SPINSTERS IN A WHIRLWIND: GENDER POLITICS IN ADEGBITE'S ECHOES OF YESTERYEARS

BOLADE BAMIDELE (MRS)
Department of English
Adeyemi College of Education
Ondo

Coping with a rapidly changing increasing complex society is a difficult and perplexing task. An increasing number of lifestyles have thus come about and have in turn created new conflicts. It appears that spinsters are generally moving away from the rigid attitudes and behaviour of the past and moving toward greater openness to personal expression in behaviour, thought and living styles. This article examines Oyindamola' obsession with becoming Kolawole's wife at whatever cost and Omoladun's cold calculating schemes in the battle line drawn between herself and Kolawole, after her friend's death on being jilted by Kolawole. It berates spinsterhood at its negative extreme, subtly hinting that situations need not break spinsters or make them desperate to the point of being branded insane. Even if they have lost grounds on the love arena, they should not resort to vengeance but should realize that troubles refine us; when we come out from troubles, we are better in our knowledge and understanding of creation. The main objective and purpose of this work is to illuminate the element of reality found in fiction and fictional writings.

Fiction And Reality

The word 'fiction' is sometimes used to denote literature. Literature itself could be defined as the recreation of the total experience of man through some imaginative devices. Some scholars also see it as an artistic reflection of the human experience. Taking some other definition by scholars into consideration, fiction is said to be a mirror of life while some opined that it is life itself. Each person giving the definition has done it as it occurs to him/her and from his own perspective.

Fiction in a literary sense, can be seen as 'work of art that is drawn from the imagination of the author (Garuba 1997). Fictional works involve creativity. This makes the author create a work which is transformed into writing embellished with the needed literary condiments and delicacies so as to suit the reader and perform the literary functions of transformation, education, entertainment, therapy, aesthetics, etc. The nineteenth century critic, Walter Pater, referred to the matters of imaginative and artistic literature as a 'transcript, not of mere fact, but of fact in its infinitely varied form'. Pater's definition is a pointer to the fact that fiction does not end with imagination and creativity but also factual elements.

A perusal of these definitions shows that something is common to all. The common feature is that it deals with human experience or life.

There are features, which support the reference to fiction as literature. One of this is human experience. Fictional writers bring out their stories from the experiences of the writer, inter-personal, inter-personal and inter-communal relationships within the society of such writers. Critics like Aristotle described fiction as an ignoble enterprise. Some other critics referred to it as falsehood, lying or feigning. This definition does not see anything of value in fiction. It ignores the human experiences that are inherent in fiction. It is suffice to say this is wrong, bearing it in mind that fiction is not created in a vacuum but has its root in the experience of man's past, present or things likely to happen. Writer's write novels based on their experiences; usually written in the guise of imaginative creation. They recreate the experiences of their formative years through the voice of their older selves.

Another basic idea is recreation. The experiences garnered are not documented in black and white in their chronological order and exactly how they happened. The stories are reproduced in another form for public presentation. The author has to sort out and select events from a myriad of life experiences that are available to him. These experiences are further arranged and rearranged in a way that will make them a convincing and plausible presentation of life. It is these same qualities of creativity, invention, imagination and recreation that differentiate fiction from some other subjects like history. Imagination really helps to beautify fictional works and it has also served as an avenue through which reality is transformed to fiction. The immediate environment of an author may provide the raw materials for the author's imagination. The onus however, lies on the author to use the imaginative skills to project the work beyond his immediate milieu in lieu of recording the partialities as done in history.

Furthermore, since works of art are not created in a vacuum, fictional works also reflect the society in which it is made. There is every tendency that a corrupt society possesses fictional works with corrupt condense or recreate world. This shows the didact work of fiction. The creative works show the corrupt tendencies of the society and use the characters to correct the vices and anomalies; fiction recreates these historical events with a view to show the ills and make suggestions for necessary amendment to be made. Fictional works play many functions within the human society. These functions are discussed below.

Linguistic Function

Fiction rests heavily and solely on language for its success. Language, which is the most basic instrument for literary creativity is used in conveying meaning and in performing all other functions. The linguistic manipulations by a literary artiste will either 'make' or mar his work, hence the beauty or otherwise

of any work of art depends on how well the language is employed. Consequently, fiction helps to develop language. It is expected of a good work of art to possess those qualities that would exhibit perfection or high sense of linguistics artistry.

Aesthetic Function

Some people are of the opinion that the most important quality of literature should be beauty. A good work of art should appeal to the sense with its beauty. It creates beauty in the areas of arrangement of words, meaning or words, subject of discussion, the mission of such work and the totality of such work.

Therapeautic Function

This refers to the ability of literary works to heal. Some scholars opine that fiction works should be able to cure people of their ailments. The ailment can be emotional, psychological or even economical. Fictional works have the ability to suggest solutions to people's problems and even cure their ailments.

Didactic Function

Fictional works are meant to teach morals. The true state of every society is reflected in its literature because it mirrors the society. Through the fictional works of art the literary artiste re-orders the disorderliness of the society by pointing out its wrongs such as: immorality, betrayal oppression, etc and suggesting ways through which these evils could be dealt with.

Educational Function

It also serves as a tool for educating members of the society. Younger members of a society learn the cultural practices of their people through the literature of the people. Also strangers get acculturated to a new environment through the reading of literature produced in such a new environment.
Apart from this, literature feature is prominently in the educational programmes of all societies.
The traditional form of education exploits the folkloric tradition of the society while the modern forms rely on the numerous form of written literature.
Fictional works over the years have shown that the total structure of a writer's world affects his vision and creativity. The state of the writer's work determines his conception and perception, Fiction and even presentation, and reality are so closely intertwined as fictional works dwell much on imagination, which beautifies historical events to bring out the aesthetics in work of art.

Spinsterhood

Spinsterhood is characteristically described as the point of transition from adolescence to adulthood. This transition entails a personal displacement from the world of the family to the larger social world. The period is thus marked by a variety of personal changes. These changes are affected by a manifold dynamic with biological, psychological and social components. Such components are of course highly interrelated, with the degree of coordination or disjunction among them, leading to different patterns of growth. Spinsters' cognitive abilities undergo changes that allow greater incorporation of others in their plans and improvement of self-reflective capacities necessary for adult performance, while the social dynamics affects in varying degrees the drawing realization of identity and the assumption of a personal identity. Erikson has designated this attainment as the central task of spinsterhood, noting its dependence on previous stages of the life cycle and its influence on subsequent development. This attainment of individuated identity is also subject to multiple influences.

Shakespeare grimly reminded man that human beings seem inextricably caught up in anabolic-catabolic cycles, in circadian rhythms, and in the menstrual ebb and flow. Samuel Butler added that all life-long, everyday and hour, man is engaged in the process of accommodating his changed and unchanged self to changed and unchanged surroundings. Living, in fact, is nothing else than this process of accommodating; when he fails in it a little he is deemed stupid, when he fails flagrantly he is mad, when he suspends it temporarily, he sleeps, when he gives up the attempt altogether, he dies. The characters in the book – Echoes of yesteryears fall into these different categories in their attempt to accommodate their changed and unchanged selves to changed surroundings.

Resumé of the Novel

As presented in the book, Echoes of Yesteryears, It is only retrospectively that one obtains a true appreciation of the nature of change. The author punctuates the past by an endless series of events, so that the literary piece becomes a succession of stories. Oyindamola, the lead character, heaved a sigh of relief as the plane she boarded took off from Gatwick Airport in London. Her mind leapt back to some nine years earlier when she first met Kolawole at Fiditi. With the use of the flashback technique, the reader is given a picture of how Oyindamola met Kolawole in her workplace. Her aunt with whom she stayed in Lagos for ten years had just relocated to the United Kingdom with her family, so Oyindamola had to move back to her home town and work for a while before embarking on further studies. To drive her point home the more, the author draws a lot of parallels in relationships and events, despite the

flashback technique employed. After a year of teaching in Fiditi, her aunt wrote to request her father to allow her come to England since she was about to put to bed and needed someone around to help take care of the house. Oyindamola thus left off for England as a timid eighteen – year old primary school teacher. She returned as a sophisticated and overzealous lady who had developed a superiority complex.

She chartered a taxi to take her to Kolawole's place on arriving in Nigeria; she felt good about the fleet of assorted cars that greeted her on arriving at the company. She was glad that Kolawole made wise use of the Pounds sterling she kept sending to him over the years. The impressive building was a good justification of the seemingly outrageous amount she sent to him some years ago to start the business. Kolawole was pleasantly surprised to see Oyindamola. They chatted and talked endlessly till Kolawole eventually took her home. Unfortunately Yemisi was already in the house planning to spend the weekend with Kolawole since he had fixed his engagement ceremony with her for just two months away. Yet Kolawole had the guts to tell Yemisi that the game was over since Oyindamola was back to claim her rightful place.

Using the flashback technique still, the author gives the reader a picture of how Kolawole and Yemisi met each other. He had gone to uncle Dele's office sometimes back about a business proposal and saw Yemisi in his office. Luckily the business clicked and he was awarded a six hundred and fifty thousand Naira contract, and given a mobilization fee of three hundred and twenty five thousand Naira. As Kolawole made to move out of the premises, he again saw Yemisi standing near a car with a flat tyre. He asked her to join him for lunch anytime in the week to celebrate his good fortune. A lunch date was fixed and soon a relationship developed. This opened doors for Kolawole and jobs poured in on him. His junior brothers were secured on plum jobs and the sister got a University admission. Although Kolawole liked Yemisi very much and she was eight weeks pregnant for him but Oyindamola's Pounds Sterling, elegant posture, sophisticated and glamorous looks gave her an edge. Yemisi was badly shaken by the trend of events, but Omoladun was beside her to calm her down and teach her to learn to take the problems that came her way as part of life. Yemisi realized with time that she was suffering from Ectopic pregnancy, hence the abdominal pains she had from time to time. Yemisi had to be operated after the pains she suffered on the day Kolawole visited her. Unfortunately she died and Omoladun resolved that Yemisi's murderers must be brought to book. She thus went to the police station to lay a murder charge against Kolawole.

Kolawole was arrested and held under detention. When the case was finally heard in court, Omoladun claimed that Kolawole threatened to kill the

deceased if she refused to terminate the pregnancy she was carrying, as he was no longer interested in marrying her. When she did not succumb, Kolawole kicked her violently several times and she fell on the floor. Some six months after Kolawole's arrest, he was however discharged and acquitted after the gynaecologist told the court that after careful examination of Yemisi's file, he found that she died because she suffered an adverse reaction to the anaesthetic agent given her before the operation.

Oyindamola stood by Kolawole's parents through it all. She drove them from court to the new house she had just bought for Kolawole in Ikoyi. She took control of affairs, advising that the past must be put behind them whilst they strove to reach the future. A month after Kolawole was released from prison, they travelled to get a good rest and shop for the fashion house they were setting up. They spent six weeks in New York, savouring the beautiful city and dreaming about the future. Back in the country, they both looked refreshed.

Barely a week before the opening of the fashion house, Oyindamola ran into a friend who was very close to her when she stayed with her aunt in London and even beyond that; Mildred. Oyindamola denied knowing Mildred and turned down Mildred's excited and warm overtures. Mildred reported the stupid friend who walked out on her to Omoladun whom she claimed was with her when she attended Oyindamola's birthday party a couple of years back. Mildred reminded Omoladun that Oyindamola was with her during Omoladun's daughter naming ceremony. Omoladun was wild with joy to discover the Oyindamola had finally been caught in a web. This is because Oyindamola happened to be the same person with Dorothy, Mildred's friend of years back, who was married to Dr. Kingsley Magnus-Jones and had three children for him. Dorothy poisoned her husband and children, and made away with the man's wealth for Nigeria. Fortunately the husband and two of the kids did not die. Omoladun and Mildred thus got in touch with Kingsley to come over with the children for Oyindamola's wedding with Kolawole. Oyindamola had the greatest shock of her life on seeing Kingsley presenting their wedding certificate and pictures to the officiating ministers in church.

Oyindamola's mother did not make it to the hospital before she breathed her last. Oyindamola's father was found dead in a nearby forest two days after the aborted wedding. Kolawola headed for Kenya a day after the aborted wedding leaving a for-warding address; and his family also left Fiditi for the unknown. Oyindamola never came back to her senses again as she constantly yelled and talked to herself. Her brothers left Fiditi in shame and moved over to Lagos to manage her fashion house which was eventually closed down and sold off to offset the medical bills incurred on Oyindamola.

Gender Politics

Echoes of Yesteryears alerts readers to some personal conflicts between spinsters over a man. These gender battles generate the richest instruction, where the woman ended up having the upper hand and dominate the environment, with the male-folk at the receiving end. Hilton Hubbard (1999:358) suggests that the interesting question for any linguistic analysis should be what kind of linguistic features in the text underpin this perception and what framework can be used for describing these features.

We find systemic-functional grammar, and especially Discourse analysis model suitable. Its eclectic nature as the examination of the functional use of language (Labov, 1972) will make the analysis of

" a coding of the going on: who does what in relation to whom/what, where, when, how and why. Thus the analysis is in terms of some PROCESS, its PARTICIPANTS, and the CIRCUMSTANCES pertinent to the process-participant configuration (Hassan, 1988:63)"

The participant roles (Hubbard, 1999) and their goals are key features of our analysis of extract from the selected text in order to clarify gender politics in fictional language. Therefore the critic has a duty to make educative discoveries about the situation that obtains in discourse codes.

Any attempt to engage gender politics in Literature must begin with the manifestation of feminism in literary discourse. Patricia Mcfadden (1994:40) suggests that writing as a feminist implies the creation of new and different spaces within which to challenge Old paradigms and viewpoints, and make the difference in African scholarship. Adegbite's Echoes of Yesteryears may be perceived as an attempt to consolidate the role of African women as achievers, since her protagonists are economically independent in such magnitude that the sought-after husband, Kolawole, enjoys their wealth and connections.

In Adegbite's Echoes of Yesteryears, the role of spinsters is foregrounded as an aspect of gender politics. Right from the very fist chapter Oyindamola, in her attempt to keep some interested men off her back, had to tell some lies. Most importantly because she could not tolerate the ugly beast who was the spokesman of the two. When she finally fell into the trap of the handsome of the two the following day, all she could say was 'we should forget what happened' p.6.

And whilst she visited Kolawole in his hostel room in their younger years, she met another girl who gave her the scolding of her life.

> *' Listen to me young girl, when I was your age, I did not run after men. I read very hard to pass my exams. Moreover, I am Kolawole's girlfriend and I'm sorry you can't wait for him. Go back to your school and study hard, wait until you pass your exams before you start thinking of men. And for goodness sake, be decent, let the men do the running around p.21.*

The choice of words in this text is instructive. What we can deduce from this is a conviction arrived at through logical reasoning and a superiority complex.

The following utterance by Kolawole to Oyindamola in their student days cannot however be said to be deduced or arrived at through logical reasoning, but from a false gender superiority.

'Oyindamola, did you just spray an insecticide?'

This was said after Oyindamola just applied perfume whilst she was getting dressed for a party.

'This material is really lovely, where did you buy it? I would love to have some to make window curtains. P. 68 Oyindamola had bought the material to make a skirt out of it. 'No, thank you. I am not a goat'. This was said in reply to Oyindamola's offer of roasted corn to Kola.

Listening to or reading Vivian's and Oyindamola's conversation on uncle Femi's interest in Vivian cannot but send rib cracking laughter down one's system.

'' If Aunt Moradeke gets wind of what you have just said, I can assure that we will be looking for a wreath to lay on your grave. Please keep off my aunt's husband if your don't want trouble, and lots of it for that matter p.59

The Yoruba world-view relied on for conjugal relationship is featured in Yemisi's Uncle's utterance whilst conversing with Kolawole.

'We have only come to beg you to please forgive her. Our elders say that the leaf used to wrap soap eventually becomes soap. You have become a part of our family and we relate to you as a son.' P. 24.

Yemisi's aunt was on her knees all the while.

Kolawole's mother's comment on the issue was, however, assertive.

' So after she has made a complete mess of her life in the while man's land, she finally decided to come and settle down with a gutless imbecile whose quest for wealth has turned him into a dummy? No, she wouldn't succeed with her plans. Her witchcraft will have no power over me. Her charms will not affect me.' P.50

Yemisi's stance after being humiliated and disgraced by Kolawole is a picture of the modern day's spinster. Shakespeare claimed that heaven knows no fury than a woman scorned.

'I don't want to ever set my eyes on you in my life again. If you happen to be the only man on earth, I would gladly die a spinster. If you are the only man destined to father my baby, then I would prefer to remain childless for life ' p.88

Spinsters had a field day in the book, Echoes of Yesteryears. Jolomi's relationship with Kolawole is another amusing example. Kolawole tried to get in touch with her on the phone during he holidays. She, however, left a one-liner message which constantly repeated itself each time he called.

'Jolomi does not wish to speak with you.' P.64

When they finally met in school, she was in the company of her friends while Kolawole pleaded to have a few words with her.

'I don't talk to gigolos.' She replied.

Then she delivered an unwavering glare of disgust, staring at him the way a long suffering creditor would stare at an incorrigible debtor. Kolawole grabbed her arm as she made to walk away.

"How dare you touch me with your filthy hand? P.64

And she slapped him boldly across his face. He stood rooted to the ground as Jolomi walked confidently into the hostel, to the full admiration of her female colleagues. Wolfgang Iser (1978) states that communication in literature is set in motion by a fusion of what is revealed and what is concealed, as evidenced in the emotional crisis between Jolomi and Kolawole. Each time Kolawole saw her, his mind wandered back to the humiliating scene. Jolomi did not help matters at all because she usually let out a wild giggle, as through he was a comical character who played in real life the role of jejune.

Omoladun, Yemisi's friend, labelled a tigress, because of how ruthlessly she dealt with her husband who cheated on her whilst they were in Europe, stood solidly beside Yemisi. All that was uppermost on her mind was vengeance. The putative features of the label 'tigress' can be fully accounted for by expressions used to describe her actions in Europe-*'hell was let loose' she beat the lady to a point of unconsciousness', Sola left with a red eye to nurse, ' she remained as strong as a bull though she was five months pregnant, 'she sued her* husband for divorce, and Sola was repatriated back to Nigeria. This view that assigns the noun 'tigress' to a woman is of pejorative connotation. It has a moral implication: a woman is not permitted to insist on her views if they run contrary to her husband', the thesis here is that a writer's choice of words is crucial to the expression of textual politics.

After Kolawole's first visit, Omoladun assured her that

'Just get better and we will teach Kolawole the lesson of his life.' P.100 Yemisi on her own part felt that

'Two years of total dedication to Kolawole cannot just go down the drain.'
No, I'll fight for him. He is mine' P.101

Beside Yemisi's graveside, Omoladun exclaimed that

'No matter what the world says, vengeance shall be mine' P.102

she thus went to the police station to lay a murder charge against Kolawole. He was thus arrested and detained in the cell for three months before the case was heard in court. For a welcome reception, Kolawole was given the beating of his life. A sore jaw and head that pulsated like the breathing bag of a dentist's gas equipment was part of his reward for overpopulating the cell. The police squealed on him and his cell mates extorted all he had on him. Tamed, Kolawole swore to himself that his cell mates were ruthless animals who would not mind having his head for breakfast and his blood for tea.

He slept on the bare floor for the night and had a nightmare. He then screamed, waking up some of the inmates. One of them slapped him and warned that

'if you are possessed by the devil, learn to keep it to yourself. We all deserve to rest the next time I hear a word form you, you will be a dead man' P.109

In the morning, pap was served as breakfast. On taking it, he suddenly threw up. The pandemonium which followed was breathtaking. The inmates screaming at

him called him obscene names. The worst hit inmate, in the sense that Kolawole vomitted into his bowl of pap, gave Kolawole a heavy punch.

Kolawole eventually regained his freedom after six months in detention. He left the witness box hesitantly as if he might be stopped. No-one did, but Omoladun suddenly materialised in front of him saying.

> *'Kolawole, the battle line has just been drawn. I am set to destroy you and I will stop at nothing to achieve my aim. I will have the last laugh. It might take me years to get you, but I swear by Yemisi's grave that I shall not leave until I have totally destroyed you . P. 124*

It is because of Oyindamola's attempt to consolidate her right and investment in the relationship that she weaves out tales upon tales to enable her execute her devilish plans, thus paving the way to achieve her hearts desire: becoming Kolawole's wife. Omoladun, whose friend was cheated of her legal standing despite all herself and her uncle had invested in the relationship as well, felt the need to map out strategies to teach Kolawole an unforgettable lesson.

This aspect of masculine failure against the background of feminine resourcefulness is given prominence, to elicit sympathy for the politics of women liberation. The injustice done by Kolawole is so palpable that he was forced to admit to himself that what he felt for Oyindamola was gratitude while Yemisi was the only love of his life-the one to whom he owned a duty. Yet he could not take his eyes off Oyindamola because of her pounds sterling. The fact that Kolawole never discussed Oyindamola with Yemisi paints him a dubious character with a hidden agenda. He planned to play smart and act the role of an African man. This confirms his villainy and the magnitude of injustice demonstrates the need for revolt, concluded Omoladun.

Our analysis of lexical usages and meaning in Echoes of Yesteryears reveals the fact that the analysis of lexical items chosen by a writer is important and result-oriented in gender studies. The same goes for the collocation pattern of the utterances of major characters involved in the articulation of gender politics. Lexical cohesion occurs both at textual level and intertextual levels of discourse depending on the type of gender inspired politics a writer chooses to highlight or even manifest in her writing. This paper, however ruminates on wether spinsters need go this far to become a man's wife or show their annoyance at being ditched by a man. One should gradually get over the loss and pick up the loose threads. One might not forget the trouble but one must make up one's mind to live. And living begins with working hard and keeping busy. That way, one loses herself and finds one's bearing.

Final Thoughts

Spinsterhood is a vital but delicate stage in a woman's life. It is a period characterised by many challenges capable of moulding or marring the spinster's matrimonial future, depending on how these challenges are handled. Unfortunately due to ignorance, many spinsters lose sight of life's purpose and

therefore abuse and misuse this stage of their lives. Spinsterhood is beset with temptations, discouragement, fear of the future of neglect, burden of bearing the ridicule, disappointments, burden of providing and caring for self and coping with negative societal perception of a prolonged spinsterhood. These pressures often lead to yielding to lust, nagging, harsh and hostile poise.

All vices common among spinsters such as insincerity, pretence, fear, unrealistic expectations about who to marry, indiscipline and unguarded familiarity with the opposite sex must be avoided. While waiting for a marriage partner, spinsters must seek to improve their persons by learning practical ways of relating with people. They must flee worldliness and worldly pursuits, avoiding carnal methods of choosing friends, business partners and jobs.

And they need to realise that it is good to depend on divine providence in times of discouragement. Any situation of distress, any seemingly unresolved problem now is not permanent. The clouds only covers the sun it does not put it out. It has been said that patience is the guardian of faith, the preserver of peace, the cherisher of love, the teacher of humility. Patience governs the flesh, strengthens the spirit, sweetens the temper, stifles anger, extinguishes envy and subdues pride.

References

Adegbite, B (1995) Echoes of Yesteryears Lagos: Allatis Secre print.

Anthony, E.J. (1978) An introduction to the Psychology and Psychopathology of change. New York: John Wiley & sons

Hassan, R (1988) The Analysis of one Poem: Theoretical Issues in Practices in Burch, D & OT Toole, M. (eds) functions of syle, London: Printer.

Hubbard, E.H. (199) 'Love, war and lexiocogrammar Transitivity and characterisation' in the Moor's Last sign" . Journal of Literary studies, Vol. 15 No ¾ (355-376)

Iser Wolfgang (1978) The Act of Reading. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Labov, William (1972)" The study of language in its social context" stadium General 23 (66-68).

Mcfadden, patrician (1994)" Writing Response-ably as a Feminist' SAPEN, Vol. 8 No 20 (40-42).

Oko, E. (1986) "Politics As the Informing Sprit in Major African Realistic Fiction" in Emenyonu (ed) Literature and Society: Selected Essays on African Literature. Ogula: Zim Pan African Publishers.

Toynbee, A. (1966) Change and Habit: The challenge of our Time. London: Oxford University Press.

Van den Berg (1961) The Changing Nature of man. Norton, New York.