Global Journal of HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: A
Arts & Humanities - Psychology
Volume 16 Issue 7 Version 1.0 Year 2016
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460x & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

A Literary Appraisal of Poets as Historians

By Dr. J.B. Agbaje
Obafemi Awolowo University

Abstract- The Yoruba believe that our past and present histories are being preserved for future generation. Hence, the Yoruba genres can be used to trace the history of a set of people and one occurrence or the other. Various genres of the Yoruba are embodiment of their history. In essence, Yoruba poets are seen as historians or repertoire of knowledge. All the stories which are embedded in Yoruba oral literature are seen in form of allusion. Yoruba orature helps to remember important cultural information and history of the Yoruba people. It is pertinent to note that the role of orature in the construction and reconstruction of history is remarkable as seen in the following genres of Yoruba oral literature such as alámọ̀, ìjálá, ẹ̀sà and orin. This paper concludes that in the above mentioned genres, like other Yoruba genres, poets play the roles of historians and that our past and present histories are preserved for future generation.

Keywords: *poets, orature, history, allusion, culture.*

GJHSS-A Classification: *FOR Code: 190499*

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:

© 2016. Dr. J.B. Agbaje. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

A Literary Appraisal of Poets as Historians

Dr. J.B. Agbaje

Abstract- The Yoruba believe that our past and present histories are being preserved for future generation. Hence, the Yoruba genres can be used to trace the history of a set of people and one occurrence or the other. Various genres of the Yoruba are embodiment of their history. In essence, Yoruba poets are seen as historians or repertoire of knowledge. All the stories which are embedded in Yoruba oral literature are seen in form of allusion. Yoruba orature helps to remember important cultural information and history of the Yoruba people. It is pertinent to note that the role of orature in the construction and reconstruction of history is remarkable as seen in the following genres of Yoruba oral literature such as alámọ̀, ìjálá, ẹ̀sà and orin. This paper concludes that in the above mentioned genres, like other Yoruba genres, poets play the roles of historians and that our past and present histories are preserved for future generation.

Keywords: poets, orature, history, allusion, culture.

I. Introduction and Theoretical Background

In the Yorùbá genres, the poets play the roles of historians wherein our past and present histories are preserved for future generation. This study established the fact that Yorùbá genres can be used to trace the history of a set of people and one occurrence or the other. There are different types of orature among the Yorùbás and all these genres are embodiment of their history. Yorùbá poets are seen as historians or repository of knowledge whereby many of the Yorùbá histories are kept. All these stories are seen in form of allusions. Blacking (1977: 22) says:

> Orature is committed to preserving the history and culture of individual people through performance; and through it vital cultural information is passed down from generation to generation.

Here, Blacking reveals it that Yorùbá orature is based on preserving history and culture, and vital information are known through it. Without orature, many of the cultural information and history might have been forgotten. But through it, they were able to pass it to other generation. That is why it is rightly said that histories are known through poetry.

Ajibade (2009: 101) also agreed to this why discussing Yorùbá Nuptial poetry. He said that, Epitherlamiums, like other Yorùbá poetry illuminates the culture of the Yorùbá people especially the formation of social groups, kinship, solidarity, sexuality, and childbearing among others.

Olatunji (1984: 115) supported this fact in his work titled *Features of Yorùbá Oral Poetry*. He says: Ẹsẹ Ifá can be treated as verbal and a storehouse of information about Yorùbá mythology and cosmology.

Olatunji says this because he knows that a lot of information are embedded in ẹsẹ Ifá.

Abimbola (1975: 32) supports the fact that ẹsẹ Ifá constitutes a compendium of information on Yorùbá world view. He says: "Ifa literary corpus is the store-house of Yorùbá culture inside which the Yorùbá comprehension of their own historical experiences and understanding of their environment can always be found. It is recognized as a repository for Yorùbá traditional body of knowledge embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore." This also gives another revelation that Yorùbá poets are historian since ẹsẹ Ifá is one of the oratures of Yorùbá, full of history, philosophy, medicine and folklore.

Also Olabimtan (1980: 153) says:

> Poetry, like religion, is essential to the life of the traditional Yorùbá. It is the vehicle of all that is sublimed in the culture of the people, and that is why there are many genres of traditional Yorùbá poetry to convey the various aspects of the people's cultures.

Barber (1990: 315) says:

> Each oríkì gestures away from its location within the performed text to an interland of meaning outside the text. Not only that some are specific historical references and some are generalized comments referring to a timeless or ideal state of affairs.

Awe (1974: 331) also buttresses it that the role of orature in the construction and reconstruction of history is tremendous. Going by the Yorùbá Alamo, ijala, esa and orin, it is clearly evident that many of these histories are embedded in them.

Auhtor: Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.
e-mail: ajibadebasit40@gmail.com

© 2016 Global Journals Inc. (US)

II. Analysis

a) Ìjálá chant

Ikòyí

Ìkòyí Ọmọ Arógun dádé	Olúkòyí, son of Akúdagbòdìàkàlà
Olúkòyí ọmọ akú dá gbèdú àkàlà	The son of war meets me at forest
Ọmọ ogun bámi nígbó mo dolú igbó,	I become the master of forest
Ogun bámi lọ́dàn mo dèrò ọ̀dàn,	War meet me at grass-field
Ogun bámi ní pàlàpálá	I become the master of grass-field
Ìjènì mowẹ́ ju ọ̀pá ìbọn lọ	War meet me at a tight corner
Ogun àjàwèyin lomuu ilé Olúkòyí wùmí gbé,	War fought without retreating is why I love to live in Olúkoyi's house
Ogun joojúmọ́ ló mú ilé baba wọn súmi í lọ,	War at everyday makes me be tired of their father's house
Ọba kọ̀, Ọba ò sígun	The king refuses to declare war
Ẹsẹ̀ òsì Ọba ò pẹsẹ̀ dà,	The left leg of the king doesn't change his legs
Ọba ní káfi ọdún yìí kàgbò ọfẹ,	The king said we should use this year to prepare àgbò ọfẹ
Èmí ìsoògùn làyà,	To do drawns is to be brave
Ìlàlá tó bá dodún mẹ́ta òní ńkọ́?	What of ìlàlà that spends another 3 years from now?
Ogun ń bẹ lọ́wọ́ ọba,	War is at the king's finger tip
Ìjénì mi ò̩bẹbẹ,	
Tí mo rógun gbéra bí aṣọ	That I got war to put on like cloth
Ìkòyí ọmọ ojú oróoró	Ìkòyí the child of Ojú oró oró
Ìkòyí ọmọ ọ̀rà ọ̀rà	Ìkòyí the child of Ọ̀rà ọ̀rà
Kín àbá mú rel'e rẹ?	What would we have taken along to your house
Gbabí wá	Branch here
Olúkòyí ọmọ ogun lọ́sàn-án olè lóru	Olúkòyí the off-spring of war in the daylight but stealing in the night
Bí ewúrẹ́ rẹ bá sọnù	If your goat is lost
Mábi èṣọ́ Ìkòyí	Don't ask èṣọ́ ìkòyí
Ṣùgbọ́n tóbìnrin rọ̀gbọ̀dọ̀ rẹ bá sọnù	But if your beautiful wife is lost,
Wábi èṣọ́ Ìkòyí	Ask èṣọ́ Ìkòyí
Olúkòyí lọ ogun ṣùgbọ́n kò wálé mọ́	Olúkoyí went to war but didn't come back home again
Wọn gbé orí Olúkòyí gengẹ	Then, they carried Olúkòyí's head majestically
Lọ sí ààfin ọba	To the king's palace
Olúkòyí sọ pé òun ò t'iidé oórì bàbá òun	Olúkòyí said he had not reached the burial ground of his father
Agbede gbédé	Agbede gbédé

In the above extract, the chanter makes allusion to the history of Onikoyi's lineage. Here the chanter makes it known that the Ikoyi people are brave people and great herbalists. Besides, the chanter depicts the Onikoyi's lineage to be womanizers that is, they flirt with women. This attitude could be seen in their ways of life wherever they may be either at festive mood or war front. Also, the chanter depicts that the Onikoyi's lineage are warlike people, that is, they have flair for war. They are not tired of going to the battle field at any point in time because of the love they have for their fathers' land. Below is another example from Èsà Chant:

© 2016 Global Journals Inc. (US)

b) Ẹ̀ṣà Chant Ológbojò

Arólú owó,	Arólú owó
Ẹ̀sà ògbín	Ẹ̀sà ògbín
Qmq lẹ́ẹ̀gi ọ̀ wọ́sọ	The child of Lẹ́ẹ̀gì did not wear cloth
Qmq ọ̀wọ́sọ	The child of those who wear cloth
Wọ́yè nígbàlẹ̀	To belittle chieftaincy in secret
Qmq ọ̀ wọ́sọ kẹ́kẹ́ rẹ̀gbẹ	The child of those who wear kẹ́kẹ́'s cloth
Rèé gbégún wale	To the bush to bring a masquerade home.
Ológbojò qmq kọ́ndú oní wọ	Ológbojò, son of Kọ́ńdú Oniwọ
Àìná ni Ìyá Ògbín jẹ,	Àìná was Ògbín's mother
Báágídé ni baba Ológbojò ní gbahun	Baagide was Ológbojò's father then
Mọlé mọ̀le ará òde	A builder, a family of those outside
Ò gbólúkẹ́,	One who cares for Olú
Oológbojò	Ológbojó
Oólógbojò	Ológbojó
Oólógbojò	Ológbojó
Mo mọlé yín o	I know your house
Ẹ̀sà ògbín	Ẹ̀sà Ògbín
Bó yọ ọ̀la Ọlọ́un afòní bùn ni	If God wishes, He grant us this day
Ẹ̀sà ògbín moríké	Ẹ̀sà Ògbín I'm cared for
Mo yáa súnké sí	I quickly
Arólú owó	Arólú owó
Awon lọmọ arágọ̀ gbálẹ̀	They are the children of Àrágọ̀gbálẹ̀
Nígbàlẹ̀	In secret
Awon lọmọ oní sékété	They are the children of the owner of sékété
N wére	In a hurry
Arólú owó	Arólú owó
Ẹ̀yin lọmọ pálasà	You are the children of Pálasà
Ológbojò má gun igi ilá	Don't back okro to limb Ológbojò
Ìwọ ni ọmọ Arégunsinmọdélé ọkọ	You are the children of Arégúnsinmodele ọkọ
Lónìí àti lánàa àmúyagàn ní ìyá jẹ́ fọ́mọ	Today and yesterday, everyone is proud of his/her mother.

In the foregoing extract, the chanter establishes that Arólú Owó, Ẹ̀sà Ògbín's lineage are masqueraders. Here, the chanter traces the history of the lienage to Kọ́ńdú Oníwọ. It is made known that the Ẹ̀sà Ògbín's lineage are great entertainers. Even, the Ẹ̀sà Ògbín's lineage uses their masquerades to perform for the audience during their children's marriages. That is to say, the Ẹ̀sà Ògbín's lineage were known from the time immemorial as great socio-cultural entertainers in the society.

Kêyìn sókun song is the next example to be consideration

© 2016 Global Journals Inc. (US)

c) *Keyin sokun song*

Lead:	If we are begging for children Explain it to God A child who puts hand in people's pocket To steal people's money Is not a child. But a child who will uplift his/her father's house Who shall favour his/her mother's house God hear me out It doesn't just start at our time Ever since, thieves have been dying ruthlessly Ever since, thieves have been dying shamely During the time of Olúgbọ́n During the time of Arẹ̀sà During the time of Òrànmíyàn, father of the Ifẹ̀land Theives turned their backs to the sea May I not turn my back to the sea	Lílé:	Bí a bá ń tọrọ ọmọ lọ́wọ́ Ọlọ́run Ẹ sàlàyé ẹ fỌlọ́run Qmq tí ń tọwọ́ bọ̀pò Tí ń jáwó olówó Ọmọ kọ́ Ṣùgbọ́n, ọmọ tí yóò gbélée bàbá ga Tí yí o ṣe ilé ìyá lóore Èdùmàre gbóhùn mi Kò sẹ̀sẹ̀ bẹ̀rẹ̀ nígbà tiwa Láéláé lolè ti ń kúkú oró Láéláé lolè tí ń kúkú ìyà Láyé Olúgbọ́n Láyé Arẹ̀sà Láyé Òrànmíyàn baba nílẹ̀ Ifẹ̀
Chorus:	A child who wakes up in the morning Who doesn't have a job Who wants to buy an expensive velvet Who wants to buy lace Who wants to buy Damask Pool of blood on the thieves who turned their backs to the sea May I not turn my back to the sea.	Èghè:	Olè á kẹ̀yin sókun Kí ń ma ṣe kẹ̀yìn sókun Ọmọ tó jí lówùúrọ̀ Tí ò níṣẹ́ lápá Tó fẹ́ ra àrán olówó Tó fẹ́ ra Léèsì Tó fé ra Damask Ẹ̀jẹ yòròyòrò lára olè tó kẹ̀yìn sókun Kí n má ṣe kẹ̀yìn sókun
Lead:	See them on the tree See a thick rope on the thief A big barrel is the trap of death A big barrel is the trap of suffering Pool of blood on the thieves who turned their back to the sea The head of a thief shall sleep at Ìbòkun	Lílé:	Ẹ wò wọ́n lórí igi Ẹ wò ìjárá okùn lára ìgárá Gorodóòmù ni pàkúté ikú Gorodóòmù ni pàkúté ìyà Ẹ̀jẹ̀ yòròyòrò lára olè tó kẹ̀yìn sókun Ìbòkun lorí olè ó sùn
Chorus:	Parent warn your child Warn them A child who wakes up in the morning Who doesn't have a job Who wants to buy an expensive velvet Who wants to buy lace Who wants to buy Damask Who wants to buy vehicle Pool of blood on he thief whose back is turned to the sea The head of a thief shall sleep at Ibokun	Èghè:	Ọlọ́mọ kìlọ̀ fọ́mọ Ẹ kìlọ̀ fún wọn Ọmọ tó jí lówùúrọ̀ Tí ò níṣẹ́ lọ́wọ́ Tó fẹ́ ra àrán olówó Tó fẹ́ ra Léèsì To fẹ́ ra Damask Tó fẹ́ ra mọ́tò Ẹ̀jẹ̀ yòròyòrò lára olè tó kẹ̀yìn sókun Ìbòkun lorí olè ó sùn.

From the above song, the singer alludes to the history of the notorious gang led by Oyenusi in 1970s. The notorious gang caused panic everywhere in the country. The Police Force could not curb them because they usually escape arrest in miraculous way. At last, the Military Force overpowered them when the force discovered the gang's hideout. The notorious gang faced the military tribunal and members were found guilty of armed robbery. All the members of the gang were executed by firing squad. Thus, the above singer brought the events into limelight for the consumption of the present generation. Perhaps, the singer intends to tell the on-coming generation to desist from such irritating social vices in the future.

© 2016 Global Journals Inc. (US)

The next example is Alámọ̀ chant:

d) Alámọ̀ Chant

Ìtàn ogun Èkìtì parapọ̀ hùn hùn hùn.	The history of Èkìtì parapọ̀ war
Ogun kírìjì	Kírìjì war
Ogun ìfìjè-bójú	A very bloody war
Ogun jálumi, ogun lílá ni	The war which made people to drown in the river, a very mighty war
Ohun logun á jà gbèyìn	It was the last war
Nílè ọmọ Odùduà	In the land of Oduduwa (Yorubaland)
Fábùnmi ní ìpàdé	Fabunmi held a meeting
Pèlú lọ́balọ́ba	With council of Ọbas
Sáafin òòrè lọ́tùn	At Oorè Otún's palace
Inú ìpàdé ijé è	In the meeting of that day
Ni kete ọba tí móhùn sọ̀kàn	All the Ọbas unanimously agreed
Wí ó di dandan	That it was compulsory
Kan jagun Èkìtì parapọ̀	To declare the war of Èkìtì parapọ̀
Ná bá ránṣé sí kete ùlú	They sent message to all the towns
Kei lí kete Èkìtì	In Ekitiland
Wí kán mọ́mọ ogun ránṣé sílùú ọ̀tùn	That they should send warriors to Ọ̀tùn Èkìtì
An ọnímọ̀ kàn	Those who knew one thing
An ọnímọ̀ méjì	Those who knew two things.
Kán pàdé líjó méje oni	Should meet in seven (7) days time
Níjó an a sígun rèlú Ìbàdàn.	The day they would wage war against Ibadan.
Bí kete ran	When they all
Bí an ṣe darí délé lólijó ijéè	Got home that time
Ni Fábùnmi múṣé ṣe ni wéréwéré	Fabunmi promptly took action
Fábùnmi Òrárálàdàá	Fábùnmi a great warrior,
Adésóyè ọkùnrin ogun	Adésóyè, a warlord
Ó ṣe gudugudu méje	He performed wonderfully
Yàyà méfà	He performed wonderfully
Kó mí di ujó méta-lé-lógún	After twenty-three (23) days
Kí kete èto ti tò	That all things had been set
Léyìn ùpàdé àkọ́kọ́	After the first meeting
Loòrè ọ̀tùn	That Òòrè Òtùn
Ọba Ọ̀kínbalóyè	Ọba Ọ̀kínbalóyè
Ọ́ tí gbé oùnránṣe dìde	He sent war messengers
Wí kán án rìn láti Èkìtì	He started their journey from Èkìtì
Títí lo sílùú Ùlórin	To Ilorin
Kán bèrè sí ní poló ogun Èkìtì parapọ̀	To promote the war of Èkìtì parapọ̀.
Fábùnmi tìka gbéra	Fabunmi, himself
Ó dùlú Ìlá Ọ̀ràngún	Travelled to Ìlá Ọ̀ràngún
Ní kí kete ran kóra jọ	Where they all converged
Lábé àkóso Adéyalé	Under the leadership of Adéyalé
Ní kán án múra ogun	That they should get set for war.
Agada Lámúàsán	Agada Lámúàsán
Ọmọ Ẹ̀fàn alàayè	Who hailed from Ẹfọ̀n-Alaaye
Òun ni Fábùnmi fàrokò rán	Was the person who took the special massage (Articles)
Ní kí ó márokò	And took the special message (Arako) with him
Lọ sọ́dọ̀ Ògèdèâgbé Agbógungbórò lúléèṣà	To Ogedengbe a Warlord at Ilesa.
Agada múra	Agada got set
Ọ́ múrìn àjò rè pòn	He went on his journey
Tòun tàrokò lọ́ ọ́,	With the special message (Articles)
Ọ́ múṣé fábùnmi ṣe ni wéréwéré	He carried out Fabunmi's message promptly.
Àmọ́ Ògọ̀tún ni Fábùnmi dé	But, Fábùnmi got to Ògọ̀tún
An án ti jíṣé Ògèdèâgbé Agbógungbórò sí baba	This is the message delivered to Fabunmi then;
Usé kàn jé ó ṣe ni ní kàyèéfî	The message delivered was mysterious
Usé kàn jé sí Fábùnmi lójó ijéè rè é o	The message delivered to Fábùnmi that time goes thus
Kete orí kó bá ń gbọ́ mi	All the people that hear me
Ògèdèâgbé ní kán an kí ọ.	Ogedengbe said we should greet you
Kán an ṣe ọ pèlé o.	And wish you well.
Inú òun dùn dí kete o o ṣe	That he, Ogedengbe, was happy with your

© 2016 Global Journals Inc. (US)

Àti kete ìwà ò ń wù Sí an Ajélè Ìbàdàn Mo fé o múra gírí Gégé bí alágbára omo Kí o síwájú an Ònìyàn re, Kí o jìjà òmìnira Kete ùrànlóó kó o bá ì fé Kó o ránsé sí mi...	actions And your behaviours Against Ibadan district officers. I want you to be up and doing As a hero And lead your people To fight for freedom All necessary assistance needed Should be made known to me...

In the above Alámò chant, the chanter alludes to the history of the inter-tribal war between the Qyqs and Ekiti-parapq (i.e the Kírìjì war). The war was fought in the 18th century. It lasted nine good years. It was the greatest war ever fought by the Yorùbá people in which many lives and properties were lost. It was through the intervention of the colonial masters that the war came to an end. The above Alámò chanter brought the event into limelight for the memory of the present generation.

III. Conclusion

It is established in this paper that Yorùbá orature is the compendium of information and store-house of Yorùbá culture inside which the Yorùbá comprehension of their own historical experiences and understanding of their environment can always be found. Orature is committed to preserving the history and culture of individual people and the community through performance; and through it vital cultural information is passed down from generation to generation. Yorùbá poets are seen as historians or repository of knowledge whereby many of the Yorùbá histories are kept. All these stories are seen in form of allusions.

Finally, this paper concludes that in the Yoruba Ìjálá, Èsà, Alámò, and Orin (song) like other Yorùbá genres, poets play the roles of historians and that our past and present histories are preserved for future generation.

References Références Referencias

1. Abimbola, W. (1975). *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifá*. UNESCO.
2. Ajibade, G.O. (2009). *Finding Female Voice.* A Socio-cultural Appraisal of Yoruba Nuptial Poetry. RUDIGER Koppe VERLAG. KON: Germany (101-150).
3. Awe, B. (1974). "Praise Poems as Historical Data. The example of the Yorùbá Oríkì". In Abimbola W. (eds.) Yoruba Oral Tradition. Ife African Languages and Literatures series II. 331-349.
4. Barber, Karin J. (1990). "Oríkì, Women and the Proliferation and Merging of Òrìsà" Africa: International African Institute 60(3). 313-337.
5. Blackings, J. (ed.) 1977). *The Anthropology of the Body*. London: Academic Press.
6. Qlatunji, O. (1984). *Features of Yorùbá Oral Poetry*. Ibadan: University Press Ltd.
7. Qlabimtan, A. (1980). *Ọgbọ́n Ìtọpinpin Ewì Yorùbá*. Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Ltd.

© 2016 Global Journals Inc. (US)