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The topic of this inaugural lecture is replete with terms which at first sight appear innocuous: "African literature", "creative pragmatism", "aesthetics of retrogression", but which careful interrogation reveals as not nearly as unproblematical as they seem. The conceptual difficulty of these terms is not merely semantic; it is epistemological; it is ontological; and, significantly, it calls into question an array of popular, long-held, though mistaken, assumptions and beliefs in literature, and culture.

Within the modest confines of time and space available for

## African Literature, Creative Pragmatism and the Aesthetics of Retrogression

*The Vice Chancellor,*

*Principal Officers of the University,*

*Provosts of Colleges and Post graduate School,*

*Deans of Faculties,*

*Colleagues, Friends from sister Universities,*

*Gentlemen of the Press,*

*Great OOUITES.*

The topic of this inaugural lecture is replete with terms which at first sight appear innocuous: "African literature", "creative pragmatism", "aesthetics of retrogression", but which careful interrogation reveals as not nearly as unproblematical as they seem. The conceptual difficulty of these terms is not merely semantic; it is epistemological; it is ontological, and, significantly, it calls into question an array of popular, long-held, though mistaken, assumptions and beliefs in literature, and culture.

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the lecture, this talk will attempt, simultaneously, to define terms, interrogate assumptions, proffer solutions, and offer practical suggestions in respect of a few of the many knotty issues raised by the exigencies of cultural history and contemporary literary experience. This dialectical procedure telescopes and highlights the main threads of my polemical discussions and contribution to literary discourse for some time now. Even so, literary theory and criticism is too vast a territory to crisis-cross meaningfully in a short talk like this one.

## II

In an article entitled “Aesthetic Juggling: Spatiality, Temporality and Postcoloniality in African Writing”, I make the submission that: Literary study has it as a truism today that the world of literature is a world of make-believe: certain forms of deceit or trickery are involved, as Plato correctly observes despite the descent into extremism of Platonic conclusions – as several literary theorists and critics of both antiquity and modern/postmodern times have persuasively argued. The counter-arguments notwithstanding (Aristotelian, Philip Sidneyan, etc.) literary study would appear to hold that imaginative literature, both oral and written, is based on some kind of tacit collusion or collaboration between writer and reader or author and critic. A good example is the famous “suspended disbelief” that a reader is said to take into the fictional world of the literary text(s). Another example is what may be described as the sugar-coating of literary invention that is commonly known as

“realism”, a device that appears to be threatened by magic realist and other postmodern narrative strategies. Realism is not real reality but affected reality in prose literature (Oyegoke, 2001)

It is a discussion of a peculiar form of aesthetic shamanism that is contained in the discipline known as “literary study” and sometimes referred to as “literary theory and criticism”. The sleight of hand that is involved in literature and the study based on it seems to have been compounded in recent times by modernist and postmodernist discourse(s) in philosophy and literature. The study simply plays around with such signifiers as “spatiality”, “temporality” and “postcoloniality” without showing much interest in the accompanying “signifieds”, if any, as “signifieds” seem to have quit the “endangered species” list and entered into that of “extinction” in literary study — since the likes of Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Paul de Man, Barbara Johnson, J. Hillis Miller, and other scholars, rediscovered language and philosophical and literary discourse.

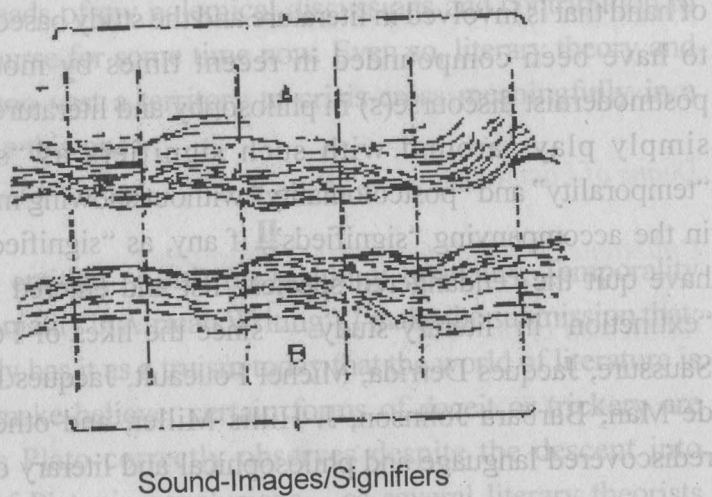
## III

Swiss philologist and professor of linguistics Ferdinand de Saussure must have had the biblical Garden of Eden in mind while proposing his science of language that has impacted massively on cultural studies in the last half a century. He proposes a pre-linguistic state whose cultural space consists of two continua of an “indefinite plane of jumbled ideas” and “the equally vague plane of sounds”. Language (represented in diagram by dotted lines ) divides up or



articulates and bonds together these continua of sound-images (signifiers) and concepts (signifieds) to produce what we recognize as words (Jefferson & Robey, 40):

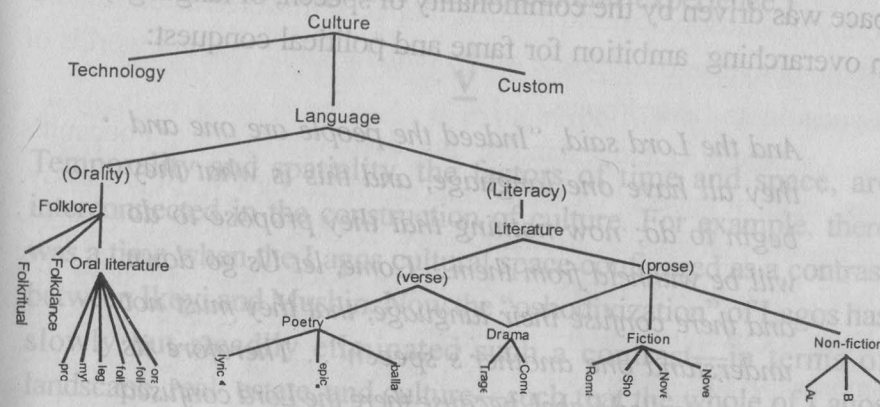
**Figure 1: Concepts/Signifieds**



By extension, the biblical Adam came initially into a pre-linguistic garden (of Eden) consisting of “jumbled reality” or “jumbled sense data”, as the epistemologist would put it, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a vague faculty of sound-images. Obeying divine instruction, Adam proceeded to articulate the pristine state, converting it, by means of words of language, into the first meaningful cultural space that had been meaningless without the words of language. Adam’s Maker had created order out of chaos, and things out of nothing, by means of the spoken word Genesis

(1:1-31). At God’s bidding (the one who had created things ex nihilo), Adam, the one who was made, proceeded to give meaning, through language, to that which had been created through speech. Thus, language initially had the dual mandate (i) to create and (ii) to give meaning.

The cultural importance of language is a product of the centrality of the spoken and written word to human life. Culture is the totality of experience including evidence of intellectual development of the group of people held together by that culture. This is illustrated in a tree diagram which I have developed and used to teach literature for some years now:



Apart from its creative and communicational value, language gives identity to a people; it characterizes a people's culture. It is a tag of cultural identity and, historically, has served the end of politics as well.

#### IV

The human race has been in a cultural crisis since Genesis and the disintegration of the biblical Tower of Babel. Pre-Babel cultural space was monolingual, inscribed by a single language, a common language of political cohesion and a common cause: "Now the whole earth had one language and one speech...And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves.'" (Gen. 11:1-4) The cultural space was driven by the commonality of speech, of language, into an overarching ambition for fame and political conquest:

*And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.....Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they must not understand one another's speech"... Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth (Genesis 11: 5-9).*

Post-Babel is a pluralistic cultural space inscribed by several

languages and a stubborn streak for political conquest unmitigated by the loss of a "united tongue". In Post-Babel space exploration has continued, using rockets and space-ships from launching pads and space-towers that are reminiscent of Babel, and using the imagination and the creative faculty, to compose literature, surf the Internet, and probe the rest of space. At the political level the "united tongue" has found a replacement in the United Nations, perhaps to stem the scourge of slavery, the slave trade, colonialism and neocolonialism, which are different manifestations of humankind's political and economic ambitions and inordinate desire for conquest. (I have used the terms Pre-Babel and Post-Babel as tropes, respectively, for the unproblematical pre-linguistic and the problematical post-linguistic human cultural experience.)

#### V

Temporality and spatiality, the factors of time and space, are interconnected in the construction of culture. For example, there was a time when the Lagos cultural space configured as a contrast between Ikoyi and Mushin. Now the "oshodivization" of Lagos has slowly but steadily eliminated such a contrast—in terms of landscape, real estate, and culture—such that the whole of Lagos has become a vast, distorted, undifferentiated cultural landmass. This pattern of conversion (and confusion)—making everywhere look like Oshodi— is taking place vigorously in every town and city in the country, including Abuja. Culturally and physically,



Nigerian towns and cities now look alike: a monotonous unplanned sprawling village. Each town or city has irretrievably lost its uniqueness.

According to Foucault's heterotopology, the new knowledge invented by himself, there are heterotopias and utopias. The heterotopias are described as a variety of spaces that are ideationally and concretely opposed to other types of spaces known as utopias. The spatialization of knowledge, "which is power", features pretty early in literary discourse, as illustrated by the Platonic idealist ideal republic from which the poet is famously, perhaps infamously, excluded on epistemological and moral grounds. This notional republic and piece of political space is, as is widely acknowledged today, a philosophical and political utopia, a "mirrored actualization" of the converse or opposite of the real, tangible, corrupt worlds of Foucauldian heterotopias.

There is a lucid and interesting discussion of one of Foucault's last seminal papers "Of Other Spaces" in Edward W. Soja's essay: "Heterotologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in Citadella". In it, Soja reviews the variety of spaces or heterotopias that Foucault examines in his paper. However, since unlike Soja's, the interest of this discussion is not Los Angeles, or the United States of America, but Africa and African writing, of the variety of heterotopias reviewed by Soja, the one that is of immediate interest to me is the type brought up last by Soja in Foucault's own words:

*Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of*

*which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory (perhaps that is the role that was played by those famous brothels of which we are now deprived). Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This later type would be the heterotopias, not of illusion, but of compensation, and I wonder if certain colonies have not functioned somewhat in this manner. In certain cases, they have played, on the level of the general organization of terrestrial space, the role of heterotopias (Foucault, 1986:27) (Soja, 1995:16).*

Duality is a state of being which is well-studied in philosophy as dualism: a view that seeks to explain the world in terms of two radically independent and absolute terms. The notion of doubleness comes up early in divine creativity: "Then God said, 'Let there be light; and there was light... and God divided the light from the darkness'" (Genesis 1:3-4). Furthermore, "The Lord planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed... therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken." (Genesis 2:8; 3:23)

In literature, the biblical garden of Eden continues to serve as a model of perfection (utopia) in contrast with the imperfect space to which Adam was expelled after his fall (heterotopia). History has shown that there was a time when Europeans physically

sought Eden at various locations on the globe, the Far East especially. Failing in this enterprise, Europe became Eden in the popular imagination (and literature) and everywhere else was Non-Eden. Paradoxically, the Far East has served European literature as both utopia and heterotopia at different times. It is against this cultural background that Foucault's discussion may be understood.

The heterotopia or space described by Foucault is the one set up as an "Other" against which the colonising "Self" and "Centre" measured itself. This particular position has been well argued by Edward W. Said and other scholars. It starts out first as a political space of illusion based on ignorance of the "Other" and then transforms itself into a compensatory space. In the literary and intellectual imagination the distant "Other" is utopia, as a first extreme, and then subsequent contact with the surface of the "Other" swings the projection to the opposite extreme of distortion, and utopia converts into worse than imperfect heterotopia; and the former imperfect space becomes the utopia in the popular imagination. In either extreme, the role of ignorance is strong. The pre-colonial genesis of paradisiac heterotopias is well studied (Oyegoke, 2001).

Postcoloniality as a theory of literature and literary study would appear to be sustainable as a strategy with which to attempt to unravel some of the conceptual problems of African writing. It must be conceded though that the phrase "African writing" at this point functions mainly as a signifier with no clear-cut signified. The phrase, like another, "African literature", retains a seductive appeal, perhaps mystery, that seems always to beckon one to a wild

goose chase. The temporality and spatialization of postcoloniality in African writing makes the seductive attraction of the signifiers "African writing" and "African literature" even more irresistible. It is difficult for me to find signifiers that are more slippery, more elusive than the terms that seek to describe literary and intellectual activity emanating from the vast, frequently misunderstood and ill-used space named Africa.

At the height of colonization, literary study made African literature cover about every space on earth where literary production emanated from a pen wielded by black fingers. For the purpose of classifying the literature and the study based on it, it was immaterial whether the black fingers moving the pen belonged to a person of distinctively Caribbean or North or South American sociological conditioning. It was enough that they were black fingers. This particular mindset was still in place even after the political processes of decolonization had begun. It is not at all clear either whether it has fully been replaced by another which sees the writing through continental spectacles or through Sub-Saharan sun-glasses (Oyegoke, 2003).

The transnational, continental and intercontinental cultural spaces of African writing seem to be under attack by post-coloniality which, is effectively a theory of pre-colonial, colonial, neocolonial and post-colonial cultural productions. However, postcoloniality is a polyglot activity informed by a myriad conflicting and contradictory philosophies and critical strategies. Worse, even postcoloniality can serve as a literary conduit for the recycling of myths and prejudices that are without foundation in



reality. Still, as a theory it has it uses, in much the same way that the postmodern, as a body of theories, fulfils a function that advances literary discourse from nowhere to somewhere and vice versa (Oyegoke, 1998).

## VI

Writing under the title "The Function of Criticism", T. S. Eliot, the influential writer and critic of the modern (and postmodern) age of literature, observes:

*Most of our critics are occupied in labour of obnubilation; in reconciling, in hushing up, in patting down, in squeezing in, in glozing over, in concocting pleasant sedatives, in pretending that the only difference between themselves and others is that they are nice men and the others of very doubtful repute.*  
(79)

Literature and literary study have come a long way since the literary theorist of antiquity, Plato, shut out the poet (and writer) from his notional republic on ethical and epistemological grounds and Aristotle attempted a rehabilitation of the writer on aesthetic and ideological grounds. Literary theory and criticism had been marked by chaos and confusion for years; Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism, acting independently during the early 20th century decried the eclecticism and positivism of previous critical strategies and embarked on theoretical reforms

to make literary study more systematic and more scientific. Coopting some of the radical new perspectives of modern linguistics, Structuralism rose in popularity for a few decades only to give way to a plethora of critical perspectives that are referred to as Post-Structuralism, consisting of Deconstruction, Feminism, New Historicism, Postcoloniality, and different slants to some of the more orthodox critical strategies such as Marxism and Modern Psychoanalytic Criticism.

Thus the aesthetics of literature is no more than problems in the philosophy of criticism, as illustrated by the title of Monroe C. Beardsley's book *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (1958). Rice and Waugh's summary of the polyglot literary scene seems apt:

*Much of the theory is abstract, and does not offer a method for approaching literary texts directly, however, it has important implications for the way we study literature, implications that cannot be dismissed simply because the theory is of no immediate pragmatic value. The discipline of literary criticism is largely founded on the basis of an immediate relation with its objects of study, but this is historically determined, not inevitable or natural. Part of the attack on the critical orthodoxy has been concerned with the undermining of that sense of a "natural" way to study literature. And if literary theory sometimes*

appears to caricature the tradition it attacks, and to make it seem more singular than it actually is, that is because its attack has often been targeted not at the manifest plurality of critical practices that constitute the tradition but at its roots, at that set of founding assumptions which traditional criticism often obdurately refuses to acknowledge as anything other than the "natural" and "sensible" way of criticism. (2)

Postcoloniality became an important theory of literature in the last three or so decades of the twentieth century. It is a theory of the writings of the former colonies of European powers with origins in the ideas of the cultural theorist Edward Said and receiving insightful theoretical contributions by the likes of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Aijaz Ahmad, and others. An influential publication *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* reviews the main planks of arguments in colonial and post-colonial literary studies up to near the close of the twentieth century.

The theory of colonial and post-colonial writing proceeds dialectically on the basis of binary oppositions, to separate the literary discourse of Centre from that of Margin by foregrounding Margin where previously Centre had been dominant. The Centre describes the cultural experience of the former colonial powers of Europe (Britain, France, Portugal, etc) and Margin refers to the cultural experience of the former colonies (Australia, Canada, India,

Africa, etc). Postcoloniality runs up a conceptual cul de sac when after opposing the colonised Periphery or Margin to the imperial Centre or Metropolis, it fails to carry through the strategy of binary opposition in the post-colonial cultural space called Africa. In an earlier discussion entitled, "The Dynamics of Postcoloniality in Literature: An African Perspective", I show how the terms "African literature" and its clones-in-miniature: "Nigerian literature", "Ghanaian literature", "Kenyan literature", "Ugandan literature", "South African literature", etc, are meaningless floating signifiers that only serve a geographical convenience in literary discourse. These nebulous cultural labels have misled not a few scholars and writers. Whereas a specific language should describe its literature for example, "English" literature, "French" literature, "Portuguese" literature, etc, what languages are "Nigerian", "Ghanaian", "Kenyan", "Ugandan", "South African" in those nondescript cultural labels referred to as "literature"?

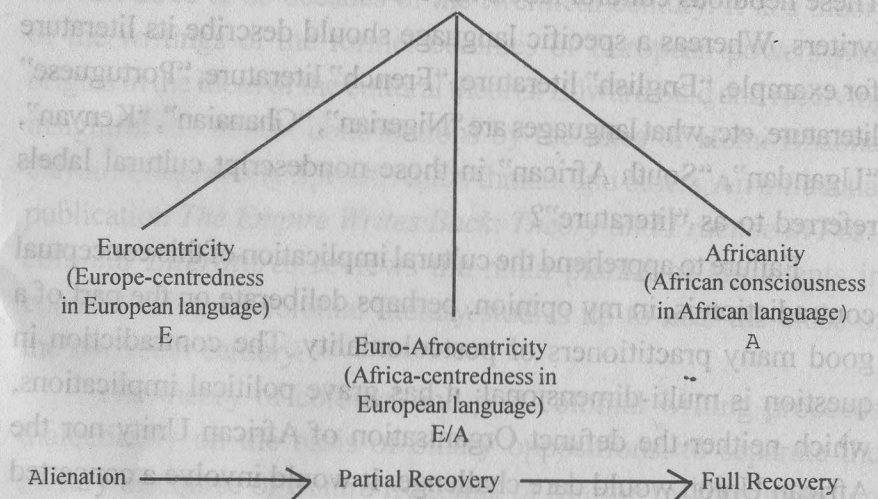
Failure to apprehend the cultural implication of this conceptual contradiction is, in my opinion, perhaps deliberate on the part of a good many practitioners of postcoloniality. The contradiction in question is multi-dimensional: it has grave political implications, which neither the defunct Organisation of African Unity nor the African Union would dare challenge. It would involve a concerted repartitioning of the African continent.

The African literary experience shows that what postcoloniality describes as margin actually constitutes a "new centre" of cultural domination: the African writing in the former



language of colonialism constitutes a “new centre” that raises a “new margin” in the cultural expression in the indigenous language(s), for example, Edo literature, Efik literature, Hausa literature, Igbo literature, Ogoni literature, Tiv literature, Yoruba literature, etc, in which the language describes the literature, as happens elsewhere but here is marginalised. Postcoloniality fights shy of a logical progression involving the foregrounding in literary discourse of the indigenous language literature(s), as illustrated diagrammatically:

**Figure 3: New Black Aesthetic**



into Igbo? Answer: This novel is about Igbo cultural experience

The progression of the aesthetics of African writing should be from an initial position of alienation through partial recovery to full recovery of a sense of identity and Africanity in which self-expression and creativity take place in the indigenous language. No full aesthetics of African writing is recoverable or possible in the erstwhile language of colonialism.

Historically, African writing has moved from the cultural misperceptions of the likes of Joyce Cary and Sir H. Rider Haggard to the confident creativity of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Festus Iyayi, Ben Okri, Isidore Okpewho, Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare, Odi Ofeimun, Sam Adewoye, Bayo Adebowale, Benson Okoji, and several others. At the indigenous language level, with perhaps the exception of writers such as Akinwumi Ishola, Kola Akinlade, Oladejo Okediji, Tunji Opatotun, the later Ngugi wa Thiong’o, African writing seems locked to some extent in a time-warp of the medieval romance of older African writers like D. O. Fagunwa and his Yoruba English version of Amos Tutuola.

It may be argued that the medieval prose romance is staging a last ditch battle for survival and trying to sneak back into contemporary aesthetic sensibility through the narrative strategy known as magic realism; but it is up against the eddying currents of a disappearing reading culture involving a milieu that is incapable of judicial criticism in literature, a milieu that is no longer able to distinguish between fact and fiction. For example, the aesthetic sensibility among the youth in Nigeria is no longer nourished by good literature; it is weaned on home video which in turn takes

inspiration from the literary traditions of the marvellous or supernatural of the medieval romance that is characterized mainly by interest in demon-gods, ritual, charms and magic. The potential and influence of certain types of home videos on cult activities and predilections among youths in real life have so far received negligible attention by scholars.

## VII

Sub-Saharan Africa is at the moment engulfed in a cultural crisis, a disturbance that is more pernicious than the political and economic instability. The Bible says: "There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance." (I Corinthians 13:10) Given the source of this observation, it may be taken as authoritative. What then is the language of African literature? Answer: "African". Is such a language non-existent. What is the audience for African literature? (Here the aesthetics of retrogression prevaricates)...em, the audience, em, of African literature is "the masses" Who are the masses? Answer: They are those at the grassroots. Fine, what language do the masses speak? Em, I think, em, they speak English.

Blockhead! If the masses speak English, how come for twenty years, from 1958-1978, not up to a million of them had read *Things Fall Apart* in English? Or put another way: not up to a million copies of the novel had been sold in that time, how come? Answer: That was because they had not translated that novel into Igbo language. Question: Why was it necessary to translate *Things Fall Apart*

into Igbo? Answer: This novel is about Igbo cultural experience and its audience is primarily Igbo. Question: Do you know the implication of what you have just said? There are no fewer than 25 million Igbo speakers – will 25 million of them read *Things Fall Apart* in translation? I can't answer that question.

"If you can't answer that question, how could you have answered the other one: Which audience is the African writer writing for?"

"Sir, I'm sure not many of them can answer that!"

"Who?"

"The writers themselves."

"You are not such a blockhead, after all!"

## VIII

Research has shown that Africans are acquiring competence in neither English or French or Portuguese nor the indigenous African language into which they are born. This development is a product of illiteracy that compounds the problem of illiteracy. Professor Ayo Banjo sets the date of the decline of literacy in Nigeria at the 1970s, while others believe it might have begun in the 1960s but has progressively worsened since then. The death-blow to literacy might have coincided with the decade that officially removed the importance of GCE Advanced Level (A/Levels) from the country's formal academic progression menu. By contrast, academic standards are still respectable at Makerere University, Uganda, because A/Levels have not been de-emphasised or discarded. With



incredible vengefulness, literature too has all but completely been removed from the syllabus at primary and secondary school levels, leaving cognitive gaps and incompetencies at the language level that university General Studies programmes and old-fashioned and unproductive language courses have been unable to correct. Yoruba studies has not been immune to some of the pitfalls experienced by English studies in the last four decades or so in this country. Yoruba is no longer taught with a compulsory literary back-up and rigour that it started with not too long ago, hence its decline as well.

At formal levels the mistake is made that English or French or Yoruba or Igbo or Hausa or Edo is a subject; it may be, but it isn't just a subject, it is a language. As has been mentioned earlier, a language is the nucleus of a culture. Therefore, the right cultural surround—to borrow from recent music terminology—is required for acquisition and mastery of a language. Just growing up in England or Australia will give a kid basic skills of grammar and usage of English; but if this kid will master the English language, growing up in England or an English-speaking environment is not sufficient. The kid must read literature in English—partly, that is the reason literature is still highly valued in the scientifically and technologically advanced societies of the world. It is in literature that you encounter a higher level of creative use of language, higher than you ever can get from mere classroom exposure or social interaction.

Another reason why literature is important and should feature regularly in everyone's cultural diet is that literature is about life.

Everybody has a stake in life, regardless of our narrow academic disciplines and other commitments. Not too long ago, when secondary school students and friends gathered together and one of them addressed another one in the following words: "E tu Brute!" seldom was an explanation necessary, because the students and friends would have been responding to a common knowledge of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and some other shared literary experiences. This kind of remark would perhaps draw a blank today among many university students, even of English.

Ben Carson, whose mother compelled him to read two books a week and write a report on the books at the time he was at the bottom of his fifth grade class, was transformed by the experience and, at age thirty-three, became head of pediatric neurosurgery of America's John Hopkins Hospital. No mean achievement for a kid who would have ended up as an urchin and "area boy". In his book entitled *Think Big: Unleashing Your Potential for Excellence*, he observes:

*All knowledge is important — a fact that some people do not want to hear. One of the wonderful things about learning is that knowledge not only translates from one area to another but is also an avenue that leads to understanding and insight.*

*For example, students often complain about the social studies courses as irrelevant, particularly history and geography. What they often do not*

*grasp is that these subjects broaden their mental horizons. History helps us to understand the past ... how we got the way we are. Geography explains many customs and events based on the land. (193-4)*

Alfred Nobel was a physicist and man of letters who loved literature. The literature category of the Nobel prize awarded annually by the Swedish Academy is treated as special because of that and the perpetually elevated position of literature in Western culture. Literature is relevant to everyone who is a part of culture and is willing to master a language, especially one that is official and is the language of government, broadcasting and educational instruction—and is an importation from England.

## IX

In the book of Ecclesiastes 10:12 the Bible says: “And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.” Much study may be unfriendly to the flesh, but the spirit of man or woman must remain undaunted by the many books being churned out by the publishing industry. When the Bible says “redeeming the time” (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5) it is a call to reorder priorities at personal, institutional and public levels. It is also a truism that drastic diseases need drastic cures. A vanishing academic culture requires an unusual pragmatic approach to recover it (Oyegoke, 2004).

At institutional level we have been long on speeches and rather short on action. A lot of us talk about poor English standard at virtually all levels of society—among university products especially. And that’s all the action: talk about poor English and people not reading for knowledge anymore. (Some cannot differentiate between “read” and “study” — “study” for a purpose say, to pass an examination, is only a small aspect of “read”.) A reading culture is a literary culture which is a must for Homo sapiens. As an institution we watch helplessly as both English and the indigenous language slip through the hands of society and society drifts back to Pre-Babel and a non-linguistic state. (Compare Carson’s mother’s creative pragmatism.)

## X

May I conclude this lecture by reiterating the paradox that “African writing” is a floating signifier without a clear-cut signified; “African literature” and its clones at national level (“Nigerian literature”, “Ghanaian literature”, etc.) are similarly non-descript; the audience for this literature is vague and elusive; frequently, the study based on this literature is confused and retrogressive. But there remain a few incontrovertible points: illiteracy is growing; good reading habits are becoming extinct; Africans are being divested of language, and the educational establishment has been unable to arrest the decline: because of a penchant for debate without pragmatism, speech without action. Finally, it seems culturally correct if literary theory and criticism should be confusing. This is a postmodern



world— but is no reason literature should not be read: and that is the action required!

### Acknowledgements

I would like to begin my acknowledgements with a Bible quotation: “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen” (John 21:25) Each person is a book that impacts on other books (persons) and is himself or herself impacted upon by several other books (persons). “Of making many books there is no end...” (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

Therefore, in summary, I thank God for: my parents, for the Oyegokes, for my cousins the Ayodeles, for my in-laws the Okesinas. For many from whom I have profited intellectually and professionally: Professor Isidore Okpewho, Professor Ayo Banjo, Professor Dan Izevbaye, Professor Molar Ogundipe, Professor Felix Mnthali, Professor David Richards, Professor Oyin Ogunba, Professor Abiodun Adetugbo, Professor Layi Erinosh, Professor M.A. Osunade, Professor Jide Matanmi, Dr Gbolade Osinowo, Dr Kerry Vincent, Professor Raphael Akanmidu, Professor Wole Omikorede, Rex Panti-Amoa, Professor Wole Amusan, Professor Tola Fadiran, Mr and Mrs Dapo Sonubi.

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Dr. Bayo Adebowale, Dr. Jerry Isekaehor Dibua, Dr. Olufemi Ogunyipe, Dr. Patrick Edewor.

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I appreciate God for successive generations of my students who have been enthusiastic and diligent; for my real and potential readers; and for widening circle of brothers and sisters.

I bless the name of God for my wife, Bolatumi, and wonderful children.

I hereby dedicate my inaugural lecture to the best of friends, who never fails, the incomparable kinsman redeemer, who by His grace, has rewritten with His own blood a refined version of this impure “book” in His Book of Life. His name is Jesus Christ.

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