

Literature and Medicine: an Appraisal of Latunde Odeku's *Twilight: Out of the Night.*

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine *Twilight: Out of the Night*, an anthology of poetry, written by Latunde Odeku, Africa's first Professor of Neurosurgery, who unknown to many people was also a poet. In the collection, Odeku looks at life from a myriad of perspectives, which graphically show his artistic versatility and creative ingenuity. Acting as Conscience of Society, Odeku uses the poems to highlight the multifarious socio-political problems, which have been the bane of Nigeria's development since she became an independent country in 1960. The poems also establish a point of convergence between two seemingly disparate disciplines, literature and medicine, as they vividly show the poet's dependence on medicine for poetic inspiration.

Latunde Odeku: A Brief Biographical Account

In his foreword to Adelaye Adelola's *An African Neurosurgeon*, a biography of Professor Latunde Odeku, Oritsejolomi Thomas, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, writes:

Professor Latunde Odeku during his relatively short life managed to achieve something of worth in many areas. He belonged to that chosen group of neurologists and neurosurgeons, who perhaps observing the unfathomable wisdom of the Divine Creator through the complexity of the human brain, inevitably arrived at the conclusion that there was more to life than the mere temporal and spiritual. This process of thought, I am

sure, it was, that made him take naturally to philosophy and the writing of poetry. (ix)

Latunde Odeku was born on 29th June, 1927, at Awe, in South Western Nigeria. In the poem, "Beyond the Sea", written in the United States, in 1955, Odeku speaks in very glowing terms about Awe, a small farming settlement on the outskirts of Oyo. It reveals vividly the poet's nostalgic feelings for the little town. He tells his reader:

Beyond the sea and far away
Is a little shelter
I call my home...
Where the natives track the sun
To their daily bread,
My life began, out of the tropic soil ...
My life, my cradle, my home (*Twilight*, 18).

Odeku was the second surviving child of his parents and the first son, a unique position, which propelled him to aspire to greater heights of success in all his life endeavours. The Odeku family stayed in Awe for five more years after his birth before returning to Lagos where his parents were once domiciled. Those five years spent as a toddler in the rustic simplicity of Awe traditional community left an indelible impression on Latunde Odeku's poetic consciousness as evident in many of his poems.

In Lagos, Odeku became, an infant pupil at St. John's school, Aroloya, in 1932, where he established himself as a child prodigy who was destined for greatness. He got admitted to the Methodist Boys' High School (MBHS) in 1940, at the relatively "young age" of thirteen years. It was while at this school that Odeku shortened his first name Olatunde to Latunde. In the poem "Alma Mater", Odeku recollects the memorable times he and some colleagues had spent together at MBHS;

Our strength with thee forever rests,
Our usefulness, our pride;
Our struggles in the years to come
Shall beam our deeds and crowns to thee

In lasting thoughts of gratitude (*Twilight*, 71).

That Odeku made a success of his life is not in doubt and in several articles and discussions with friends and acquaintances, he always reiterated the point that the foundation for his success was laid at MBHS. Odeku was a Probationary Officer in the Nigerian Customs and Excise Department between 1946 and 1947 from where he later proceeded to the United States as a student of Howard University, Washington D.C. As a young undergraduate at Howard University in 1948, Odeku also found time to participate in extra-curricular activities which had humanistic inclinations. It is not surprising to note that one of the organizations he joined was the American Friends Service Committee an association dedicated to the upliftment of the standards of living of the common man throughout the world.

In 1950, Odeku passed the Bachelor of Science Degree (Summa Cum Laude) and also won the Phelps-Stokes Fund Scholarship valued at two thousand dollars per annum. The scholarship lasted for the four years he spent at the medical school. In 1954, Odeku graduated from the Howard University Medical School, where he distinguished himself as one of the best students in his class. He became a medical intern at the University Hospital, University of Michigan, between July, 1954 and June, 1955, after which he proceeded to Canada where he acquired the Licentiate of the Medical Council of Canada which conferred on him the right to practice in Canada.

He started his neurosurgery residency in 1957, at the University of Michigan's Postgraduate School of Medicine at Ann Arbor, where he, again, excelled as a competent neurosurgeon. During this period, he was awarded a special grant with a value of 3,400 dollars by the Relm Foundation which made it possible for him to study for a postgraduate degree in Neuropathology. By 1962, when he had passed the Diplomate of the American Board of Neurological Surgery, Odeku was offered the opportunity of working at some of the United States' top medical institutions including the Howard

University College of Medicine. Instead, Odeku opted to return to Nigeria and was employed by the University of Ibadan as Nigeria's pioneer neurosurgeon. Odeku, in taking up the job at Ibadan operated in the garb of a patriot and it was a decision that cost him not only a huge amount of money in terms of the salary and emoluments he would have received if he had been practising in America, but also his marriage to Mary Gilda Marques, an Howard trained doctor who opted to stay in the United States when Odeku returned to Nigeria in September 1962. The marriage, which was contracted in 1957, was blessed with two children, Lenora and Peter.

At different times, Odeku wrote poems for his two children. One of such poems is "I love my mother's face" which was ghost-written for Peter at the age of one day. In the poem, the day old baby looks adoringly at his mother's face, streaked with lines of worry and weariness and he expresses his love, affection, appreciation and belief in the unwavering steadfastness of his mother in nurturing and caring for him:

In my mother's face
All is love
The gentlest words it says to me
To keep me calm,
And what I cannot understand
She understood for me.
With greatest trust I look at it,
Beyond all else;
In my mother's face, the sun
Will always rise for me.
I love my mother's face (*Twilight*, 50).

At Ibadan, the American trained Odeku encountered some hostility from his largely British-trained colleagues. However, this gradually gave way to an open show of admiration and respect when Odeku's competence and expertise as a neurosurgeon was established. In 1968, he was elected Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in recognition of his contributions to the evolution of medical practice in Nigeria. Odeku was widely

travelled and at different times after his return to Nigeria from America, he visited Copenhagen, Zurich, Vienna, Kampala, Pakistan, Manilla, Bangkok, England and America, and acquired more skills in the process. He was also a member of many scientific and medical organizations.

Odeku, despite his busy schedule found time to reorganize his private life. He had been divorced from his first wife and in 1971 he married the then Jill Katherine Adcock, an English medical doctor who was working at the University College Hospital. The marriage was blessed with two children, Alan, who was born in October 1971 and Amanda born in January, 1973. In March 1973, he was at Howard University to receive his alma mater's Alumni Medal for his selfless service to the upliftment of medicine both in Nigeria, and throughout the world.

Later that year, in June 1973, after he returned to Nigeria, he became very sick and had to be hospitalized at the University College Hospital. Later in September, 1973 he travelled to England with members of his family and he used the opportunity to also visit India to undertake some research at the Neurological Institutes at Madras and Vellore. He came back to Nigeria in January 1974 and as a result of the strain of his travelling on his health, he broke down and was admitted into the University College Hospital as a patient. Since 1964, Odeku had been diagnosed as having diabetes mellitus, a disease from which his parents had also suffered. It was a resurgence of this disease in his life that incapacitated Odeku for much of 1974 and barred him from functioning normally as a surgeon. August 1974 saw him in England in search of a lasting treatment for his illness. He died at the renowned Hammersmith Hospital on the 20th of August, 1974. He was buried on August 27, 1974 at the graveyard of St. Peter's Church Burnham in Buckinghamshire. He was aged 47.

Odeku's diabetic condition and the pain, which he had to endure as a result of his medical problems, make it possible for him to understand the suffering of people from different segments of society. In this regard, a correlative parallel can be established

between Odeku's life and that of the prominent Russian physician-writer, Anton Chekhov. According to Philip Sandblom:

For most poets, poetry is but a current commentary on their private lives, a transcription into verse of the prose of their fate... . This truism must still seem meaningful since it is so often repeated and elaborated upon. Anton Chekhov modestly admitted that " If I had only my imagination to rely on in attempting a career in literature, I should like to be excused"; as it was, his experience included a medical education as well as his own tuberculosis. (II)

Odeku could be described as a meteor that blazed through the Nigerian sky in a bright haze of light before disappearing into the oblivion of time, forever. He has, however, achieved immortality through his poems. His contributions to the overall development of the Nigerian society prompted General Yakubu Gowon, the then Nigerian Head of State to tell his wife, Dr. Jill Odeku, in a condolence message that Odeku:

... served his country and mankind with singular dedication and a sense of mission: he was a man of humane disposition who loved his profession and proved to the world that he was an authority in his field (*An African Neurosurgeon*, 53-54).

On the whole, what is worthy of note is that despite his busy schedule as a medical practitioner, Odeku proved his academic worth by solely or jointly publishing 85 medically related articles and 13 other articles on general topics. In this study, we remember Odeku not so much for his exploits as a medical doctor, but because he was an accomplished physician-poet, and author of two collections of poetry *Twilight: Out of the Night* (1964), and *Whispers from the Night* (1969).

It is on record that when Odeku published these poems in 1964 and 1969 respectively, he distributed copies free of charge to his colleagues and friends which included Leopold Sedar Senghor, the first President of Independent Senegal and himself a respected African poet of international repute. In an acknowledgement letter to Odeku after the receipt of a copy of *Twilight: Out of the Night*, Senghor praised Odeku's brilliance as an artist and advised him further:

I have perused it (your poetry) with great interest. You have introduced something new into African poetry of English expression. It would be a very good thing if you could send a copy of your work to Mr. Alioune Diop, the Editor of "Presence Africaine" for a translation into french.

Twilight: Out of the Night (1964)

Twilight: Out of the Night contains 103 poems, which are full of vigorous flashes of artistic brilliance and a creative intensity characteristic of African oral poetry. In traditional Africa, some poems are performed at night after a hard day's work, when people tend to be more favourably disposed to the entertainment provided by griots. Interestingly, Odeku's poems were mostly written at night — hence the title of the collection — and for Odeku, night-time provides a relief from the harrowing experiences that man undergoes during the day. Likewise, his night-time reminiscences as reflected in these poems are like songs sung, primarily, to entertain but at the same time to edify the reader. Despite the diversity of themes, the messages embedded in them are capable of universal applicability. Most of the poems have didactic undertones. It is also noteworthy that although Odeku was writing during a period when a lot of African poets were known to impose rhyme schemes on their poems he uses free verse in almost all the poems in order not to introduce any unnecessary restriction that would impede the flow of his thoughts.

In two of the poems in *Twilight*, both of them with the title "Poetry", and written in 1962, Odeku attempts a definition of poetry and his position on poetry confirms the fact that poetry like the other genres of literature is a reflection of life:

In poems
 You see
 Beginnings, the end
 Of human life;
 And the stretch
 Of vivid troubles,
 The sprinkled laughters
 Between (35).

The poems in the collection reveal different shades of experiences which offer an insight into the dynamic complexity of nature and existence. In the first poem, "Blackman", Odeku talks about the need for the black man not only in Africa but also in the diaspora to assert his rights to self-definition in the face of mounting odds. From the perspective of the poet, the right to live or die is the black man's prerogative and only he can make the choice. The poetic persona's defiant tone is evident in his affirmation of the right to choose and determine the course of his destiny, by his own selected criteria. He declares:

Must I be threatened still
 To walk the shadows of retreat,
 And, fruitless, plough the barren fields ...
 Lingering, dejected, only to die;
 Or cast the sun of heaven forth
 Before me, no more to hide in huts,
And live! (15).

The poem was written in 1947, at a time when Nigeria was a colony of England and western civilization was perceived by a large majority of Africans as the embodiment of perfection. The profound nature of this self-assertion in the first poem

sets the mood for the rest of the poems in the collection. In his lifetime, Odeku was once married to a white woman — Dr. Jill Adcock, his second wife. His first wife, the American, Mary Gilda Marques, was almost white and these were developments which some people might find paradoxical, considering the fact that in "Blackman", Odeku speaks out against white domination and oppression, injustice, and man's inhumanity to man. However, in Odeku's opinion, freedom of association was one way of asserting an individual's right to self-determination. The important thing was for the individual, whether black or white, not to lose his sense of purpose and direction. The word "huts" in the penultimate line of the extract above has a negative connotation and it symbolizes the precariousness of the life of an average black person, fettered by outdated and malfunctioning traditional norms, which inadvertently cast black people with a toga of inferiority, which coupled with the oppressive tendencies of a white dominated world results in socio-economic retardation.

In "Aequanimitas", "Tropical Splendour", "Beyond the Sea" and "The Niger", among other poems in the collection, Odeku highlights the unique beauty of the African continent and its peoples, a conscious repudiation of racist sentiments: that the African is a underdeveloped specie of the human being. In this regard, poems about Africa in this collection share a common ideological boundary with that expressed by the negritude poets of francophone Africa. Most of Odeku's "Africa is Paradise" poems including the four mentioned above were written when he was domiciled in the United States as a medical student. They reveal in very graphic ways his nostalgic memories of the "ever throbbing heart of the world", Africa. They emphasize the simplicity of the African which should not be mistaken for stupidity. In "Tropical Splendour", for example, the poet describes Africa as a place;

Where Nature spreads its morning dews
To tend the greenness on the velvet land;
The tropic sunrise breaks

Through the melting darkness of the clouds
 To settle sparks of glistening drops
 Upon the dark and clustered leaves,
 Like an edgeless tapestry,
 Giving lustre to the face of day.(16)

The more generalized description of the beauty of the African landscape gives way to a more specific presentation in "The Niger",

The thunders and the rumblings
 Overwhelming and defiant;
 The lightnings and the gathering clouds;
 The furious winds that blow
 In a blasting tropic storm;
 The endless torrent rains
 That rouse the quelling ebbs;
 The blinding brilliance of the noon-high sun
 Dazzling without restraint
 The boundless trees, evergreen.(23)

The natural phenomena described above contribute to the exciting topography around the River Niger, which has made it one of the most beautiful scenery in the world.

"Aequanimitas" affords the poet the opportunity to talk about the resilient spirit of the African, toiling and trudging on against all odds despite the harsh nature of his existence. The poet presents an idealistic portrayal of the African as a near perfect human being who is not afraid of hard work and whose simplistic attitude to life which is an epitome of grace has made some people to regard him as being not better than a jungle beast. Africans, according to the poet;

Poor as may be
 With all their ceaseless toil
 Still they mellow to the gods
 Their voiceless gratitude...
 In the oasis of hope
 In the shades of sorrow

And the helplessness of life;...
 Such laden spirit
 So burdened, so unbreakable ...
 They roll their lives from day to day,
 Just like a passing silent scroll,
 With such Equanimity.(22)

While it is possible to say that a poem like "Blackman" is specifically directed at the African, there are some other poems in this collection where Odeku addresses Africans, as well as black people in the diaspora who are being oppressed, harassed, and exploited for reasons of blackness of their skin. In a vein similar to the African-American poet, Claude McKay, in "If We Must Die", Odeku urges black people to stand up and fight for their rights in his poem "How Many Times?" which is laced with a defiant and angry tone directed at the injustice to which black people have been subjected by the so-called "friends" who preach friendship but practice evil with no inhibitions whatever. The poet advises, therefore;

Clad your untouchable skin
 With an iron soul
 To stand and stand again
 Against deprivations, the UNJUST,
 Again and again...
 No matter how dry and long,
 From Georgia and Texas
 From Johannesburg, even into hell (26).

A similar theme is pursued in another poem, "Tell Them Who You Are". In this poem, Odeku's message is directed at all men, irrespective of race, creed or religion. He stresses the need to be resolute and firm when one is fighting a just cause. He advises against cowardice and lethargy and emphasizes the importance of maintaining a principled stance on matters relating to human welfare and fundamental human rights regardless of the consequences:

Tell them who you are,
 Or the world will never know
 The roar, the mighty lion
 Thundering beneath your gentle hide
 Carry your cross a day
 (Like the humble "Mr. J. Christ")
 Through your Gethsemane
 Still be not like a dumb uprooted tree:
 Tell them who you are.(43)

In this poem, the poet uses the allusion to Jesus Christ and Gethsemane to emphasize an important point. While it is true that Jesus Christ suffered and carried his cross, he, at the end of the day, as a result of his crucifixion, death and resurrection affirmed his supremacy over his detractors. In the poet's opinion, it is imperative for anyone who thinks he is being oppressed to persevere by standing up and fighting the oppressor. It is the only way that he can ever gain some measure of respect for himself.

In "Not For My Soul" Odeku discusses the issue of racism in the American south where for a very long time the Klu Klux Klan had instigated racial hatred that led to the stratification of society along racial lines, and the lynching of innocent black people. The poet indicts the white members of the society for not practising the ethics of the Christian Bible, which enjoins them to love their neighbour as themselves. For example, there is racial stratification in the "House of God" and the poetic persona seems to suggest that the racists' reactionary behaviour lacks logic and basic intelligence. The persona's observation on a visit to a Church further confirms his suspicion:

Beneath the hills in a southern town
 That wears its ugly face: "No Blacks"
 (And not for my soul)
 I seek my God in a temple house
 Among the brethren and the fold...
 I try to sit and pray,
 To let God know I've come;
 Not for my soul ...

Immaculate ushers hurry to me
to usher me out (78-79).

In this particular poem, "Not for my Soul" is repeated six times to emphasize the point that the poetic persona presumably a black person, seeks to pray not for the salvation of his own soul but for the redemption of the soul of his detractors who while they think they are serving God are in fact crucifying him because of their untoward behaviour.

In such poems as "Learning to Expect", "Wasted", "Just like a Country-Road", "Earth can claim no More", "I do not Ask", "Gathering Ash", "Let me keep what today is Mine", "Epitaph for a last Page", "The Nights I Spent", "Time", "Shipwreck", "For what I am", and "Dissolution", he writes about the fleeting nature of time, the transient nature of power, of beauty, and of honour; the mortality of man, as opposed to the immortality of good deeds; the inevitability of death, the virtue of humility and contentment in life.¹⁵ Death is a relentless stalker in "Earth can Claim No More" and "Gathering Ash" and man is powerless to contain its onslaught. Man is portrayed as a prey, a victim in the cold hands of death. An air of gloom surrounds the poem, "Earth can Claim no More" as evident in the very sombre and grave tone;

From life's unguarded shores, we wait,
Death, ceaseless picks its random date:
Where are the host lost at dawn ...
Our youthful comrades that are gone!!! (31).

"Earth can Claim No More", a celebration of death, which was written in 1947, and the poet ironically seemed to be predicting his own untimely death at the age of 47. The issue of death also crops up in "Epitaph for a Last Page" where the poet implores men to be mindful of what they do while on earth. For him, it is not a man's wealth that matters in life but how he was been able to affect the lives of other people around him in

a very positive way so that he might earn for all his efforts an epitaph that reads;

... he was a good man (51).

Twilight also contains several love poems highlighting the love that Odeku had for his first wife Mary, whom he always affectionately called MGM and their two children, Lenora and Peter. In these poems, which include "In the Night", "Monument for You". "Lenora", "The Pyramid of Innocence", and "Lennie", among others, the poet speaks passionately of his love for MGM and the children. The eventual collapse of Odeku's marriage to MGM could only have meant much anguish, sorrow and sadness for the poet particularly between 1962 and 1970 before he eventually married Dr. Jill Adcock in 1971. One of the best romantic poems in the collection is "Monument for You" which speaks volumes of Odeku's unconditional love for his first wife. The poem is an eloquent testimony of the poet's adoration and a sincerity of heart for his love, Mary;

There is a monument built for you
 In my heart
 I made a marble of its walls,
 And of its door a gold;
 The steps I laid with pearls...
 And all your charms and smiles
 I placed in a case of gems;...
 And everyday it looks serene
 I build it more anew;
 I take the longest deepest gaze
 Of you
 To the monument in my heart (45).

According to Adelola Adeloye, Odeku's biographer, the late neurosurgeon:

... had much respect for Dr. Mary Gilda Marques. Indeed, he was always grateful to his MGM for the love they both shared at the beginning of their adult lives and the blessing of Lenora and Peter, their two lovely and wonderful children (42).

It should be stressed again at this stage that Odeku's marriage to MGM broke down because of his decision to return to Nigeria to contribute his own quota to the development of the newly independent country that he loved so much. Odeku believed in Nigeria and despite the fact that he spent 14 years in America, he knew within him that Nigeria as a nation was destined for greatness after the exit of the British. For him the emancipation of the Nigerian people from the shackles of colonialism was a dream fulfilled since independence was bound to herald a new dawn of national fulfilment and happiness. In this regard, Odeku was not different from other African writers who wrote works of art in the late 1950s and the early part of the 1960s expressing their optimism and desire for the emergence of a strong Nigerian state and a virile African continent.

Odeku's poem "Hail Nigeria" which he wrote in 1960, is suffused with the poet's happiness and feeling of exhilaration at the thought of Nigeria's independence. Although "Hail Nigeria", was written when Odeku was still living in the United States, he nevertheless associated himself with the hopes and aspirations of Nigerians through the use of the collective pronoun "we". Independence meant freedom from psychological, physical and spiritual enslavement and he affirms that colonialism was nothing but bondage:

The day we shed our chains
To stagger, toddling to the road,
Hunched from the weary load,
The years of drudgery and of woes,
We laughed as we crawled up to walk
Because we are free...
The sun will always shine
Here on this face of Earth:
Armful, redoubled in its strength
To toil, and sweat, and strain,

NIGERIA rises to the task
Soaring to a lustrous heritage (41).

"The Sun" symbolizes a prophetic bright future that the poet envisages for Nigeria. Since it is a truism that the sun must shine everyday, the poet invokes the logic and power of "positive correlates" characteristic of the traditional Yoruba incantatory poetry (Ogunba, 1981; Olatunji, 1984) to "compel" a positive and definitive social development and economic growth on the young independent country, Nigeria.

By 1962, when Odeku returned to Nigeria from the United States he was able to confirm his fear that Nigeria was, indeed, undergoing a very radical transformation. However, the issue was whether the change was positive or negative for the Nigerian society as a whole. Already obvious in the Nigerian society of 1962, was social and economic inequality, man's inhumanity to man, nepotism, tribalism, favouritism, mismanagement of government resources and different forms of neo-colonialism. What the poet-returnee sees is misplaced extravagance, as the relatively affluent members of the society, the rich and the powerful, spend money without a care for what the future portends for them and the society. The poet comments on these things in "The New Crowd", and how, two years after independence, corruption has led to moral degeneration in the Nigerian society. His remark is apposite here:

Big cars, a huge estate:
fortunes gathered in haste
(with a vicious rake);
they struggle ... for a quickest £,
Thousands they take for grease:
As if this tomorrow is the final day
The prodigious beavers mint their own (63).

In a manner similar to the concern expressed by the Ghanaian novelist, Ayi Kwei Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons*, on the need for the African to embrace, and relocate the

old lost way, Odeku laments the squandered opportunity Nigeria's independence could have brought and the premature decadence which has become the order of the day:

Where is the old but senseful way
That gave us balance yesterday
And kept us sane in the dark;
Our pride that made it so
For our fathers what they were:
In poverty, driven like slaves
By the Whiteman's greed,
Yet in their unshaken dignity of Man
They stood, less dishonoured and were proud (64).

He observes the obvious reversed role in the new order in which the new slave masters are black, self-centred and self-opinionated. Thus by 1964, in "Tyranny", a rather downcast and very contrite Odeku writes candidly about oppression and all forms of injustice which had become the order of the day in the new Nigeria. The period between 1962 and 1964, in South-Western Nigeria was very turbulent. Obafemi Awolowo, the first Premier of the Western Region was incarcerated on charges of treasonable felony, while his erstwhile deputy Samuel Ladoke Akintola had formed a political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party, an action which split the Action Group led by Awolowo into two opposing factions. What followed was a very serious social unrest that led to politically instigated murders of Action Group Party members by Nigerian National Democratic Party assassins, culminating in the January 15, 1966 military coup. The scenario therefore foregrounds Odeku's "Tyranny", in which the poet chronicles the unfortunate political development unfolding in the early part of the 1960s in Nigeria, while emphasizing at the same time the fleeting nature of power:

... only tomorrow,
Their might shall cease,
And so the tyrants rise today,
Bypassing the status quo;

Expedient, unified, swift,
 Supreme in their madness,
 Mishandling men
 to prove their strength
 Arresting, racking, laying waste;
 Wielding their shackles of fear
 To scar the Conscience of man.(84)

Acts of tyranny and repression are not limited to Nigeria, they are a common occurrence. Therefore, in "Hostages For Mankind", Odeku observes that oppression is an integral, constituent part of mankind since the creation of the world. Drawing his illustration from history, Odeku mentions leaders who at different times have institutionalized oppression and different kinds of dictatorship to perpetuate themselves in power. For example, the Caesars who fed;

the righteous martyrs ...
 To the lions for a meal.(69)

He also remembers:

... The Jews that Hitler burnt
 To quench his silly Aryan pride:
 Exponents of torture,
 And the bloody Auschwitz hell;
 From the ghettos to the pit
 To the slaughter
 Of the dripping Eichmann sword.(70)

The poet uses these historical allusions to confirm this universal phenomenon, and goes a step further to indict Americans for the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which is, according to him, another dimension of acts of oppression:

Atoms explode (damned the blast);
 Outcries of anguish from the clouds ...
 Eternal vengeance:
 Each porch, a battlefield
 Deadening our backyards

Into a huge cemetery;
 And the sidewalks of life,
 paved with slaughter! (171)

Instead of laughter, man earns for his greedy efforts, slaughter and destruction. By implication, the poet in "Hostages for Mankind", believes that the bane of sustainable development in the world is bad leadership and its institutionalization of tyranny as a system of governance. Odeku opines that the ideal leader must be selfless, humane, responsible and responsive to the needs of the people he has been chosen to lead. In other poems written between 1948 and 1963, Odeku writes about a notable Indian politician, Mahatma Gandhi, whose positivist qualities any aspiring credible leader must learn to imbibe. For Odeku, Gandhi was a credible leader whose self-effacing posture at all times, even during periods of great personal distress and discomfort, endeared him to the people of the Indian sub-continent. It is not surprising therefore that in "Go Easy Young Man" Odeku advises the youth, the hope of tomorrow to draw their inspiration from men like Gandhi and not from the politicians in "flowing robes" hardly care who for the wellbeing of the citizenry. He warns;

Now return to East and start off there,
 Back to Gandhi, to the wise men ...
Inscriptions laid in their gentle words
Survive more centuries than steel.(107)

In the second line of the extract above Odeku employs biblical allusion, "the wise men", understandably, the magi from the east who visited baby Jesus shortly after he was born presenting him gifts. We suspect the poet's subtle acknowledgement that the eastern part of the world has become the centre of knowledge and wisdom from which the rest of the world may learn if it must survive the corrosive effects of western civilization and culture with its individualistic attitude to life, which breeds despots at the expense of the ruled.

Gandhi was a Hindu and a mystic who idolized nature and celebrated it as an epitome of perfection. In, *Twilight*: some of the poems including, "Birds in the Snow", "Sunset", "I Never Knew", "Rain", "Sunrise", among others, celebrate nature as an embodiment of the divine and beauty. In a vein similar to John Keats's "Ode to Nightingale" Odeku's "Birds in the Snow", focuses on birds as a creation and as a symbol of Nature, possessing a very unique beauty, grace and charm, a state yet to be attained by man despite his supposed technological innovations and scientific advancement. The bird is depicted in this poem as being contented with its position in life despite the fact that it depends, largely, on man for its survival. Nature as creator of the bird;

... works, pencils, embellishes;
And behold its little masterpiece,
A humble dweller in heavens blue.(34)

While some of the poems associate Nature with the Divine essence, others, which for convenience we refer to as religious poems acknowledge the supremacy of God. The religious poems reveal that despite Odeku's laudable achievements as a neurosurgeon and internationally renowned academic he still accepted the existence of the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God who exercises supreme control and authority over the whole universe. The poems include, "Actors for the Word of God", "The Hand of God", "God", "Sanctuary", "Out of Eden", "God Beyond the Pulpit", "The Face of God". In "The Hand of God", "God" and "The Face of God" Odeku posits, like the English romantic poets, that Nature and God are intricately linked together. They are inseparable and that Nature is in fact one of the physical manifestations of God's Almightyness. "The Hand of God" confirms this assertion:

The rousing surface-flares
Of Nature's angry mood,
Seen in the tempest on the sea
Or a blizzard in the snow:

They give Man a warning
 That God is Great
 And yet the trivial stone we see,
 Trampled beneath our haughty snub,
 Lives in its own best way,
 Ignores the rain, the sun and wind
 To withstand the punishments
 Of Nature and of Time
 It too
Is the Hand of God.(59)

In "Actors for the Word of God", the poet reminds man of the inevitability of the judgement day when he will be made to account for his deeds and misdeeds before God. He wonders aloud about how many people really regard the precepts of God as sacrosanct who must not be defiled through sin. He observes that many people read the Word of God but are not doers of the Word and he asks the inevitable question:

How many men will take the stand
 (On whatever judgement day)
 Knowing they acted well,
 Or not at all !!! (53)

The poem pricks the conscience of the reader and encourages him in a very subtle manner to re-align with the will of God.

So far, we have discussed so many ideas revolving round multiple themes in Odeku's poetry. However, the question is whether or not there are poems in *Twilight*: which discuss medicine, a profession which brought him in close contact with people from different segments of the society. It is quite relieving to note that medically related poems abound in the collection. Odeku clinically observes the physician, the patient and the public in such poems as "The Physician", "The Cradle", "Chain-Gang", "Crippled", "4th Ventricle", "Syndrome", "Eponyms", "Relatives for a Dying Man", "The Cadaver",

"Masked", and "The Ballad of the UCH" which is the longest poem in the collection and which I have discussed in another article entitled "Literature and Medicine: Opening Statements". They present a very vivid view of what it takes to be a medical practitioner attending to patients and contending with pressures from relatives of the patients who proffer "solutions" to the ailments, however complex. Apparently, medicine provides the inspiration for the creation of art as evident in the collection. A medical novice who reads the poems is likely to be enlightened by his exposure to medical terminologies and procedures. "The Physician", depicts the medical doctor as the best friend that man can ever have, standing as a bulwark against death and disease. The poet speaks with a very soothing voice as he explains that the physician is man's constant companion from the cradle to the grave, protecting him against the ravages of death's harbinger. "The Cradle", offers an insight into the physician's impression of a premature baby struggling to live despite all the odds stacked against him. The depiction of the precarious state of the premature baby evinces emotions and sympathy with the baby. Through the premature baby, the poet impresses it in the mind man that life is a struggle which ensues right from birth.

"Chaingang", introduces medical interns or resident doctors who perform the bulk of the work involved in taking care of patients at great personal discomfort. These interns are presented as selfless individuals who sacrifice their time and energy to ensure the well-being of patients. The way they toil and slave away listening and attending to patients makes the poet to describe them as a "chain-gang". The subject of "Crippled", revolves around handicapped persons referred to by the poet as "nature's imperfect handicraft". He questions the reason why able-bodied human beings should complain about their position and status in life despite the fact that they do not experience the kind of disadvantages which confront handicapped people who are often made objects of scorn and pity. The poem preaches the importance of being contented at all times. We can say that the message embedded inside the poem is that "Godliness

with contentment" in the life of any man is a great gain. In "4th Ventricle", Odeku describes the various parts of the human brain and the functions they perform which assist in making man sane and slightly above animals. For instance he talks about how:

Monticulus rises from the roof,
Using tentorium for a parasol;
Pack with its folia folded up
The vermis takes its midline place,
Like a crowded tree top,
Splitting cerebellum into symmetry.(83)

The systematic dissection of the brain presented so graphically by the poet offers an insight into the complex nature of the human brain and its centrality to the effective functioning of man. The surgeon is presented in the garb of a "god" with the ability to create and re-structure the brain through sutures.

"Relatives for a dying Man" is a poem that revolves round a patient in an hospital who is on the verge of dying from a terminal disease. It presents a graphic picture of the sorrow, the anguish and the pain as the patient and desperate relatives seek solutions to the seemingly unending suffering. The relatives become unofficial advisers to the doctor, prescribing solutions in order to show their love for dying man. The poet insinuates that these relatives are "beeches", hypocrites, who are out to see how they can benefit from the death of the patient. From the perspective of the poet, most of these relatives who crowd hospitals to show their affection, especially in caring for affluent patients, are most often scavengers who:

... maul the patient on his bed,
Filling his ears with their witless talks;
Pass by the chapel, by the corridor,
(Mumbling enough that you can hear)
You'll see their heavy heads they bow,
Gathered in a bleak concern

To fake a hastened requiem;
A host of wayward hypocrites plead,
Like heathen comforters
"Praying" loudly for a dying man.(94)

Quintessentially, Odeku, the poet, a Yoruba, functions as a defender of the rights of the common man and his larger-than-life image as a creator of his own art allows his presence to be felt on every page of *Twilight: Out of the Night*. A careful reading of this volume of poems establishes the fact that Odeku's versatility as an individual had a tremendous and very positive impact on his poetry. As a poet, he speaks on sundry issues, especially those that affect the common man in the society, operating at times as a chronicler of events but also as a social critic. He highlights flaws that are capable of destabilizing the society, if care is not taken by members of the society, irrespective of age, creed, colour or religion. In other instances, Odeku's poems are intensely personal, revealing in very unique ways, the poet's belief in the right of every man to self-definition and fulfilment.

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