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Folk Literature and Cultural Heritage: The Igbo Example

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Abstract:

The paper presents literature as a mirror of a people in a given speech community. This implies that a particular human society has its literature which exists in preliterate times; we call it folk literature or orature, for short. Folk literature encapsulates the actions and reactions of any social group. The paper argues that literature represents the essence of a people as literature is language at work, language being the arrowhead of culture. In avers that if you want to understand a people, a good place to inquire into is their literature. Besides, it contends that language exists basically in literature. The literary form we recognize as orature showcases the people's world view, which, inter alia, captures their interaction with one another as social group; it reveals their idiolect, value system and folkways. Thus, orature unveils their social and cultural frontiers from the synergy that is implicit in traditional community life from nativity. Indeed, folk literature of a people encases diverse cultural information that portray the totality of their cultural treasures, namely, the technological, the sociological and the ideological facets. This essay insists that we need to excavate and internalize the utilitarian bounties of orature, for these bounties acquaint us with where the rain began to beat us, where we are coming from and where we are going in the stream of time. To ignore cultural bounties of our heritage will amount to throwing a baby away with the bathwater. The paper explores New Historicism as literary and critical bases in its speculations, which, in the opinion of the essayists, will better present the corpus of folk literature as it is presented in this paper than in any previous work that may have been done on the subject matter.

Keywords: *New Historicism, oral literature, society, culture, values*

1. Introduction

Folk or oral literature is as old as the early man, in man's "first attempt to create literature in his escapades and attempts to interact with his fellows."¹ The composition and performance of the oral literary genres exhibit an appreciable degree of artistic characteristics of accurate observation, vivid imagination and indigenous expression.² So, they are generally recognized by the communities that cherish them in the laws of traditionalism, and by their nature, they encompass every aspect of the unwritten culture of a people. In the performance of folktales or folklore, for instance, it is immaterial whether the tales are fictitious or real; what matters is that they capture true life realities.

The oral genres, can generally serve as a mirror of a people's culture in the sense that they serve as teaching materials for acculturation. They are used in the society as means of coating the bitter pills of dogmatic communal training of the moral and personality sensibilities of its members. They are a reliable instrument for transferring the society's values into the subconscious of the young. Whatever we may say of culture applies to folk literature because folk literature is a cultural feature. So, culture, vis-à-vis, folk literature is "a social invention and it may be thought of as social heritage, as it is transmitted by precept to each succeeding generation."³ Commenting further on culture, Ezenwu and his associates cite Tylor, who defines this social construct as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society." Even the folk genres which are performed mainly for entertainment often have much of the society's perspectives to convey.

The social character of the literary work resides, above all, in the fact that an individual can never establish by himself a coherent mental structure corresponding to what is called world view or cosmology. Such a structure can be elaborated only by a group. The individual is capable only of carrying it to a very high degree of coherence and transposing it to the level of imaginary creation, conceptual thought, or other individualized activities. The aesthetic and cultural relevance of the literary genres have been captured in various ways by many scholars in such a way as to prove that African oral tradition is full of folkloric materials from which writers or readers can effectively tap or draw. The oral tradition, which includes the cultural materials, mostly features in the forms of folktales, oral poetry, legend, chants, songs (dirge, elegy, satire, and ballad), and others. Emenyeonu traces the scope of oral literature as it pertains to the Igbo oral genre. According to him,

Igbo oral literature embodies the literary aspects of Igbo Oral Performances such as folksongs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, prayers including incantations, histories, legends, myths, drama, oratory (forensic and otherwise) festivals. From these grow the roots of Igbo life, its culture and its worldview.⁴

The scope of Igbo oral genre is virtually the same with other speech communities of every land and clime. Anyachonkeya's⁵ has unique addition to Igbo oral literature, which Emenyonu's inventory of oral literature has not fully captured includes a classification of folktales, which, according to him, are: oral tales (*akuko ifo*), animal tales, such as Trickster and Aetiological (Why) stories, human tales, and mixed tales (human and animal and or spirits as characters). For instance, as Emenyonu and Anyachonkeya have done, Soyinka (226) traces cognate features of Traditional African literature, especially of the poetics of the Yoruba worldview. Thus, on the poetics of Traditional Africa, Soyinka (226) observes that it is not merely those verses which have found their way into the anthologies and school texts; that it is not merely those lyrics "which because they are favourites at Festivals of the Arts (that are) hunted by anthologies with tape-recorders, (and that) supply the readiest source material for uprooted academics; nor is it restricted solely to the praises of yams and gods, invocations of blessings and evocations of the pristine." Having expanded the scope, Soyinka states that traditional African poetics encompasses all of it and goes further to expound the scope by adding that:

it is however also to be found in the very *technique* of riddles, in the pharmacology of healers, in the utterance of the possessed medium, in the enigmas of diviners, in the liturgy of divine and cultic Mysteries (in addition to the language of their public address systems), in the unique temper of world comprehension that permeates language for the truly immersed – from the Ifa priest to the haggler in the market, inspired perhaps by economic frustration!"⁶

So, the oral genres create in the communities that cherish them a collective consciousness which is neither a primary reality nor an autonomous entity. It is rather elaborated implicitly in the overall behaviour of individuals who participate in the economic, social, cultural and political life. In fact, the socio-cultural features of the literary works are based on the following assumptions:

- Storylines form the root of most literary works.
- Every oral genre has a variation which contains elements (and) which are peculiar to a particular society or culture.
- Oral genres assume that the audience is familiar with tradition, beliefs and cultural norms.
- Particular features are embedded in the culture; so, it is, at times, difficult for audiences outside a particular culture to identify with or immediately understand the meaning and purpose of another people's folk literature.
- Basic themes, even plots are often the same across cultures.

For the fact that the oral genres would always serve as a mirror into the social and cultural features of any community, the need for their consistent in-depth study becomes imperative. Such a study enables us to see the image of the past with which to structure the present and which certainly lasts since it rests on the true nature of the people. It also enables us to see how the inert tendencies, coupled with environmental factors which influence behavior. Therefore, such a study is always useful to the folklorists, historians, sociolinguists, sociologists and, to some extent, social psychologists.

Human beings need to be studied in a socio-cultural context; therefore, a good literary work ought to serve as an image and mirror through which the socio-cultural features of any community may be filtered and taped. People are born into already existing culture and are socialized to function within that cultural ambience. It is, therefore, pertinent that social and institutional appurtenance and content of a culture manifest itself in the way people of any given community think, feel and behave or their entire conduct. For instance, in the tale "The Tortoise and the Dove", the Tortoise is delighted to eat up the whole food which is meant for him and his friend, the Dove. He achieves this by proposing that only the one who can pronounce the name of the food '*akidi*' (specie of beans), is qualified to eat alone. In his celebrated stammer, the poor Dove could not pronounce *akidi* smoothly and quickly, and that offers the Tortoise enough option to eat up the whole food while his friend watches in discomfiture. Naturally, the Dove would not let the Tortoise get away with it, and so plans for a revenge. When he hosts their collaborative work, he proposes that they would go inside a pit, wash their hands, and any of them whose hands remain clean without touching sand on coming out of the pit would be at liberty to eat the whole food alone. For the fact that the Tortoise moves on his limbs, he has to wash, wash and rewash his hands over and over again. In the process, the Dove quickly washes his hands and flies out of the pit, settles on the delicious meal and eats it up with a great euphoria of joy and ecstasy. Tired of washing his hands and getting them messed up with sand, the Tortoise decides to go for the meal. Unfortunately, before he gets in the Dove has finished eating the food, leaving the Tortoise famished and sad.

Again, we read from Ibibio folklore about the Praying mantis, who has sojourned to a distant land. His people home send word across to him inviting him to return immediately to attend to his mother, who is critically ill. On his way home, words come to him breaking the doleful news of his mother's death. The Praying mantis stands still and lingers for quite some time, not knowing what to do; neither moving forward nor backwards home was convenient for him. This short tale is an etiological or *why* story, why we often see the Praying mantis stays at a seeming rest position, but moving his body forwards and backwards.

The narrated tales of the people of diverse speech communities make it expedient to study the people in their given socio-cultural ambience, and it is best achieved through their oral literary heritage, which serves as an image or mirror in appraising them and their worldview. Among the Icelandic people, for example, we glean from their oral tales and myths; some of them are "The Elves' Dance on New Year's Eve; The Sisters and the Elves; The Dance in Hrúni Church."⁷ These teach us more about their cosmology than any other source of knowledge available on them. In like manner, from the oral narratives of the Jews, we learn of such tales about them as "The

Rainbow; *Tkhelet*; Some Hebrew Legends of the Sea; The 'Egla' Arufa, or the Expiation of the Polluted Land; Hebrew Installation Rites; Earth Eating (Patai)."⁸ and so on.

From the exploration we have just made in those speech communities, we reach a conclusion that folk literature is culture-bound; that it articulates the thoughts and mores of a people, which a generation of forebears pass on to succeeding generations via oral milieu.⁹ Nwosu and Ihekwe (2019, 44) share our optimism, when they observe that:

Culture is the life force of every society. Folk life and oral arts are cultural tenets. Through these the people articulate their thoughts and mores. Oral performance is a socio-cultural activity which traditional African societies use in exploring communal ethics and mores through the indoctrination and admonishment of members.

Nwosu and Ihekwe acknowledge the didactic nature of folk literature. They also include the festival feature of it, which means the dramatic pieces that characterize those communal festivals or oral performances, such as *iwa akwa* and *ara-n'umu* folk media of Obowo in Etiti and of Mgbidi, in Oru West Local Government Areas, respectively, all of Imo State of Nigeria. In view of the fact that folk literature is bound up with culture, with language being the vehicle for its transmission, we contend that language, vis-à-vis, folk literature, which is applied language, is DNA of culture, comparable with the chemical material in biology we call deoxyribonucleic acid of culture.

That we link oral performance as adjunct of folk literature is confirmed in the argument that Modern African drama has its root in orature and add that this quality has affirmed its originality and identity.¹⁰ He explains that Modern African writer does not only employ orature as a medium of artistic expression but also as a means of enriching the western script of English with local colour and flavour. Odi, therefore, infers that the authentic taste and texture of African drama transcends the theoretical performance to the wide acceptance by the society and summing up why the African dramatist cannot ignore the need for accuracy in its oratural historiography. We share Odi's sentiment on his view and positive link African folk literature has with Modern African drama; this reinforces the fact that our orature is a beautiful bride, as it were, not only in Modern African Drama, but in many other language-based modern disciplines, but sadly refuted by the racist west.

Of course, music is an essential ingredient and feature in folk literature and, so, is relevant in the modern discipline of Music. This is germane because the musician cannot perform without language, be it written or oral literature. With the appurtenance of language such as proverbs, figures of speech, idiomatic renditions, the musician of town and gown harness the essential features of language in order to communicate his message. That is why he explains in the endorsement of the efficacy of Music in the teaching and learning of Igbo proverbs and the discipline in itself,¹¹ we need add.

For the fact that folktales are stories about relationships between and among humans and other fictional characters like animals and spirits or mixed tales, animals and animals, they inevitably constitute certain building blocks or motifs. It is interesting to note that every culture uses these building blocks in its own way for the purpose of building something that suits its worldview, for pedagogic, informative and entertainment goals. So, the small differences that exist between apparently similar stories can reflect mere cultural differences. Of course, the tales above from the Igbo and Ibibio speech communities as well as those from Icelandic and Jewish communities, remind us that the laws of retributive justice and cause-and-effect are entrenched in the cultures of the people of every land and clime, who *must* cherish those tales. Again, the saying: "if it was good for the Dove, it should also be good for the Tortoise", shows why we should exercise caution before doing anything; otherwise, it results in some unpleasant consequences.

It is also important to note that the effect of the impact, which literary artists weave into their literary works cannot be glossed over or dismissed with the wave of the hand. While they create their works to captivate the minds and hearts of their audience, their works also reflect their own attitudes and values, as well as artistic endowments. Though the artists reserve the right to shape their literary creation to their whim, lack of linguistic competence of the language of any community will invariably lead to some alteration in the content or message of the tales. Often, the recorder may consciously or unconsciously bring an inherent social, religious, or political bias to the task. In some other cases, alteration of the works occurs as a problem of the difficulty posed by implied cultural values, which may be influenced or fueled by ethnocentric prejudice. Usually multiple written versions of the same work would suggest that they derive from the same root or one earlier written source, which may no longer be in existence. Conversely, significant differences among multiple written versions would suggest the existence of multiple earlier sources in the milieu of oral tradition. Such instances abound in the oral genres of the various Nigerian speech communities, especially among the Igbo stock as well as the various speech communities of Africa.

Literature, we all know, reflects society, and derives raw material from the society to which it responds. Of course, people and culture are inseparable because culture is the aggregate of concepts and values which characterize a community. That explains why the folklore of any people can serve as an image or mirror with which that community can be appraised. In a very striking manner, most oral genres serve as repository of historical knowledge, a tool for both social criticism and didacticism and medium for the edification of the audience. In this regard, Anyachonkeya, in his *Once Upon a Time*, offers the African world a masterpiece for the preservation of cultural and societal values through the appreciation of the oral literary genres. As far as he is concerned, there is no difference between appreciation of folklore and appreciation of one's culture. In his explanation of a mythical Ghanain bird, *Sancofa*, which is drawn on the front cover of this oral literary text, he reiterates:

Literally, it is "go back for it" while symbolically, it is a passionate call on Africans in (the) Diaspora to go back to their roots, that they go and investigate their past. It is a call as well as warning, that embracing the totality of alien culture is comparable to the man who initiated into the *Ozo* (Real men) society and adopts the name "Nne Buo" - (May Mother Grow); Such a man sold his father's name.¹²

According to Onuekwusi, his individualism lies in his conception of a dream paradigm in which a son justifies that act of preserving through writing "a slice of Igbo literary heritage" to the admiration and encouragement of an ancestor. This is featured as a background to his work, which covers folktales, riddles, lyric poetry of all kinds, idioms and proverbs. In summary, Onuekwusi describes the work in this manner:

... In an environment where intellectual attainment can be dwarfed by book famine, Anyachonkeya's contribution provides a relief, especially as it brings copious examples of many forms of orature into a volume... I have no doubt that the students of Literature, Sociology, Anthropology and indeed the general reader interested in studying or enjoying ... Igbo oral literature forms will find *Once Upon a Time* (as memento).¹³

Folk songs, in most cases, are interwoven with the culture in the sense that the context and value of the songs are determined by the cultural demands. This explains why most communities have different types of song for various ceremonies. Such songs include birth songs, praise songs, funeral songs and chants, work songs, satiric songs, worship songs, marriage songs, death songs, etc. The traditional songs usually provide an avenue for a very sincere release of emotions.

In Igbo community, for instance, no song exists for the mere sake of existence; rather, every song plays a unique role for which it is called into existence, and that role is naturally indicated by the content of the song. For instance, when a song satirizes an unhealthy behaviour, then it is a satire or satiric song. If it mourns and praises the achievement of anyone at his death, it is an elegy; but where it is a lamentation song, then it is dirge. If it adores and reveres God, the creator of all, it is a worship song. If the content of any song rejoices over the birth of a new human being and also enumerates the gain of a human child, it is a birth song. If, on the contrary, it laments the loss of a companion and also describes the vacuum created by the absence of the deceased, it is a death song, as in a dirge, cited above. So, songs occupy very significant place in the folk literature of a people.

Riddles and proverbs are not, in any way, left out. While proverbs express basic truths, which can be applied to common situations. Riddles offer, in the question form, an avenue for amusement as well as a situation that involves some brain-cracking exercise. These are features or devices of figurative language which lubricate our speech and embellish our thought. Though they appear in such simple forms, they are meant to place a check on the conduct of the people for whom they are meant. So while entertainment appears a common reason for the performance of the folk literature, education of the masses and reshaping the society for the better become a more significant reason. Put differently, the root of folk literature lies in the utilitarian values enunciated which motivates the folk literary artiste to collate and publish them, among its functions.

In Senegal and Mali and Gambia, we have praise songs which celebrate the exploits of a hero; the literary artistes who are versed in this are referred to as griots. Niane, the author of the primary epic, *Sundiata - An Epic of Old Mali*, portrays the dexterity and literary capacity of the griot. At times, the artiste may sound vulgar, especially in satiric works, but it is for the purpose of destroying a decadent attitude in order to create a healthy and acceptable one. It must be noted that linguistic idiolect of vulgarity is not unexpected in such a literature, for it is characteristic of regional literature, a literature that reveals the nativity of the people. One of the griots of contemporary Senegambia is Mamadou Kouyate, who introduces and says the following of himself as quoted in Okpewho:

I am a griot. I am Djeli Mamadou Kouyate, son of Bintou Kouyate and of Djeli Kedian Kouyate, master of the art of speech. Since time immemorial the Kouyartes have been at the service of the Keita princes of Manding The art of speech has no secret for us, without us the names of kings would sink into oblivion; we are the memory of men; by the word, we give life to the actions of our dead kings for the benefit of the present generation My word is pure and stripped of all untruths; it is my father's word; it is my father's father word.¹⁴

With this introduction of self as well as his oral praise poetics, we agree that the griots are carriers of tradition. So, the literary artiste appreciates the fact that the literary work is the culmination of coherence of tendencies peculiar to the consciousness of a particular group. In other words, the work corresponding to the mental structure of any social group may be elaborated in certain exceptional cases by an individual with very few relations to that particular group. So, the folk literary genres, by their nature, are works that offer ways of ordering normative experiences in any particular society.

From the socio-cultural point of view, literary or creative works provide a cosmological version of the basic structure of reality, a charter for action and a guide to good behavior. This is explained in the fact that every individual, at least, in our contemporary complex societies, is a member of many different social groups. The various groups are virtually significant to his individual welfare. This is in tandem with the mode of transmission of cultural values and by various age groups, of which a folk literature is not an exception.

Okigbo furnishes us with modes of transmitting cultural values. According to Okigbo, the details of these mode are pre-figurative culture, post-figurative culture and configurative culture. In pre-figurative culture, adults learn from the young, as we learn, these days, a great deal of the information communication technology from the youth. In the post-figurative culture, children learn from their forebears or elders, for what the elderly one observes in sitting position, his child, may not be able to observe same even when he may climb the rooftop. In configurative culture, on the other hand, both children and adults learn from their peers, and the prevailing model for members of the society is the behavior of their contemporaries. However, in the words of Okigbo, elders "may still exercise a dominant influence in that they set the style and define the limits within which configuration is expressed in the behaviours of the young."¹⁵

For this reason, personality of most members of any society or culture will be in consonance with the expectations imposed on them through the normative behavior prescribed by that society. The implications of this necessary interdependence of person and society are obvious in the actions and reactions of the characters of any literary work. One

of these implications presupposes that every individual is a member of a society and so is expected to conform with the ideals and values of that society. In agreement with Salawu, it is through the whole gamut of human relationships that man ultimately creates the basic units of social organization, and these units of social organizations are located in the human society. The mark of a society, which differentiates a social group from a mere aggregate of individuals, is the capacity of participants to engage in concerted action. Along this line, he identifies the following criteria, which must be met by a group before it can be considered a society:

- The group must be capable of existing longer than the lifespan of the individuals that make it up;
- It should recruit its new members, at least in part, by means of sexual reproduction;
- It should be united in giving allegiance to a common complex (general system of action); and
- The system of action should be self-sufficient.

Through socialization, the outstanding process of training and instruction in traditional or informal education, the society maintains a given level of conformity. It is important to note that both conformity and diversity are inherent aspects of every social system, and every society that must be functional tends to reward conformity and discourage deviation from accepted norms of sanction. In this way a society maintains cohesion. Folk literature, in effect, is among linguistic devices used to checkmate unwholesome conduct. Anyachonkeya admits that via the medium of literature, oral and written, are there available to uphold and enforce societal values a people hold so dear. According to him:

African society has ideals and values which her people hold in high esteem. To uphold and maintain these values, certain kinds of behavior patterns considered normal are expected from members of the society. Those accepted values make the African society to prescribe code of conduct considered desirable for continued existence of the society. The acquisition and maintenance of the code of conduct constitute the norm we find in the normative practices. Therefore, any member of the society who behaves in a manner that goes contrary to the normative practices is sanctioned. This implies that infringement of these rules amounts to offence. There are, however, certain violations of the normative practices that are adjudged criminal. To this end, we view crime as static whereas criminality is performative and dynamic¹⁶.

As earlier noted, oral and written literary works are amply used by literary writers and artists, like the griots, to check behavior patterns of members of any given society, using the normative practices available in that society. In some of the oral genres, we have examples of various kinds of deviation from accepted norms and the sanctions meted out on offenders as consequences; this is based on the Biblical maxim of what one sows, one reaps; or, in scientific dictum of Newton, in his Third Law of Motion, in action and action are equal and opposite; or even in the theological platitude of the Hindus in the Law of Karma. There are proverbs, of course, which advance this moral principle. It is from this perspective that we say that proverbs, a literary instrument in the lubrication of thought, is a salient component of orature and they hinge on cosmic laws. That *if a child wrestles with his father, he will be blindfolded by the old man's loincloth; that a wrong a person does or commits against (his fellow), he naturally pays for and that he who spits up spits himself*, and so on.

One of the unique functions of folklore in general is permitting a word or action which is usually not approved in normal situation. In Igbo culture, as in many other cultures, there are words that should not be spoken and also deeds that should not be done. However, such words, expressions and deeds have ways of appearing or expressing them in the people's folklore, which partly reflect their culture and worldview. Igbo traditional folklorists achieve a richness of style and create total effects through the application of satire. In her work entitled *From Ritual to Art*, Ohale has collated the following as one of the Igbo satiric song-poems:

Ocha nwa Mgbokwa
Ocha ghaghagha
O bunwaa ocha, n'obu ekpenta (p.142).
Ikpu aghagi aji
Ka nke mbe
The colour of Mgbokwa's daughter is terrible
It is no more light skin, it is leprosy
There is no more hair on her vagina
It is like that of a tortoise¹⁷.

This poetics, in itself, is a protest against a young woman who bleaches her skin and commits abortion. Of course, the young woman does all of this at a price which is detrimental to herself; which implies her actions are counterproductive.

In a very humorous manner, Sutherland presents the complications that are associated with the personal and societal lives of any abnormal character. Ananse, the trickster and principal character of this work, devises a clever means of selecting the most appropriate husband for his only child, Anansewa. The presence of his mother and his aunt pose a hindrance, and he cleverly comes up with the fabrication that their native home cocoa farm is set on fire by some enemies. So, he demands that they (Aya, his mother and Ekuwa, his aunt) leave hurriedly to protect their native home from such disaster. Unaware of Ananse's "Die-and-Rise" skirmish, Aya tries to wake her granddaughter, Anansewa, from what she supposes to be a deep slumber so as to notify her of the emergency journey she has to make to Nanka, their native home. Of course, Ananse interrupts by making his mother appreciate the need to let his daughter have a good rest. The poor Aya complies without knowing that the supposed deep slumber is actually the reason for the urgent journey she makes to their

native home. The absence of his mother and aunt makes it easy for Ananse to get his young daughter play along with him, with none to interfere. Though Anansewa, on her part, sees no reason why she should die and rise before she can be married, gullibly still has to obey her only surviving parent, who happens to be the only adult relation around her at the moment.

One didactic feature of Sutherland's drama is the introduction of known trickster of Ghanaian oral literature, which is the Spider. In Igbo folklore, their popular trickster is the Tortoisier; while in European folklore, it is the Fox; in Senegal, it is the Rabbit, and so, Anyachonkeya, in poetics, entitled "If an Igbo Tricks You", where he regales us:

If a Ghanaian tricks you

Show him a spider.

If a Senegalese tricks you

Show him a rabbit.

If a European tricks you

Show him a fox.

If an Igbo tricks you

Show him a tortoise....¹⁸

Luck is on Ananse's side. His plan works out well. When messages get to the chief of Mines, the chief of Sapaase and the chief of Akate, that Anansewa is dead, every one of them opines that he cannot sponsor the burial rites of a lady who is not yet properly married to him. However, they are not reluctant to do what custom permits. On the contrary, when the Chief-Who-Is-Chief receives the same message, he wails and mourns Anansewa in all sincerity. He finally makes himself available to incur the funeral ceremony expenses of his proposed bride, declaring that his love for Anansewa cannot be changed by death. At this, Ananse becomes convinced that among the four chiefs, only Chief-Who-Is-Chief can always be there for his only child in all circumstances. So, he finally confesses that his daughter is disguised as dead to enable him to select, from the four suitors, the one who truly loves his daughter. He, therefore, accepts Chief-Who-Is-Chief as his son-in-law, and quickly arranges a marriage feast between this chief and his daughter.

Though Ananse's 'Die-and-Rise' game can be seen as a strange behavior, it still serves as a mirror on which true love remains undying no matter how sorely it is tried. From the socio-cultural point of view, the tricks which Ananse plays on his mother/aunt, his daughter and his entire community are directly influenced by an aggregate of his personality development, the conduct of the individuals in the society as well as the prevailing social traditions. This agrees with what Freud describes as disguised forms of human behavior that may produce art (literature). Apart from this, the language of the artist is also capable of creating new and inner worlds which are real to the perceiver of any literary performance. These are the worlds in which he believes, worlds to which he reacts, and worlds which when conveyed with a touch of genius, live permanently with the perceiver. These are known as meta-worlds, and their importance to the oral interpreter of literature cannot be too stressed. Every man, therefore, is inextricably involved in a complex web of social relationships, and his position within a social system constitutes his status. He locates himself within the larger community; put the other way, he places himself into a category, assuming the responsibility of that position, and expects others to respond to his whims.

So, much of the behaviour of man consists of acting in a manner designated to preserve or enhance his social status. No matter how lowly a man's position in the society may be, there are obligations that he must meet and rights that he can demand. This naturally equips man to have a sense of personal obligations - to fulfill his responsibilities. From the lessons of the tales of this study, one, is therefore, disposed to live in conformity with the accepted norms of the society since no one can rise above the social and cultural ethos of the society. In other words, no one grows bigger than the family or his State.

2. Conclusion

The utilitarian values of folk literature are rather infinite and its depth is robust. Any people that let go of their folk literature are not conscious of their cultural values as they would have sold their essence - their identity, as it were. They are, indeed, a lost people to denigrate their folk literature, their real identity.

The paper has attempted to present folk literature as a mirror and image of a people in a given speech community. This means that a particular human society has its literature which exists in preliterate times and which we refer to as folk literature or orature, for short. This assertion is expedient to debunk the spurious claim of Finnegan who, though admits the existentiality of "oral aspect of African unwritten literature but sadly debunks its legitimacy in terms of literary status, for as she puts it: "Little has yet been said about the *literary* status of these oral products."¹⁹ Chukwuma refutes Finnegan's racist blinker by stating that "Oral literature is of great significance in the African context, mainly because it is the traditional form of literary expression, bearing in mind the oracular nature of African societies²⁰." We join Chukwuma in dismissing Finnegan's claim about African oral literature; we describe her jaundiced racist interpretation as anachronistic, comparable of Mungo Park's claim of having discovered River Niger, a primordial giant river in which the natives knew by their native name for eons of years before the foundation of our planet. Indeed, Africa is a people, so also its folk literature; its scope is robust and encapsulates as well as unveils the actions and reactions of Africa as any other social group.

The essay contends that literature represents the essence of a people as it is their language at work; language being the arrowhead of culture. In addition, it contends also that language exists basically in literature. The literary form we recognize as folk literature showcases the people's world view, which, among other things, captures the people's

interaction with one another as social beings exhibiting their idiolect, value system and folkways. Thus, literature reveals their social and cultural frontiers from the synergy that is implicit in traditional communal life from nativity.

This work has attempted to show that folk literature of a people encases diverse cultural information that portrays the totality of their cultural heritage, namely, the technological, the sociological and the ideological facets. This essay urges us to tap or excavate and internalize the utilitarian bounties of folk literature, for the literature invites us to appraise where we are coming from and where we are going in the stream of time. To ignore or negate this invitation will amount to throwing a baby away with the bathwater, as already observed.

The paper explores New Historicism as literary and critical bases in its speculations, which, in the opinion of the essayists, better presents the corpus of folk literature as it is presented in this paper than in any previous work that may have been done on the subject matter.

In conclusion, let us reflect on the thrust of the following excerpt and ascertain how it fits into the corpus of this essay. "Parents die. Children disappoint. Lovers leave. Leaders betray. Bodies fail. The graves yawn, waiting."²¹ As we strive not to leave a lacuna to the chagrin of posterity, we must pound in the mortar!

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