistics is stylistics. Style has different meanings for different people.

According to Carter (1989) style generally depends on linguistic levels. Due to these levels every text and writing is different from the others, hence every genre is different. Haynes (1989) is of the view that the study of style is the study of distinctions, looking at what was said against what might have been said. Style can also be called a variety of writing.

Style is a primary aspect of any literary piece of writing. It gives a unique recognition to the writers' voice and perception which distinguishes him from other voices and writers. Style in writing is often aided by the numerous stylistics devices employed by the individual writer. Style enables a writer to present the same idea or thing with new colour, meanings and magnitudes. Therefore style is the basic thing which gives individuality and uniqueness to every writer. Apparently, the word stylistics is derived from style.

## **1.6 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE AND THE SOCIETY**

This research should:

1. Contribute furthermore to the insightful reading and understanding of Irobi's works.
2. Lay claim to the fact that Nigeria's degraded state is as a result of bad governance and corruption which has eaten deeply into the fabrics of the country's nationhood.

## **1.7 DEFINING KEYTERMS**

### **1.7.1 What is Disillusionment?**

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is defined as:

A feeling of disappointment resulting from the discovery that something is not as good as one believed it to be.

According to wikitionary.org disillusionment is defined as

A feeling of disappointment, akin to depression arising from the realization that something is not what it was expected or believed to be, possibly accompanied by philosophical angst from having one's beliefs challenged.

From the above definitions, we understand that disillusionment is a feeling of hopelessness, stemming from apprehending something that has thwarted our hope and faith in it. The general notion of disillusionment stated here as constantly reflected in the literature of post-independence. In view of this realisation, the concept of disillusionment has since become a constant note in the literature of post-independence Africa.

In the contemporary post-colonial Africa, writers have employed their art as a supreme tool for depicting disillusionment. Post independent African socio-political situations have fuelled the disenchantment and pains that have therefore become the suffusing motif in the continental literature. In a vast discourse on the theme of disillusionment in contemporary African fiction, Ayo Kehinde (2004) contends that African writers are committed to the social and political realities of their environments.

Thus, themes in African literatures mirror these social and political realities. Kehinde holds that during colonialism and vilification of all things African associated with it, African literature was content to celebrate the heroic grandeur of the African past. During the independence struggle, literature was again pinpointed as a tool for anti-colonial struggle. In postcolonial Africa, literature is adopted to represent the disillusionment that is widespread in the continent. (Ayo Kehinde, 2004)

There is a tone of disenchantment that goes through most post-independence literature. This disappointment is connected with the fact that independence has not fostered progress and improvement which it was hankered to achieve.

### **1.7.2 ABSURDITY IN LITERATURE**

Absurdity according to wikitionary.org is defined as:

“The quality of being absurd or inconsistent with the obvious truth, reason or sound judgement”.

Absurdity as a noun can also be defined as a state of being ridiculous or wildly unreasonable. As an adjective, it can be defined as senseless, illogical, and unbelievable, contrary to reason, ridiculous and meaningless. ([www.wikitionary.org](http://www.wikitionary.org))

This meaninglessness has been explicitly decoded in Albert Camus’ *Myth of Sisyphus* (1955) and *The Plague* (1947) In the same way, Samuel Becketts’ *Endgame* (1957) has essentially justified the meaninglessness of human existence. In Nigerian socio-political sphere, the three Irobi’s poetry collections would be doggedly explored to evaluate the extent of absurdity grounded in the Nigerian polity.

## **2.0 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, we have represented a general introduction to the study by looking into the background of the study as well as the author’s background. The research theory has also been introduced. The aim, objectives, justification, research questions, statement of the

problem and scope of study have been laid out. We will therefore proceed to the next chapter where we shall trace the history of disillusionment in Nigerian literature as well as how post independent African literatures have expressed this concept. Also, we will carry out a critical review of literatures on Irobi's poetry as well as other literatures relevant to this research.

# CHAPTER TWO

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

“The production of new knowledge is fundamentally dependent on past knowledge” (O’Leary 2010:71). Hence, literary production is of essential concern to the contemporary African Writers. It is important to note that while other developed nations of the world are preoccupied with the primary business of artistic productions, writers in Africa cannot afford not to continually discuss and elaborate on social and political issues that impinge on the development of the continent.

## 2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1.1 HISTORY OF ABSURDITY AND DISILLUSIONMENT IN LITERATURE

The idea of absurdity in human condition was first raised by Albert Camus who used the word “Absurd” to describe human conditions in his work *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1955). In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus defines the Absurd as,

This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of Absurdity. (2)

Camus offers up a model in his work for good living, in the face of the unavoidable notion of hopelessness, through a dissection of the tale of Sisyphus, an individual doomed to eternally pushing a boulder up a hill, only to see it roll down again.

*The Myth of Sisyphus* opens with a suggestion of two options: to commit suicide in the face of absurdity, or to live in denial. The absurd is our estrangement from the world that permits our underlying relationship with it. When the feeling of illogicality allows for the concept of the absurd to manifest, there is a strain or a modification between what we desire from the world and what the world itself can offer, or as Camus says, “a divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints.” (6) It is a fundamental and problematic

element of the human existence, because we as humans, at heart, desire from the world meaning or explanation for our existence, which in return we are disappointed as it, cannot offer to us the explanation we so much desire.

The feeling of absurdity may bring about a crisis of meaning, or a subversion of the set of obligations that we organize our lives around. It may manifest as a loss or an enfeebling of what we formulate to make life meaningful. We inherently desire some otherworldly explanation by which we can understand our place in the world. Camus implies in his work that the only meaning that can be drawn from life must be essential. Suicide and denial in the face of the absurd are remedial to good living.

Camus' writing has captured the inner difficulty of the modern world, when a person begins to question their own tiresome existence seeking to find meaning behind their daily motions of life and failing to find any at all, they come to anticipate a void. Camus exemplifies the fact that the earth revolves around the sun. People lived and died in pursuit of that knowledge, and yet the question and answer alike do not matter, because we live in conformity to social structures and norms that are manmade and will one day seemingly be blinked out of existence. (Camus, 1955)

Similarly, Samuel Beckett, in his *Waiting for goddot* (1953) and *Endgame* (1957) exemplifies the insignificance of human life in comparison to the infinite void of space and the abstract concept of time, which rules over humanity, as the notion which can manifest in the minds of men and bring about absurdity. The characters in these plays constantly engage in meaningless activities repeatedly for no obvious reason.

Literature of the absurd has its origins in the Theatre of the absurd, a movement part of the modernist movement, that notably following the first and second world wars. The

world wars exposed the callousness of the human mind and it affected the human psyche to a great extent. The Second World War; the most devastated war in history was stirred by Adolf Hitler who was at that time controlling Germany under the aegis of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NASDAP) also known as the Nazis party. ([www.worldwar2.org.uk](http://www.worldwar2.org.uk). web. 20. May. 2015)

The Nazis believed the Arian extraction should be the only existing race because they believed it is the perfect race imbued with a superior gene. Consequently, the NAZI party decided to eliminate people who they thought were not as perfect as they were especially the Semitics (Jews). It inaugurated their propaganda with institution of anti-Semitist laws which revoked the citizenship of Jews in Germany, restricted them from working as well as marrying a German. As if that was not enough, it horrendously sanctioned the mass killing of people in order to eliminate them completely.

In its further pursuit of this dementia, Hitler ignited the Second World War by invading Poland a home to, many Jews. The Nazis built several exterminations camps to kill the Jews during the war. The casualties of this holocaust includes Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, mentally and physically disabled as well as other perceived to be against Hitler were gruesomely killed in these camps. After the war, this extermination camps built by the Germans were liberated and the world was shocked to see the horrors within these camps. (<https://www.historynet.com/worldwar-ii> web.14.May. 2015)

The aftermath of World War II provided a social environment that stimulated absurdist views and allowed the popularity and development of this movement. This absurdity depicted in literatures is a result of disillusionment with the evil disposition of the human mind and the aftermath of war. It is also an attempt to justifying the exploitation of the working class and poor, the affluence of the rich, the cruel yet condoned destructiveness

of the world wars, and the unquestioned belief in evolution and progress. (<https://www.historynet.com/worldwar-ii> web.14.May. 2015)

### **2.1.2 DISILLUSIONMENT IN AFRICAN LITERATURE**

Disillusionment in African literature can be traced back to the post-independence era in which so many African countries made mess of the independence celebration by overtly embracing corruption and mismanagement of the scanty resources embedded in their various countries. Shortly after independence in most African nations, political manipulation, corruption and the mismanagement of resources crept in and finally devalued the significance of such independence.

Most decent writers in Africa have described this historical period in Africa as a period of sustained disillusionment. The grouse of these writers is essentially against the mismanagement of political and economic potentials in most of these newly established African states.

As a result, the evident collapse of hope and excitement of the independence developed into disappointment and despair; disillusionment and alienation by the political elite (neo- colonialists), who exhibited ‘covetousness, greed, myopia and corrupt tendencies (Nnolim 2006:2)

These works according to Ayo Kehinde (2004) gives an “expression to a profound rejection of the contemporary African continent as it is presently constituted especially in terms of its human dimension” (90).

In, Ngugi Wa Thiong’O *Writing against Neocolonialism* he argues:

Political independence has not resulted in the much desired freedom and transformation. The elite who take over power from colonialists rather than dismantling colonial structures of social injustice and oppression merely preserve them for opportunistic ends. Thus, post-independence years in many ex-colonies of Africa are characterized by indices of underdevelopment (*An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*:2009: 157)

In his own part, Wole Soyinka in his essay titled 'The writer in modern Africa' has described political problem in Africa thus:

In the movement towards chaos in Africa, the writer did not anticipate. The understanding language of the outside world, "birth pains," that near-fatal euphemism for death throes, absolved him from responsibility. He was content to turn his eyes backwards in time and prospect in archaic fields for forgotten gems which would dazzle and distract the present. But never inwards, never truly into the present, never into the obvious symptoms of the niggling, warning, predictable present, from which alone lay the salvation of ideas. (1967, 17)

Soyinka spoke elsewhere in the same paper of 'the lack of vital relevance between the literary concerns of writers and the pattern of reality that has overwhelmed even the writers themselves in the majority of modern African states, (1967, 19)

In Achebe's *A Man of the People*, political corruption is stimulated by expatriate interests, foreign firms strand the corrupt black politicians with "ten percent" bribes. Achebe presents his disillusionment through the character of Odili a young school teacher who doubles as a narrator in this novel.

Eustace Palmer in *The Growth of the African Novel* (1982) discusses factors that inspired Achebe in writing the novel. He lists these factors to include: ministerial incompetence and corruption, social inequalities, rigged elections, poverty, mass indifference and cynicism and intellectual bankruptcy (82). He went on to accentuate that Odili Samalu is

an idealistic graduate who took a job in the village secondary school as a teacher. Odili is the one ‘through whose eyes the corruption of the governing classes is largely viewed’ (82)

Similarly, Ayi Kwei Armah in his *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969) captures the decay and collapse that trademarked post-independence Ghana. Being set in Ghana does not take away the fact that the situation described in the novel exists in all the post-independence countries of Africa. Armah comes into the trail of this discourse with a question, he seeks to know “whether the rot and weakness were not after all the eternal curse of Africa itself, against which people could do nothing that, could last” (91). Armah does not hurriedly provide answers to his question. He takes time to convince his reader that the African quandary does not loll outside the people of the continent ( “*Ayi Kwei Armah and the Significance of His Novels and Histories.*” N.p. n.d. Web. 30 April 2015).

Thus, he locates the anarchy of post-independence African society on the oxidisation of the African value systems (Ayo Kehinde,2004). This, he argues, is the handwork of Africans themselves. Armah exposes corruption in high places as one of the outcomes of abrogation of cultural values in any society. Thus, having reversed the trend of cultural values which are meaningful to it, Africa, as represented by Ghana in the novel relapses into corruption.

The forms of corruption which are prevalent in this novel manifest themselves in swindling activities of business owners, giving and accepting of bribes, in the pathetic manner with which people conduct public business, and in the amassing of public wealth exhibited by government officials (. ‘Ama Ata Aidoo: Independence and Disillusionment in Postcolonial Ghana’, *African Postcolonial Literature in English in the Post-Colonial Web*,’97. Web 16 July 2007).

In some other boroughs such corrupt activities as mentioned above are conducted in secrecy but not in Armah’s Ghana where most members of the society have accepted them as national ethos. This may have informed Armah’s decision to use Ghana as metaphor for corruption. In the conversation between the man and the messenger, the messenger enthused over a discussion of corrupt activities as exhibited by public officers thus:

“But you know our Ghana.”

“Ah yes.”

And everybody says the Ghana lottery is more Ghanaian than Ghana (19).

When Armah says that the Ghana lottery is more Ghanaian than Ghana he alludes to the rife nature of corruption among the lottery staff whom he considers more corrupt than other segments of the country. In the case of government officials, Armah sees them as greedy men who manipulate their positions not for the benefit of people but for the spoils of office. These new leaders are the mystical children of the departed colonialists who continue the exploitation of the common people on behalf of themselves and their principles. Koomson is the ideal envoy of this group. He drives the best cars, attends the best parties, wears the most expensive clothes and goes home with the best women, and all these are paid “for by the government” (90).

The situation is enhanced by the fact that every member of the society has accepted the current situation as the normal state of affairs. This is reflected in the attitude of the messenger who won a lottery and smiles in the “embarrassed way of a young girl confessing love” (18) despite knowing that he may not be paid, or that he must have to part with a big hunk of the prize money he won at several levels of the lottery stage. Thus, there is no sense of revolt at what is happening, this is a reflection of the magnitude of corruption in post-independence Ghana ( “*Ayi Kwei Armah and the Significance of His Novels and Histories.*” N.p. n.d. Web. 30 April 2015.)

Jomo Kenyatta in his *Suffering Without Bitterness* (1968), validates the aspirations and cravings of the Kenyan people from the Mau Mau war:

Our march to freedom has been long and difficult. There have been times of despair, when only the burning conviction of the rightness of our cause has sustained us. Today, the tragedies and misunderstandings of the past are behind us. Today, we start on the great adventure of building the Kenya nation (212).

However, several years later, these aspirations of the people have still not been met. The pervading socio-political climate is inundated with disillusionment and lack of fulfilment. The hard-gotten independence has turned a curse, because the majority of Kenyan

peasants still live in a state of poverty. The life of the urban poor is made worse by appalling housing conditions and poor urban services. The Kenyan police force is rated one of the most corrupt forces in the world.

In Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* (1973), the theme of post-independence profligacy becomes a metaphor for neo-colonial African nations, which are impeded with displacement, disillusionment, despair and deficiency. Underscored in the novel is an echo of the distressing reality of the masses in the neo-colonial society (Ayo Kevin, 2004). Kenya, the fictional society of the text, has been ensnared since 1963 in the crucible of agony, poverty, dehumanisation and starvation.

Mwangi's thematic focus centres on the rendering of the terrifying, the painful, and a common insistence on post-independence disillusionment. He bares his society's filth, decay, deficiencies and conflicts with a view to presenting a true picture of it. His excremental vision of the society is similar to that of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969). The novel gives a supercilious criticism of the failure of the new state to provide opportunities for the youths.

Life for the commonalities symbolized by Meja and Maina is a living hell branded by extreme poverty, fear, crimes, drought, hunger, unemployment and a very limited horizon, since there is little chance of upward mobility. People have to live in this environment of indifference, psychological catastrophe, like obsession, criminality, kleptomania, and the like (Ayo Kehinde, 2004). In *Going Down River Road* (1976), Mwangi probes deeper into the effect of the city's environment on individuals in the city. He does this with the illiterate and semi-literate of the society, who live from hand to mouth and who are largely in the majority who provide cheap labour to the society

Mwangi does this through a representative character, Ben, who bears the encumbrance of the city, its harsh realities, cold ethics and its fierce, almost brutal fight for survival. Ben's dismissal from the army for selling weapons to armed robbers is a likeness of the rot in the Kenyan society. The society was refuted of values as no one is concerned with inquiring about other people's sources of wealth. The resources of the country were therefore being plundered by the privileged ruling class and their cohorts. In answer to Ocholla's comment that he should have known better than to trust gangsters, Ben proclaims,

Nothing was impossible in those days. Everybody was scrambling for big money, and no one cared how you made it. You could have sold the whole goddam country to eager buyers; a lot of those guys in the big cars on the avenue did just that. I was a poor salesman. (Mwangi, 1973:54)

It thus becomes obvious that corruption was the fastest means of wealth. Majority of the trapped members of the Kenyan society therefore, had a dejected future and resorted to prostitution, crime or simply drowned themselves in a very potent locally brewed alcoholic drink called "Kill Me Quick", to mask their frustration.

In May 1965, a Nigerian poet, Christopher Okigbo began the sequences of poems he called "*Path of Thunder*", which records the hallmarks of the tragic events that led to the Nigerian civil war. Okigbo was greatly disillusioned by the intensification of violence, lawlessness, and corruption that made sustaining a stable civil state increasingly difficult. He recognized the avant-garde nature of the events flouncing through the country, as well as the risks that formed integral part of such events for, a revolution. It had become obvious that the stages of veiled elucidation had come to an end and the stage was set for a blunt address of the state of the nation. (Obiechina, 1990)

In '*Come Thunder*', written in December 1965, when the state of violence had reached its peak in Nigeria, Okigbo makes his final prophecy, which was to be fulfilled to the punctilious detail by the events that eventually led to the civil war. He writes:

Now that the triumphant march has entered the last street corners,

Remember, O dancers, the thunder among the clouds...

Now that laughter, broken in two, hangs tremulous between the teeth,

Remember, O dancers, the lightning beyond the earth... ()

The dancers referred to here are the politicians, the corrupt civil servants, and the exploiting classes smothering the bright prospect of independence. Who shoved their country over the sheer drop into appalling violence and civic mayhem. This tragedy, eventually led to the civil war, as predicted by Christopher Okigbo. This war was caused by the attempted secession of the Eastern Nigeria to proclaim itself a Republic of Biafra. This secession stage-managed by the Eastern region's Military governor, Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Ojukwu. (Obiechina: 20)

Giving the gravity of events in Nigeria since independence, the collapse of positivity is fathomable, as well as the feeling of guilt and self-reproach among writers that they had not provided enough warning. History has always been the scaffolding of Nigerian poetry Since the 1990s, and it is worthy to note that poets have often been first-hand witnesses of the political turbulence experience in Nigeria.

While reading these poets, one discovers that in spite of their rebuke of Nigeria's profligacy, their anger and disillusionment are directed at bankrupt leadership. Language of their poetry evinces hope which foregrounds their reformative mood. As a result, they are conscious of the significance of history, which has made it even more imperative for them to engage it in their craft. Their

appropriation of history is not intended to catalogue the nation's woes as a compendium of past events. Rather, they vivify history for the people to know how the nation got to this dismal state (Emmanuel Obiechina, *The Writer and His Community in Contemporary Nigerian Society* ' 1998:1-9.), to affirm Achebe's words 'to know where the rain began to beat us'. (Achebe, 1979)

All notable poets who have been writing since the 1990s have had to contend with the problem of disillusionment in their poetry. The tension, socio-economic and political, the insensitivity of ailed and corrupt leadership, the despair arising from dashed hopes, the perennial retrogression dogging the polity are all articulated in their poetry. While recreating the nation's unenviable history and the disillusionment it has fostered, the poets also strive to recreate alternative ways that can help in reclaiming the initiative for the nation's rebirth (Obiechina, 1998).

The twists and turns of the nation's socio-economic and political trajectory have been acknowledged by the writers to be the primary cause of disillusionment in the country. Nigerian political and sophisticated elites use the various institutional structures to enrich themselves rather than use them in the interest of the state. Most often, these political elites have the best of education which they have turned into an instrument of exploitation of the masses.

Niyi Akingbe in his 'Rhapsodizing the Morass of Despair in Esiaba Irobi's *Inflorescence and Cotyledons* (2014)' examines how Irobi's poetics have articulated Nigeria's unfulfilled dreams and the shenanigans of its political leadership that has constantly prevented it from aspiring to a greater heights. He further intensifies his argument with Gerhard Wendler's quote. Wendler (1988):

"The discovery of oil in Nigeria has presented a paradox. In spite of the huge income which Nigeria and the oil companies receive out of oil sales, Nigerians

not only remain poor but are becoming poorer every day. The enormous wealth is distributed among the government, the oil companies and a handful of individuals” (p. v).

To Gerhard, the discovery of oil in Nigeria has little or no positive impact on her citizens. A country as blessed as Nigeria is expected to have developed tremendously and her citizens are not expected to live below the standard. But in reality, Nigeria despite her huge oil revenue is ranked a third world nation with an alarming fraction of her citizens living in poverty below the average 1USD standard of living. The poverty stemming from the country’s undeniable failure has unceasingly bred anger, hostility and spleen from Nigerians who have suddenly discovered that Nigeria makes huge sales from its crude but which does not reflect in their lives.

Hence, most Nigerian oil bearing communities have decided to object this policy of marginality that does not benefit them. This protest is gradually degenerating into constant calls for the detachment of Nigeria along the tribal precincts.

Esiaba Irobi’s poetry collections: *Inflorescence* (1989), *Why I don’t like Philip Larkin* (2005) and *Cotyledons* (2009) is preoccupied with the analysis of the level of decadence in the Nigerian polity and how it is inherent in the Nigerian socio-political sphere, an eyesore which is perpetrated by the post-independent government administration in conjunction with the social decadence perpetuated by the members of the upper class.

## **2.2 DISCOURSES ON STYLISTICS THEORY**

In order to identify the underlying messages hidden between words conveyed in the hearts of various literary techniques that have been woven together to produce an entertaining

yet educative literature, it has become important that we learn to read critically. It is even almost more important that we understand the various voices crying from afar in other languages; and it is just as urgent that we understand the perplexing horde of voices speaking in our own culture.

The English word “criticism” derives from the ancient Greek term “krites”, meaning “judge.” Perchance the first type of criticism is that which transpires in the process of poetic creation itself. In composing poetry, a poet would have made certain “judgments” about the themes and techniques to be used, about what the audience was likely to approve, and about her own relationship to her predecessors in the oral or literary tradition. Hence, the creative act itself is also a critical act, connecting not just inspiration but some kind of self-assessment, reflection, and judgment.

The concept of style has had a troubled history in the modern period both within and outside literary study. It has universally been argued that we use the term ‘style’ without knowing its meaning. According to Leech (1969) “style is the way in which something is spoken, written or performed” Narrowly interpreted, it refers to word use, sentence structures and figures of speech. More broadly, style is considered to be a manifestation of the person speaking or writing. He further refers to ‘style’ as *elocutio* a latin term which means style and also means *lexis* in Greek. *Elocutio* is the style and diction of a language (Leech, 1969)

The discipline of stylistics has several relations and lineages, these include obvious close relations in literary criticism and critical theory, theoretical and applied linguistics, psychology and sociology. However, it also has more distant relations in ancient Greek, Roman, Arabic and Indian rhetoric. (Turner, 1975)

Stylistics can be traced to the formalist tradition that developed in Russian literary

criticism at the turn of the twentieth

century, particularly in the work of the Moscow Linguistic Circle. Its most famous member and the most well-known exponent of Russian Formalism was Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) whose work focused on defining the qualities of what he termed 'poetic language'. Jakobson's work was to have tremendous influence on the development of stylistics, not least as a result of his varied academic career and the opportunities it afforded for the cross-fertilisation of ideas. Following Jakobson's emigration to Czechoslovakia in 1920, he began collaborating with Czech literary scholars such as Jan Mukařovský (1891-1975), establishing the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1926 (Habib, 2005)

More recently, stylistics in its current form emerged alongside the development of modern linguistics across the twentieth century. Modern linguistics separated out the underlying principles and structures of language (our competence) from the actual surface utterance coming out of our mouth or the writing appearing on paper or screen (our performance). One branch of theoretical linguistics set out to discover the deep structure principles of competence, and another branch of linguistics aimed to explore the functional, dialectal and idiosyncratic uses of performance in the world – stylistics developed from this latter direction (Habib, 2005).

Most linguists and main literary critics, particularly those who are not resistant to the rapidly growing influence of modern linguistics on literary studies, would readily accept the generally acknowledged definition as Turner (1975:7) writes: "stylistics is that part of linguistics which concentrates on variation in the most conscious and complex uses of language in literature". Thus, we can say that stylistics means the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation which offers an area of contact between literary criticism and linguistics.

On the other hand, Hendricks (1974:4) refuses to regard the application of linguistics to literature as something included within the field of applied linguistics, he proposes, instead, the term "stylolinguistics" to mean " ...the study of convariation between linguistic and literary phenomena." no matter whether we call it "stylistics", "stylolinguistics" or "linguistic stylistics ", all of these disciplines function in the same way and have a particular quality in common. Ullmann (1957:23) account that "The tasks of stylistics are primary descriptive" This statement suggests that stylistics is one of the descriptive ways which can never become a fully understood method of literary criticism.

Halliday (1964), one of the most popular stylistician defines stylistics or 'linguistic stylistics' as follows:

the description of literary texts, by methods derived from general linguistic theory, using the categories of the description of the language as a whole; and the comparison of each text with others by the same and by different authors in the same and in different genres. (*The linguistic sciences and language teaching 1964:5*)

Furthermore, stylistics is simply defined as the linguistic study of style. By 'linguistic', we mean the application of linguistic theories, and 'style' denotes the linguistic strategies used by the author to convey the semantic import in a literary text. In fact, the function of stylistics is to act as means of linking the two disciplines: linguistics and literary criticism. Since stylistics is neither pure linguistics nor total literary criticism, a stylistician is, thus, intended to act as a linguist and as a literary critic as well. To link both, the job of the linguist and that of the literary critic, stylistics emerges as a connective means to demonstrate how the linguistic elements act significantly in a text to produce a communicable message.

The function of stylistics is to help the reader elicit, the significance of a literary text by analysing the interrelations between its linguistic items. In fact, the question of the nature of stylistics, and its position among the various disciplines, its scope and its limits have aroused considerable discussion. The term "stylistics" can apply to various kinds of linguistic analysis.

Of course, stylistics has attracted criticism from several sides. From the perspective of pure linguistics, the analysis of literature and literary reading involves too much subjective interpretation for comfort. From the perspective of literary criticism, the analysis of literary texts as data feels uncomfortable. However, these are matters which can be addressed by paying attention to the careful methods involved in stylistics: dealing directly with interpretation as a matter of language processing; dealing directly with literary value as a consequence of prestigious styles (Widdowson, 1975)

Stylistics has been criticised for being too formalistic. That is, for focusing on particular linguistic features while ignoring the essential elements of cultural value, or higher level matters such as theme, interpretation or significance. This might have been true in the past, though even the so-called Russian Formalists of the 1920s were never completely blind to context and setting. However, contemporary stylisticians now have the means of discussing these matters of culture, value and interpretation, as outlined above. Stylistics is nowhere near as formalist as literary critics in general think (Oloruntoba-oju , 1999).

Stylistics has also been criticised for being ahistorical in nature hence, the stylistic choices explored in a text are measured against our own meanings, rather than against historically contemporaneous meanings. Again, this was possibly true in the past, but recent stylistic work has also explored the choices that are apparent in archived versions of manuscripts. So stylistics is perfectly capable of operating in the service of historicism, when

appropriate. Stylistics has been criticised for focusing on meaning, rather than feeling, value or significance. It is probably true that the tools of linguistic analysis from phonetics to syntax and semantics encourage an emphasis on denotation rather than sensation, local meaning rather than social and cultural meaning. (Habib, 2005:356).

Linguists view style as a linguistic phenomenon and hence they centre their analyses of literary texts on the language in terms of sounds, lexis and syntax. In addition, the linguistic premise, correspondingly, disregards any non-linguistic definitions that define style as a 'shell surrounding a pre-existing core of thought or expression,' or style as reflection of one's ideas and feelings as in Buffon's aphorism 'style is the man himself' ('le style est l'homme même'). (Habib, 2005: 356).

In contrast, critics hold an antithetical opinion disapproving of linguistic description per se. Rather, they emphasise on other aspects, like value, purpose and aesthetics and other general theories of literary criticism. Critics also pay attention to the intuitively impressionistic response of the critic or the reader, which he extracts from the aesthetic function and other external factors such as the historical, biographical or socio-cultural implications, which are outside the text.

The split between these two schools is the result of two different positions in the study of literary style: the French *stylistique* pioneered by Charles Bally and the German *stilforschung* represented by Leo Spitzer. The former delineates the characteristic features of the text by its powerful descriptive techniques; the latter is writer-centred set toward sensing the soul of the text through the subjective, intuitive reflections gained from the text and so offers personal, interpretive accounts. In effect, the French *stylistique* is closer to linguistic criticism (linguistic stylistics) as its focus is on the properties of the text whereas the German

stilforschung is closer to literary criticism (literary stylistics) as style is viewed as revealing the soul of the writer. (M. H. R Habib, 2005: 357)

As we have seen, the notion of stylistics as a discipline has been a question of dispute over a period of time. Several conferences on stylistics were held to bring such a dispute to terms. Of these academic circles ‘the Indiana conference’ (1958) stands the most valuable in making groundings for the development of modern stylistics as an interdisciplinary field. It is ‘interdisciplinary’ in a way that it draws tools and concepts from linguistic and literary theories. In his significant contribution to assuage and contain the conflict bet

## **2.3 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has been a survey of the history of absurdity in Literature as well as an extensive trace of disillusionment in African literature. It has further examined the factors that birthed disillusionment and protest as motivated by the age of neo-colonialism and post-independence Africa.

This chapter has also reviewed the works several African authors who have of commented on the factors that birthed disillusionment. In this chapter, we have also examined Akingbe’s paper on Esiaba Irobi’s poetry in line with the focus of this research. The next chapter will focus on the justification of the theory selected for this research.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

The preceding chapter has been concerned with reviewing extant literature related to this study and this chapter presents the theoretical framework of this research. This chapter

will explain the theoretical underpinnings of the critical approach adopted for carrying out this research and provide a detailed account of the critical approach as well as justification for choosing the approach.

### **3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The literary theory known as stylistics theory has been chosen as the framework for this research. Stylistics occupies the middle ground between linguistics and literary criticism and its function is to mediate between the two. In this role, its concerns necessarily overlap with those of the two disciplines. It is for this reason that stylistic analysis tilt unnoticeably into literary appreciation. Therefore, literary analysis seeks the assistance of stylistic analysis which is of a complementary nature to it.

Carrying out a stylistic analysis can settle many knotty problems in literature. for example, a Writer's use of language, if studied carefully, can reveal her aesthetic personality, her deep laid philosophy and world view perhaps far more accurately than any study of her background and the literary movement she subscribes to.

Style is a primary aspect of any literary piece of writing. It gives unique recognition to the writer. The idea or thing discussed by many other writers, by using stylistic devices and dignified style a writer presents the same idea or thing with new colour, meanings and dimensions. Therefore style is the basic thing which gives uniqueness to every writer. The word stylistics is derived from style.

Stylistics is a branch of Linguistics which deals with different styles. It refers to the study of appropriate use of words or language in a sentence or writing. Haynes (1989) is of

the view that the study of style is the study of distinctions; looking at what was said against what might have been said. Style can also be called as variety. In various contexts, style refers as the manner of expression. Due to multipurpose field of style, it is used according to one's field of study.

Adejare (1992) makes this clear when he said that style is an ambiguous term. He added that it involves the narrative technique of a writer in terms of choice and distribution of words and character. The general meaning of style is 'manner or mode' but the literary meaning of style refers to how a writer's thoughts take the shape of words. The style has variety of meanings throughout the history in and outside the literary text. It is observed by many critics that the term style is generally used without knowing its meaning.

According to Leech (1969) style is the way in which something is spoken, written or performed. It refers to use of words, sentences, structures and speaking style. Personality of the writer is connected with his particular style. It reveals that how a person effectively and beautifully depicts his ideas and thoughts. It describes the way of person's speaking and writing. It is derived from the Latin word "elocutio" which means "style" and means "lexis" in Greek.

Leech and Short (1981) opines that it is the selection of the words from a grand linguistic vocabulary. Style is involved in both, spoken and written, literary and non-literary types of language but it is particularly associated with written form of the literary texts.(40) Leech and Short further elaborates that style is the dress of thoughts. It is the way of the writer to convey the message to the readers. It is upon the writer that how he makes his text understandable that the meanings are conveyed. (*Style in Fiction: A linguistic introduction to English Fictional prose*, 1981)

## **3.2 LITERARY STYLISTICS**

Literally stylistics means the study of style and the methods used in written language. Every critic and scholar defines stylistics in his own way. According to Freeman (1971) stylistics is a sub-discipline which started in the second half of the 20th century. According to Leech and Short (1981) stylistics is the linguistic study of style, is rarely undertaken for its own sake, simply as an exercise in describing what use is made of language. According to them the main objective of stylistics is to discover the meanings and appreciate the linguistic characteristics of the text. (*Style in Fiction: A linguistic introduction to English Fictional prose*, 1981)

Short and Candlin (1989) said that stylistics is a linguistic approach to the study of the literary texts. Widdowson (1975) defines stylistics as the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation which differentiates stylistics from the literary criticism and considers linguistics as its linking technique. Carter (1988) has of same view that stylistics is a bridge (link) discipline between linguistics and literature.

Stylistics is the study of those devices used in language such as rhetorical terms and syntactical devices that are used to create expressive or literary style. Therefore, Stylistics is that study which touches both literary criticism as well as linguistics as its morphological structure suggests. According to Widdowson (1975) stylistics expresses means whereas language and Literature are its subjects.

### **3.3 Levels of Stylistic Analysis**

Following are the five levels of stylistics analysis. By using these levels, we analyze any given piece of text.

#### **3.3.1 Phonetic Level:**

It is an analysis of sounds. We often study the features and possible function of sounds in phonetic level.

### **3.3.2 Phonological Level**

Basically this level deals with the study of sound patterns of a given language, rules of pronunciation, the rhyming scheme and utterance of the word in the sentence. Lodge (2009) is of the view that phonology is the study of linguistic systems, specifically the way in which sound represents differences of meaning in a language. Phonological devices are rhyme elements, alliteration, consonance and assonance.

### **3.3.3 Graphological Level**

Crystal and Davy (1969) argue that graphology is the analogous study of a languages writing system or orthography as seen in the various kinds of hand writing or topography. These are the formalized rules of writing. Leech (1969) asserts that graphology exceeds orthography which refers to the whole writing system; punctuation, paragraphing and spacing. In short, it deals with the systematic formation, structure and punctuation in the sentence.

### **3.3.4 Grammatical Level:**

This level of stylistics discusses syntactic and morphological levels. Morphological level deals with the construction of the word by adding prefixes and suffixes to the root words. The main aim of this level is to study and analyze the words, internal structure of

sentences and their formation. To find out foregrounding and the deviation, clauses, phrases, words, nouns and verbs are to be distinguished.

### **3.3.5 Lexico-Syntax Level**

This level of analysis is the group of two dissimilar words, lexis and syntax. The term lexis means the vocabulary used in a language or in any writing for any purpose. Syntax means sentence construction, how words combine together to make phrases and sentences. So, it is used in the construction of the sentence as stylistics is used in literary style. Lexical patterns may be obtained through various means which include unusual or inverted word order, omission of words and repetition. According to Tallerman (1998) Lexico-Syntactic choices are obtained through devices such as piling of usual collocates, unusual collocates, archaic words, particular parts of speech, metaphor, simile, oxymoron etc.

## **3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section is the research methodology for this study. This study is qualitative in nature and there are various definitions of qualitative research. Jupp (2006) defines qualitative research as a “research that investigates aspects of social life which are not amenable to quantitative measurement.” This study therefore does not rely on quantitative presentation of research findings but that the researcher interprets the meaning of the data collected and presents it in argumentative form. It is apparent from the definition cited above that qualitative research is concerned with meanings and interpretation of social phenomena.

This study therefore revolves around reading and critically interpreting Irobi’s poetry. Jupp (2006:249) emphasizes that qualitative research is often based upon ‘interpretivism’,

constructivism and ‘inductivism’. It is concerned to expose the subjective meanings through which people interpret the world, the different ways in which reality is constructed; through language, images and history, in particular contexts.

#### **3.4.1 PRIMARY SOURCES OF DATA**

For the purposes of this research, the primary sources of data are three poetry anthologies by Esiaba Irobi namely *Inflorescence (1989)*, *Why I don't like Philip Larkin (2005)* and *Cotyledons (2009)*. The selected anthologies are the primary sources of information in that disillusionment and absurdity is evident in the selected poetry anthologies.

#### **3.4.2 SECONDARY SOURCES OF DATA**

In this study, the secondary sources consist of critical works which are related to the present inquiry. These include books, journals, newspapers as well as online data sources. Secondary sources are valuable to the present researcher because ideas in these secondary sources are insightful to the study. Critical works on African literature help to sustain and validate the arguments raised in the present study.

Works by such African literary giants as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Soyinka Wole, Okigbo Christopher, Jomo Kenyatta, Ali A. Mazrui, among many others, provide important insights to the present study. Journals are also an important source of data for this research. The researcher referred to several journal articles on literary studies to substantiate

arguments raised in the thesis. Furthermore, reference is also made to other literary genres such as novels to enrich and widen the scope of the study.

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has discussed the theoretical framework and methodology used in this study. It has been observed that stylistics theory is an appropriate theory. The chapter has identified and explained stylistics as the best theory to discuss disillusionment in post-independence poetry.

The chapter has also discussed the methods of obtaining data for the research. It has been observed that the research is qualitative in nature and the primary sources of data are the selected anthologies. Critical works constitute secondary sources of data for the present research. Secondary sources are used to concretise the arguments raised in the study. Chapter four presents the data analysis and findings

# CHAPTER FOUR

## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a critical interrogation of the selected poetry anthologies namely. It is a contention of this chapter that the language of the poet whose poetry is under study is disillusioned and indicates absurdity. The chapter does not intend to discuss each and every poem in the selected anthologies but only those that are relevant to this research.

## 4.1 ANALYSIS

Esiaba Irobi had a boundless affection for words. He was a strong believer in the infinite ability of words to make meaning and he was generous with his words, using them jubilantly even in the determination of subject titles. He stretched the meanings of these words, or simply gave them new meanings, deploying them not merely as tools of his trade, and also as weapons of war. Rage was a significant element in his poetry rage against oppressive orders and all social constructs representing belief systems and thought processes he found repugnant to his free living and truth telling sensibilities (Diala, 2014)

### 4.1.1 *Cotyledons*: 'LONDON'

London is a poem woven around deviation, disillusionment, absurdity and the subject of exile. The poet begins with the description of London, the capital of England, as an industrialized city where the cold winter blows through the nook and corner of the city. The city reminds the persona of the lack of development and total blackout that characterized his home country as power supply is never an issue in London where he is exiled as this equally makes the city lively.

Further, all the glitz, allure and beauty that the city of London are soon lost out as the reality of loss, deprivation, oppression, squalor and sense of despair grip him, making

him disillusioned and distraught in an exiled land where life should be more than comfortable as he it is captured here:

The pain of those you left behind  
Squawk in the wings of your mind  
Like the pigeons of picadilly

As London glints in the white night  
Like a beautiful ship (General Belgrano)  
Sliding into the deep blue sea

“Exile does the beauty of England  
Make you sad?”  
“Not at all. It only reminds me Ireland  
Falklands and my own land. (P.8-9)

The beauty of London is a sharp contrast to the decay and lack that are the bane of the poet's homeland and the more difference he is able to conjure, the deeper his despair becomes. Moving to London has not really given the needed respite to overcome the pains and disappointment that defined his homeland. Despair and bitterness seem to be following him everywhere as London could only provide him with the mirror of seeing the rot, alienation and oppression that are prevalent in his own country instead of total escape from the horrors of the past.

How it tears at the nipples of your presence  
To see in a foreign land  
Through the gass windows of a jewelry shop  
The molten faces of our brothers  
Whose greed and roguery brought you here

Brought you here to claw at an alien earth  
Like a crab uprooted by the tide  
A candle crying in the wind  
A fish swimming in the dessert  
An exile. Do you know now... (P.9-10)

Again, this poem is used as an avenue to protest against the greed, avarice and destructive nature of Nigerian leaders whose leadership style and lust for power and wealth has contributed in no little way to the devastating state of the poet and other citizen who find themselves living in exile as their home countries could not offer them happiness and the comfortable lives they deserve.

Stylistically, 'London' is a poem where Language, most especially conversational and colloquial ones are not just put to best use by the poet but they are also deliberately manipulated and deviated from norms of language usage to emphasis the tone and thematic concerns of the poem. Expressions such as 'maikontry' which literarily means my country, 'bakerloo', a pun and parody of Waterloo, 'tatoon bee' and 'lifeless life' are examples visible in this poem.

Again, the poet uses monologue and sarcastic tone to give effect to his militant and protesting voice against the dictators and looters of the people's commonwealth back home. He also deployed the use of cussing words and dry humour to vent his frustration, sense of alienation and despair as demonstrated:

My distant shore is full of selfish fishermen  
Who sing as they draw their costly nets  
Filled with bodies of drowning children.

The exile begins to weep when he remembers  
His country, serrated by the dividing sword  
Remembers his country: Mary the mother, without the halo,  
With breast of lead and concrete  
Dripping the congealed milk in U.

P.

E.

I left a life behind. A lifeless life,  
A life I never love to live again. (P.12)

In all, Irobi's 'London' presents us with the panoramas of psychological struggle and crises of loss that characterize the life of those living in exile and he achieves this through the use of unconventional and experimental poetic style.

#### **4.1.2: *Cotyledons*: 'THE SAHEL SAVANAH'**

In this poem, figurative language and the use of monologue and engaging conversation are deployed to describe the political and social landscape of Nigeria and the effects they have on the psychological well-being of the poet. The political landscape is described as an empty and bare sphere where 'beasts' and 'scavengers' feed freely on carcasses. The poet here uses 'The Sahel Savannah' as a metaphor of the high handedness, greed, looting and embezzlement of public fund that characterized military rule in Nigeria.

The military rulers are described as 'scavenger of sandhurst' (34) with molars capable of tearing the country like flesh. His choice of sahel Savanah is a linguistics device deployed to bring to the fore the lack, want, hardship and emotional pains of the ruled who are made to tolerate life in a 'brown landscape spreads out like carcass of a desert trampled by camels. Rusting with dust tufts of elephant's grasses' (35)

Further, glooming pictures of how those in power massacre maim and killed innocent citizens like criminals on the platter of politics, ethnicity and activism are painted by the poet to express his state of disillusion about the state of affairs in his home country and to also express his anger towards the rulers:

On our right. Remember? Ha-ha-ha-ha- how  
The peasants were put in an Indian file  
And machine-gunned like coup plotters.  
But the blood has dried. The dust has settled  
And the millets are in bloom again...”

No, compatriot, the dust has not fully settled.  
As you prowl, it whirls, after each step,  
Into a sandstorm, churning and turning  
Until it spirals into an inferno of pebbles  
And stones and, compatriot, empties itself into your  
Eyes like a revolution!

Aside his anger in the above line, the poet persona is quick to point out that the dust of the countless injustice and brutality melted to some section of the country is not yet settled and neither can the series of blood bath he has seen weaken his militant voice or silence his resolve to keep fighting oppression in his country as the dry Sahel Savanah which he refers his country as is still capable of producing cotyledons and millet (activist and human right crusader) despite the continuous onslaught.

The poet concludes in the end that most of descriptions he makes and impressions he has about his home country do not stem from blind hatred or anger, but through painful experience of many years that have disfigured his mind and he concludes this way:

Okri, I am at Heart, a poet

Of pleasant places and green pastures  
(Study my voice for signs of change)  
I am the sparrow in the meadow.  
These landscapes I paint are the terrains  
Of a mind disfigured by pain..

The highly absurd words such as scavengers, beasts, hyenas are used as metaphors to depict the military rulers in Nigeria and their regime as disgraceful and absurd, while the bare and naked landscape painted in the pain disfigured mind of the poet persona represent the ugly and daily bitter experience of the common man who is treated like carcass and prey by their rulers. To equally show that all hope is not lost despite the grim pictures painted, the poet shows some ray of hope by carefully selecting words such as sparrow in the meadow, cotyledons, cactus and millets in boom again as metaphor for activism, voices and ray of hope in the midst of hopelessness.

#### **4.1.3: *Cotyledons*: ‘The Valley’**

This poem is symbolic in many ways. Irobi in this poem presents the readers with two worlds where dreams and aspiration could either be stifled or flourish depending on the sides of the valley you find yourself by using “valley” as a metaphor for the two words. In the poem the valley is personified as a human capable of yawning like a bean and equally mourning her scattered seeds.

The underlying meaning in this opening is the valley described as a country where most of her citizens are unsettled, most have been forced to exile or taken side with the destructive military. This is concealed in the use of figurative language such as: ‘yawn like an

–bean pod’ (43), personification: mourning her scattered seeds. The seeds in the poem are also used to represent the poet persona country’s citizens who are scattered abroad as fugitives, asylum seekers, seekers of greener pastures and exiles. An attempt to relate the subject of exile and political instability to the images and language created by the poet may appear strange on the surface, yet, it is one of the styles adopted by the poet in depicting some of the absurdities in his home country and to show how exiles like him have become disillusioned and distraught about how leaders have repeatedly failed to deliver on their promises of prosperity and liberation consistently.

In similar vein, the ‘Valley’ provides readers with the imagery of a country where creativity and freedom are either defined or imposed on citizens by agents bereft of original ideas and knowledge. The poet refers to this set of people as ‘bald hills whose hairs are combed by the wind’ and this the poet considers to be absurd since a country is supposed to be a sphere where people aspire, dream and work in pursuit of happiness without any limitation:

To live in this valley  
Is to see the horizon  
Through the armpit of these hills. (P.43)

On the contrary, the poem is able to present readers with some positive as he paints pictures of other “valleys within”, which can be likened to the human mind or other countries where people can dream freely, express their creativity, enjoy love and happiness without any hindrance.

In describing this new landscape, the poet employs the use of metaphor and symbols to depict people and situations. For instance, writers, artists and inventors are likened to ‘young spider capable of weaving kingdoms’(43), which symbolically refers to inventions and feats in atmosphere of unity and camaraderie which he likened to ‘Trapping sunlight with thread of love’ (43). Again, the young at heart are described as tender cotyledons that do not

have to face the future or express themselves with fear of favour or criticism because ‘they will not sing with trembling blades’ (43)

On a final note, the poem concludes by alluding to Eliot’s popular poem “Waste Land” and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* that belong to the absurd genre to provide reason for the poor state of affairs and shape of things in his country. In this regard, the poet once again succeeds in using language replete with vivid imageries, metaphor, simile and the use of a conversational tone such as his conversation with a masked Funsho to give intensity to his frustration and showcase the absurdities in his country which he poetically refers to as “Valley”.

#### **4.2.4: *Inflorescence*: ‘Sandhurst’**

‘Sandhurst’ is another of Irobi’s poem in which the abuse of power, oppression and military brutality are brought to the fore. The use of veiled expressions, grotesque descriptions of scenes and the megalomaniac syndrome that characterizes military rule in Nigeria are evident in this poem. Using very strong adjectives and imagery, the persona describes Sandhurst; a pseudo name that originally serves as the highest military institution in Britain, where most senior cadres of colonial Nigerian army officers were trained in the art of military strategy. Irobi employs it as a metaphor of oppression in the poem. Hence, the ‘beauty of a beast’ that instils fear and anxiety in the minds of the citizens.

Owing to the numerous draconian decrees that emanate from the Nigerian military, the expression ‘beauty of a beast’ is used by the poet to give effect and intensity to the brutal nature of military rule and to put paid to the lies that their concerned posture and grandeur of Dodan Barracks are veiling:

Sandhurst,  
Your beauty is the beauty  
Of a beast...  
Behind your gates of steel  
The mind of a continent creaks and wheels  
Like the blades of a windmill. (13)

In the lines quoted above it is obvious from the poet choice of words that many atrocities are perpetrated against innocent civilians on daily basis by soldiers who are described as tigers and other carnivores that feed lustfully on innocent citizens depicted as rabbits and children. Tigers in this poem are portrayed as grazing on a field as another ploy by the poet to show the nature of military by substituting the word grazing for tearing which tigers are known. This becomes imperative for the poet because military brutality is an unending exercise in the barracks depicted as a camouflage in the poem.

On your windswept lawn  
Fringed with the bones of children  
And the carcass of rabbits,  
Your tigers graze, sniffing  
The scent of blood, until each dawn,  
Beyond these walls,  
In camouflage lands. (.14)

Furthermore, the poet resorts to the use of paradox to further bring to light the killings and brutality that has become the trademark of military rule in his country by addressing Sandhurst, the seat of military power as a person and reminding it of its numerous dastardly acts and such as contributed in no little way making the future uncertain and bleak for the citizenry. In this wise, the landscape on which military brutality holds sway is described as

‘Sahel Savanah’, a dry vast land that houses carnivorous animals that feed on carcasses. This in a way indicates the poet's adept use of highly symbolic language to show the painful experience the ruled go through in the hands of the ruler during the military era in Nigeria's politics.

Again, absurdity of language use is brought into the poem towards the last stanza to further enhance the quality of the poem and give it aesthetic effects. For examples, the “trampled”, this is the oppressed” tremble with rage “and the description where the carnivores are “shoveling sand into the eyes of the future” shows how the poet makes good use of conceit, concealed imageries and paradox in exposing and condemning military brutality.

Sandhurst, your carnivores  
Have paced the desert step by step, shovelling  
Sand into the eyes of the future.  
The future blinks. It rusts. It flickers  
Like the eyelids of your lunatics. Yet, the ginseng  
On these trampled fields tremble with rage  
Resisting the whirlwind's assault. (14)

#### **4.2.5: *Why I Don't Like Philip Larkin and Other Poems: “The Rhinoceros”***

Evident in this poem is the adoption of an absent but familiar person as the addressee, a known historical figure Enoch Powell, the former British Prime Minister. Humour is the effective vehicle of delivery for Irobi's sarcasm or mockery and this sense of creative ease is evident all through the emphatic violence of language in the poems of this collection, as in the poem, “The Rhinoceros”, dedicated to former British minister, Enoch Powell:

I am the black rhino. My eyes are fierce,  
My hide is coarse, my breath is poisonous.  
My tusks are cleavers, short and sharp,  
Forever smeared with blood. I feed on brains  
And bone marrow and fresh ovaries and  
And hot semen, and you guessed it right:  
Human genitalia! I'll eat your balls tonight! (3)

Enoch Powell was notorious for his fierce public and racial antagonism towards the ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom. The issues in Black Rhino are serious. Irobi uses the poem to comment on the racial situations in the United Kingdom. The comical delivery is intended to engage the attention but not distract it from these serious issues. The purposive self-abnegation by which the poet-persona is identified is delivered with a macabre sense of humour. Its rage is unmistakable even as the character seems to exult in being exactly the nightmare white supremacist prejudice asserts that he is as a racial other. This deliberate 'beastification' of the self is also particularly effective in this poem as it intentionally invalidates and violates the sense of decorum and notions of civility and beauty preferred by the addressee and other like-minded reactionaries:

My turd is made of warts and wattle.

My brain is made of dung. I stamp the mud.

When I fart, language dies in your mouth. (Irobi, 2005, pp. 3)

Irobi uses this poem to comment on the issue of racial segregation and injustice in societies around the world. He likens the black race to a rhino, a strong animal. To him, the black race has been empowered with a voice and an identity that comes with pride. He boasts of this voice, the strength and ability of the Rhino. The Rhinoceros is a dark poem even with all its humour, although, its rage is deployed towards a positive conclusion:

I am the black rhino. I will never be a statistic. (Irobi, 2005, pp. 3)

#### **4.1.6 *Why I Don't Like Philip Larkin and Other Poems: "Horizons! Horizons!"***

The key elements of this poem are the conversational tone effected by long, flowing discursive passages, his frequent direct references to the reader as well as Georgina an ex-lover who he dedicates the poem to as a participant observer. This poem is a recap of the history of Irobi's exile. In the first line, "HISTORY, FOR ALL EXILES, begins with a flight! Georgina," (82) the poet introduces the subject matter of the poem by using capitalization to lay emphasis on the words 'history and exile'. Irobi tells the story of how he became disillusioned with the hopelessness and degenerative state of his country and how he was forced into exile. He employs satire to criticise Muritala Mohammed airport, Lagos by deviating from the original spelling of the name to "Mortal Mohammed airport" intentionally to criticise the deplorable state of the airport which is a metaphor of the economical state of the country.

He goes on to recount the basis of the state of the country by outlining the factors responsible for the Nigerian problem.

"History had a hand in it. The tyrants had a hand in it" (82)

History as used in this line is a metaphor of the Nigerian colonial history and the aftermath of their shenanigans while the tyrants as used in this line is a metaphor for the military personnel, the academicians who abandoned their recourse for political favours and posts;

“... the best minds of successive generations queue in line like flies for positions as commissioners, ministers or ambassadors from the spiders of Dodan barracks” (pp.92)

Furthermore, Irobi employs the flashback technique to share his taught on the Biafra war and the how the war informed his person. As a child that was caught in the cross fire, he was exposed to the brutality and menace of war which in turn affected his psyche and a major part of his resentment for his country stemmed from the war. He resents his country as regards the corruption that has eaten deep into the systems of government and has rubbed off on her citizens, this is seen in “...A government of demons by demons and for demons” (86). He further intensifies his resentment by satirizing his countries first national anthem:

“MAICOUNTRY, WE HATE THEE, our own dear fucked-up land  
Through tribe and tongue has differed and in brotherhood  
Of ill we stand...” (91)

The mood and tone of this poem depicts anger and disappointment. Evident in this poem are aggressive words and phrases like: fucking, beasts, scavengers, computerized human beings, uniformed apes, the sweepings of our society, bastards, fuhers. These words and phrases suggest anger and bring to the fore the state of disillusionment, depicting Irobi’s state of mind towards the Nigerian state as a causal effect of the military brutality he experienced which eventually led to his exile and renouncement of his country, affiliating himself as a citizen of the self-acclaimed Republic of Biafra.

## 4.2 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have been able to critically analysis the data selected for this research. We have also been able to identify the linguistic elements he employs to convey his thoughts. In the next chapter, we will summarize and conclude the research.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## 5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes this research. It encompasses a summary of the research findings and recommendations.

## 5.1 RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

As it has been established that writers do not write in isolation, they treat themes that are universal and they address pressing human issues, therefore, Irobi does not write in isolation when he criticizes the political situation of Nigeria living in exile. Injustice for example is a universal phenomenon. Hence, Irobi sees the need to address injustice regardless of cultural boundaries. This attests to the reason why he uses his poetry to address issues in societies like Kenya, Nigeria mostly and every other country he chooses. It is in this sense that a writer becomes more than a wordsmith, he becomes a social activist when his writing counters injustice and social instability in any part of the world.

Through Irobi language, we are introduced to an angry and irritated person who does not relent to satirize the factors and elements responsible for Nigeria's decadence. He likens the Nigeria situation to a nation trapped in a cyclical motion of development. This research has been able to analyse the language employed by Irobi to portray his disillusionment with the socio-economic situation of Nigeria.

Going down history lane, corruption in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial era. After the country gained her independence, her citizens were filled with hope and expectancy that their fellow countrymen at the mantle of power has been handed over to, will right the wrongs of the colonial masters. Instead of measuring up to the aspiration and expectations of their people, the ruling class stepped into the shoes of the colonial masters by using their offices to enrich themselves other than to build up the country.

Irobi believes that the military intervention in Nigeria's political history further contributes to the degenerative state of the country. As indicated in this study, Irobi's indictment of the military can still be observed in the current Nigerian situation, in that power is still vested in the same set of people that held it as far back as the 1980s. They keep coming back with the same manifesto. This keeps the nation in rot, limiting the development of the country.

To Irobi, this is a display of absurdity as the country keeps running in circles like a rolling stone that gathers no moss. He sees this situation as absurd, like Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* who live their lives by reliving the past with no significant progress; the Nigerian nation is trapped in the same web of absurdity.

Although, the military argues that it intervened in the political scene to purge the nation of her corrupt leaders whereas it uses its position to harass and abuse the civilians as well as anyone who dares to challenge them. Irobi's condemnation of the excesses of Nigeria's military junta compelled him to live in exile. As a result, he renounces Nigeria as his country affiliating himself with the now defunct Republic of Biafra.

To understand his poetry, one must first understand the history of Esiaba Irobi, the political history of Nigeria as well as have a background information on the literature of the absurd. Knowing this background goes a long way in understanding Irobi's poetry as creativity borne out of melange of literary and political variables. Thus, Irobi justifies the claim that a writer should be socially committed to the issues that emanate from his world. Such issues as explicated by Irobi aptly underline disillusionment and absurdity as some of the factors that ferments protest literature. Writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'O and Wole Soyinka have achieved this in the genres of fiction and drama respectively, Irobi's poetry like

Christopher Okigbo's has also joined in the literary tradition of protest literature in contemporary Nigeria.

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