

**POETRY AND SOCIO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN NIYI OSUNDARE’S ‘MY LORD,
WHERE DO I KEEP YOUR BRIBE?’ AND JOE USHIE’S ‘YAWNS AND BELCHES’**

By

Barnabas Dick,

Department of English,

University of Uyo, Uyo

barnabasdick@gmail.com

+2348125048420

ABSTRACT

This paper studies Niyi Osundare’s ‘My Lord, Where Do I Keep Your Bribe?’ and Joe Ushie’s ‘Yawns and Belches’ to unveil the power interplay and dynamics between leaders and their subjects and how such hegemony has led to the fragmented nature of the subjects by their leaders at different times and periods. This is a literary research which purposively selects Osundare’s ‘My Lord, Where Do I Keep Your Bribe?’ and Ushie’s ‘Yawns and Belches’ to for analysis, as the two poems depict the socio-political realities in Nigeria. The study adopts New Historicism as its theoretical framework because the theory emphasises how events, places and culture affect or shape literature. Findings show that corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society so much so that at different times of writing, these two writers capture the menace with remarkable similarities. The study concludes that consistent discussions, criticism and a total reawakening by subjects can help mitigate the exigencies of political leaders and power abuse.

Keywords: Socio-political, Dynamics, Power Interplay, Hegemony, Leadership Problem

How to Cite this Paper: Dick, B. (2024). “Poetry and Socio-Political Dynamics in Niyi Osundare’s ‘My Lord, Where Do I Keep Your Bribe?’ and Joe Ushie’s ‘Yawns and Belches’”. *Planeyo Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Maiden Edition, 1 (1), 97-110.

Dick, B.

Introduction

Nigeria has continued to witness diverse political and socio-economic problems which have hampered the development of the nation. Social happenings and creative literature have always shared a lot in common. Ngugi Thiong'O believes that the writer and the politician both trade with words. Both are created by the same reality of the world around us, their activities having the same subject and object: human beings, human relationships and human welfares (Ngugi wa Thiong'O, 1981, p.71). The nexus between creative arts, socio-economic and political development cannot be overemphasised. It is from the environment that the writer draws materials from and therefore becomes preoccupied. Nigeria has a rich literary tradition that predates colonialism. Clement Chirman posits that in pre-colonial Nigerian society, oral poetry and songs were dominant features of communal activity employed as occupational songs, dirges and ballads (Chirman, 2008, p.23). Most of these songs addressed political issues like justice and equality.

In light of these oratories, folktale, oral poetry, drama, proverbs or wise sayings or any other form of oral poetry had the performer being seen as the conscience of their societies. This means that the writer draws its raw materials from the society which he is a part of and so it agrees with Thiong'O's position that literature is not written in a vacuum (Thiong'O, 1981, p.6). Social happenings and events go a long way to shaping what comes out of the society as literature. Many creative writers like Chinua Achebe, J.P. Clark, Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi, among others, have mirrored the society they live in through their creative works. Niyi Osundare and Joe Ushie, among other writers, have also followed such a path. In following such path, these authors have brought a revolution into the Nigerian poetic tradition. They have championed and redefined a new tradition in Modern African Poetry popularly known as 'Alter-Native' Tradition in African Poetry. This means that they not only prefer to talk about socio-political issues but they break the stringent poetic tradition and use satire to paint the situations.

According to Nesther Alu, Osundare arrived at the literary scene at a time which shaped and prepared him for the task of freeing up poetry from the prison-house of obscurity which Soyinka's generation has put it (Alu, 2008, p.1). This means that the language used by Osundare and, perhaps, Ushie is different from that of the authors of the first phase. Alu (2008, p. 68) makes it clear that Osundare belongs to the Third Generation of African poetry while Ushie belongs to the Contemporary phase where both phases share similar style. The modern African Poetry tradition engages simplicity of poetic language in discussing very serious national issues; most times it uses lampoon and satire. It is not surprising then that these two authors use simple language in presenting multi-layered themes and dimensions on the suffering of the underprivileged, the defenseless and the neglected majority who constitute the country's population. Alu asserts that

Osundare's works vividly convey his concept of the relationship between the oppressed Nigerian and the crop of leaders. It addresses a deluge of themes which include corruption, poverty, administrative mismanagement, and to a certain extent, the lingering effects of colonialism on the African continent (Alu, 2008, p.61-62).

During the years of anti-colonial struggle, Africa's nationalist leaders had a better idea of what they were fighting against than of what they wanted to replace it with. Beneath the happy euphoria of independence, there were few framing political principles or social visions with which to navigate the difficult years of nation building that lay ahead. Instead of specific restructuring programmes, there were only vague gestures towards economic self-reliance, democratic modernisation, and detribalisation (Nwosu & Adeshina, 2021, p.56). In the place of a constructive political ideology and training in multiparty parliamentary practices, Africans were given high-sounding rhetoric, personality cults that urged them to identify their charismatic leaders' personal fortunes with their own, and nostalgic communalist myths that, under the guise of socialism, would shortly be used to entrench totalitarian political systems. Thus, it was not surprising that, by the end of the 1960s, most of the makeshift national democracies with which the departing imperial powers had hurriedly patched over the continent's social and ethnic fissures a decade earlier had given way to one-party states or dictatorships.

In Nigeria, intractable tribal rivalries plunged the fragile nation into genocide and civil war while neighbouring Ghana floundered into a morass of institutionalised corruption and political repression (Nwosu & Adeshina, 2021, p.56). This tribal difference has continued to hamper the nation's development. For the majority of Africans, independence did not bring unity, social justice, peace, or prosperity, but division, inequality, political violence, and economic stagnation. At the end of the independence decade it was clear to African writers and intellectuals that national liberation had been a selective affair, mainly consolidating the power of indigenous professional elites with whom the colonial regimes, in former administrative colonies like those of British and French West Africa, had maintained a long-established political dialogue.

Today in Nigeria, the masses grumble from the violation of their rights owing to bad leadership by public office holders. Some of these violations have led to hunger, starvation and untold suffering and has lingered in the polity for far too long thereby appearing to be institutionalised as little or no effort has been made to change the status quo by public office holders. Bribery, corruption, nepotism among others has eaten deep into the fabrics of governance in Nigeria.

Dick, B.

Almost every day, the plights of the masses are worsened by the introduction of harsh and biting policies made to enrich the upper class while the poor continue to wallow in abject poverty.

Review of Related Literature

One of the central issues on the front burner in Nigeria and indeed all the African countries is leadership problem. Since independence in 1960, the Nigerian leadership strategies have remained epileptic and superannuated. Nigeria and Nigerians have been under the heavy burden of bad governance from our supposed leaders. Nigeria is a country with uncommon and unquantifiable resources in both human and material form, yet Nigeria remains the headquarters of poverty and corruption – two indicators of a failed state and bad leadership and governance. Oni & Obe opine that:

Paradoxically, Nigeria the giant of Africa (as it is called), wallows in socio economic, political and infrastructural decadence in all her crevices. The inability of Nigeria's leadership to harness the nation's vast resources and reserves toward socio economic development continuously calls to question the composition of the fabric of the nation's leadership and governance. There seems to be a total collapse of ethical governance with the abuse of every moral norm of administration and a loss of conscience towards 'rightness' and objectivism in polity. To this end, it becomes a wonder if Nigeria can ever rise out of decadence and her impoverished state if those that are meant to drive the steering towards the nation's emancipation lack the morality and sanity to do so (Oni & Obe, 2017, p.11).

This consequently implies that the vehicle of socio-economic progress has been fixed on the reverse gear. So, while it seems we are taking two steps of forward movement, we seem to be taking four steps backwards. Sad as these indices portends for Nigeria, this is not to say that progress have not been made at all in terms of development. There is no doubt that past leaders in the country have tried their best to fix the leadership and governance issues; however, several debilitating factors have vehemently opposed such policies and strategies and have constantly placed the country in an epileptic and immovable nature. Unemployment is on the high, poverty has so degenerated leading to what Nigerians now see as two classes; upper class and the lower class, where there is no middle class again, with the lower class exceedingly becoming too many by the day.

As Andrew Ebekozen notes, 'several studies have shown that corruption is the root cause of the socio-political and economic woes of Nigeria' (Ebekozen, 2020, p.2). Though various measures have been taken at one point or another to check the spiraling effects of corruption, the results have

been quite dismal. Many governments have even sung the riddance of corruption as a song in their manifestoes but seem to be overpowered by it when into power. While acts and facets of corruption seem to be assuming frightening dimensions, political instability, economic chicaneries and social machinations like tribalism seem to be dangerously fanning its ever inflaming embers. Corruption scandals are not new in Nigeria as they have been the major reasons given by the military for their interventions in politics since the 1960s. In a speech to announce the bloody but botched coup of January 15, 1966, Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu mentioned corruption as one of the major factors that ignited the coup:

Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand 10 percent; those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers or VIPs at least, the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look big for nothing before international circles, those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian political calendar back by their words and deeds (Nzeogwu, 1966, p.21).

This work is situated on the fact that poets usually make metaphoric, symbolic and satiric use of language. Armed with such a linguistic prerogative, they say what ordinarily could not have been said by the ordinary users of language. Through the application of well couched poetic expressions, they make punchy remarks and lampoon those in positions of authority without directly breaking any legal statute (Nwosu & Adeshina, p.15). Also as masters in the art of language use, poets use the instrument of language to provoke and instigate people to deeply contemplate and analyse issues. Among Nigerian poets of the new order, Niyi Osundare is one of the earliest to give serious attention to corruption in the civil and public service. Writing in his pioneer poetry collection, *Song of the Marketplace* published in 1983, he brings to limelight the high indices of corruption in the Nigerian civil service in a poem entitled “Excursion”: /I have been through the secretariat where civil servants are all but civil/ here files are lost and found by mysterious messengers’ magic (Osundare, 1983, p.12).

The aspect of corruption that Osundare exposes and condemns is the situation where public servants expect to be given monetary inducement for them to carry out official responsibilities for which they are monthly remunerated. It is not unusual that in most offices in Nigeria, corrupt messengers withdraw official sensitive files from circulation and hide them inside their drawers. It goes on to show that in places less imagined, bribery and corruption have been considered normal and one can only be looked at with dismay if you seem not to understand. Such files can only be released when their palms are greased by the beneficiary of the information contained in the file or in some extreme situations, such files are permanently destroyed. This is rampant in Nigeria as Eke asserts that the ‘the lack of efficiency and effectiveness in the civil service is built on corruption’ (Eke, 2016, P.289). Also, Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria, once lamented that ‘our public offices have shown cases of the combined evils of ineffectiveness and

Dick, B.

inefficiency and corruption, whilst being impediments to effective implementation of government policies' (Obasanjo, 2000, p. 1). Corruption is undoubtedly a systemic problem in Nigeria's civil service for even in recent times, the Nigeria Bureau of Statics (NBS) report of 2019 records that 'of all Nigerian citizens who had at least one contact with a public official in the 12 month prior to the 2019 survey, 30.2 per cent paid a bribe to, or were asked to pay a bribe by a public official ...' ("NBS Publishes 2019 Corruption in Nigeria Survey Report"). Addressing the prevalence of such corruption, Osundare in a poem with the title 'Ignorance' writes:

Madaru steals public funds
and blocks the road
with a sleek Mercedes
custom made from Germany

they sing his praises

and envy his luck (Osundare, 1983, p.3).

As observed by Vito Tanzi 'in several cases of corruption, the abuse of public power is not necessarily for one's private benefit but can be for the benefit of one's party, class, tribe, friends, family . . .' (Tanzi, 1998, p.9). This reflects a pervading trend where those who loot the country's treasury to live ostentatious lives are not condemned but are lionised and given chieftaincy titles by the same people whom they have indirectly impoverished (Nwosu & Adeshina, p.21). Madaru in the poem, instead of receiving virulent reprobation for 'stealing public funds', is praised and made a hero whom other people struggle to be like. Now, when another person assumes the office of Madaru, he or she will even want to do more in order to be more than Madaru and so corruption flares-up like wildfire. Going by the title, 'Ignorance', Osundare insinuates that those who fete and hero-worship corrupt individuals are block-headed ignoramuses, for were they to be wise, they would not laud those who are indirectly enslaving and impoverishing them through dishonest acts but would probe, seek measures to ensure that such ones are brought to book.

Another contemporary Nigerian poet, Idris Amali who depicts this circuitous nature of corruption and Nigeria's democratic experiments in a title poem entitled 'Back Again at the Foothills of Greed'. In the poem, he wonders what leads Nigeria to obviously re-cycle the same fractured political route that is replete with corruption: We are back again/ At the gate of greed/In our blind eyes/. . . We are back again/At the fortress of our nation's faith /We are back again at another full moon of 'chop and chop'/When the chased eagles and vultures/Have perched on low shrubs/But with their surgical talons poised/To further empty our bowels/ (Amali, 2000, p.9). Amali's poem shows that it has become almost normal that these corrupt leaders are recycled to continue to take control of leadership. According to Wale Adebaniwi, 'governance and public office in Africa, from Nigeria to Kenya . . . are transformed into an "eatery" in which people either take their turn to eat

or are invited to “come and eat” (Adebanwi, 2020, p.106). One cannot agree less to this because in Nigeria, an aspiring candidate once mentioned that his interest in power is because it is his turn. Amali points to this when he writes that Nigeria is back again at another full moon of ‘chop and chop’.

In the same poem, he wonders why Nigerians celebrate dishonesty. Also, Amali’s disposition to corruption heightens in a more recent collection, *Effega: The War of Ants*. Most of the poems in the text are devoted to the war against corruption through sensitisation of the populace. For instance, in ‘Dedication’, he laments, ‘As this land/Prides and strives on great fertile filth/. . . Below the huge mountains of filth/ Punctuating the nook and cranny of our land/As the rule of theft and misrule/ Have become the rule of law/ The powerful have turned into legion of looters/ Complete in the progressive looting race/ Umpired by the Chief thief of the State . . .’ (Amali, 2000, p.5). His mentioning of the land striving and thriving is realised when he brings in filth, to mean that the land only thrives in ‘filth’. Amali’s choice of words in the expression ‘Chief thief of the State’ has a similar sound realisation is ingenious as some Nigerian civilian Presidents have been discovered to have been aiding graft. The sound pattern signals the use of pun which is suggestive in the title ‘chief’ and what they do with it in ‘thief’.

Theoretical Perspective: New Historicism

This critical engagement is guided by New Historicism, a theory that emerged in the late 1970s as a reaction against the formalistic tenets of New Criticism. As coined by Stephen Greenblatt, it arose as one of the reactions against the view that literature can be studied in isolation from its social and political contexts (Childs & Fowler, 2006, p.6). Thus ‘in place of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists attend primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meaning, its effects and also its later critical interpretations and evaluations’ (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, p.218). As Jane Collette puts it, ‘New Historicism is a modern theory that concentrates on how events, places and culture within a society affect a written work’ (Collette, 2012, p.3). Succinctly put, Patrick Pietruszynski asserts that ‘new historical theories maintain that it is not the text itself, but the social and historical contexts in which the work is created that determines the importance and meaning of the literary work’ (Pietruszynski, 2006, p.20).

Plying on the same thought, Xiontang Lyu remarks that ‘not dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists pay more attention to the historical and cultural context of the literary text’ (Lyu, 2021, p.1075). Thus, in this study, attempts are made to explicate the numerous manifestations of corruption in Nigeria by revealing the efforts made by some Nigerian poets. Terms like hegemony, subjects, power, uneven development and marginalisation are some tenets of new historicism considered in this paper. New Historicists concern themselves with the concept of power, the intricate means by which cultures produce and reproduce themselves. According to Abrams & Harpham (2009, p.124), ‘these critics focus on revealing the historically specific model of truth and authority reflected in a given work’. Many New Historicist critics

Dick, B.

assume that texts, not only literary works but also documents, diaries, records, and even institutions such as hospitals and prisons are ideological products culturally constructed from the prevailing power structures that dominate particular societies. Reading a literary work from a New Historicist perspective thus becomes an exercise in uncovering the conflicting and subversive perspectives of the marginalised and the suppressed. These issues are investigated in the analyses of the selected poems.

Socio-political Dynamics in Osundare's 'My Lord, Where Do I Keep Your Bribe?'

Osundare's 'My Lord, Where Do I Keep Your Bribe?' is a 92 line poem arranged in 25 stanzas. The tone of the poem is revered, satirical and sad. The persona tries to show veneration to his superior even though he disagrees with them. The mood is pitiable, disgusting and disappointing. The title of the poem is pregnant and could simply arrest anyone's interest. The mentioning of 'My Lord' and 'Bribe' raises eyebrows to why the question, 'where do I keep your bribe?' is directed to the 'Lord'. The Lord in this context refers to a judge who renders judgment to the guilty ones in the court of law. The judge is supposed to be upright in his or her pronouncements. The judge is supposed to be a revered person given their prerequisite oath of justice before attaining the position of a judge. From the foregoing, it is clear that a judge is one who renders judgment fairly devoid of injustice, bias or unfairness. Therefore, the title linking a 'judge' and 'bribe' together calls for attention because it is not to be mentioned that a judge is linked to the word 'bribe' talk more of receiving it.

Osundare employs the register for Law in describing this corrupt judge who collects bribe to deliver unfair judgment. The persona speaks in a deferentially ironical tone as could be seen in his constant repetition of the word 'My Lord'. This repetition also refers to addressing the Lord directly. It appears that the persona is the servant assigned to the Lord to assist in some duties especially ones relating to his office. The respect shown by the servant to his boss is deep and could be seen in his constant addition of 'please' to his boss, 'the Lord'. In the context of this poem, 'My Lord' is not just the judge who pronounces judgment in a court of law but extends to all political leaders in public office, religious leaders, and other forms of leadership. The first stanza is a request from the servant to his master; 'My Lord, please tell me where to keep your bribe.' It is clear that the judge does not make it a secret again of his evil acts. The poem is replenished with rhetorical questions from the servant. These questions are accompanied with suggestions on how to preserve the bribe got by the corrupt judge:

shall I bury it in the capacious water tank?

Shall I haul it up the attic?

Shall I give a billion to each of your paramours

The black, the light, the fanta-yellow

or shall I haul it up to your village?

In the valley behind seven mountains where potholes swallow up the hugest jeep?
And penury leaves a scar in every house (Osundare, 2004, p.11-12/21-22).

These suggestions are recommended by the clerk because he is used to them, meaning that he has been taking these bribes to the different places mentioned above; ‘capacious water tank’, ‘attic’, ‘paramours’, or in the ‘valley behind seven mountains’. The attic which is the space directly below a roof and the building usually unfinished is one of the places suggested to the judge given its secretive nature. The capacious tank as mentioned can also be used for hiding money and one would think it is a tank filled with water, only to ironically understand that it is indeed filled with money. The paramour as also suggested refers to an illicit lover or in the Nigerian parlance, *hookup girls*, with whom the judge would gladly keep this loot with and, in return, get their services. As mentioned in the lines, they are either ‘black, light or fanta-yellow’. But then, maybe, he should hide it in the potholes in his village, such potholes that can swallow up the ‘hugest jeep’. One can notice the personifications used by the poet in his choice of the ‘swallow’ – an action that is performed by humans being attributed to inanimate things. And then ‘penury leaves a scar’ is suggestive of the poverty rate that has taken over almost every family leaving a scar to show for, except for only those who have a share of the loot.

From the above, it is clear that the judge has been using one of these means to preserve his loot and the servant is only suggesting to him to choose the one that he would prefer this time using a dramatic monologue style since the judge does not get to speak. Such lampoons continue:

Judges doze in the courtroom
Having spent all night, counting money
And various gifts
And the chief justice looks on with tired eyes
As corruption usurps his gavel (Osundare, 2004, p.61-64).

It is such a pitiable imagery painted above, that the judge is sleepy in the courtroom, having spent all night counting money asserting his hegemony as the superior. What then becomes of the hope of the common man who seeks justice in the court room? Justice is far off from him for not greasing the palms of the umpires, justice becomes very far from the common man who does not have a large sum of money for a judge for justice and, therefore, marginalisation comes in as the common man is marginalised. The concluding stanza shows the state of Nigeria:

Nigeria is a huge corpse

Dick, B.

With milling maggots on its wretched hulk
They prey every day, they prey every night
For the endless decomposition of our soul
My most honourable Lord
Just tell me where to keep your bribe (Osundare, 2004, p.71-72).

The judge is still silent on the request from his servant. It appears he is still trying to make a choice of what becomes of his loot. This is a clear picture of what leaders in Nigeria do. It is to be noted that the judge is a representative of the larger Nigerian politicians who make ground breaking promises during elections and after being elected, goes on to do a different thing. The image created by the poet is that of a land soiled by corruption and he compares it to a decaying corpse filled with ‘maggots’. These politicians have publicly made it known that it is better for one to loot and share the funds. This type of power interplay and dynamism is also portrayed by Ushie.

Socio-political Dynamics in Ushie’s ‘Yawns and Belches’

The collection *Yawns and Belches* was published in 2018. The issues raised in this collection cut across leadership problem featuring corruption, nepotism, bribery, stealing and mismanagement of public funds among others by public office holders. The eponymous poem, ‘Yawns and Belches’ captures the same situation of hopelessness as seen in Osundare’s ‘My Lord, Where Do I Keep Your Bribe?’ This time, the division is made clear; those who belch are of the upper, well to do class, and the ones in top governmental places, while those who yawn are the greater masses who wallow in abject poverty. The poem is written in 12 stanzas of unequal lines with the first and last stanza being a repetition of what appears to be a prologue and an epilogue, stylistically deployed by the writer for emphasis. The poem begins with:

Subjects of the furious tropical noon sun are we all
But the belching few shelter of the iroko or silk tree
Feel not the yawning’s writhing in the open furnace of sun (Ushie, 2018, p.15).

‘Subjects of the furious tropical noon’ is climatically used to refer to the region known as Nigeria. Next, the poet-persona brings up what is made of the dichotomy in the region; the belching few and those who yawn, showing the hegemony that is in play. Those who belch from feeding too well are ‘few’ while the many who yawn are being ‘scorched by the sun’ which represents suffering. In stanza two, the poet persona admits that even when the fingers are created unequally, both the shorter and longer ones work equally for the body’s own good. However, the democracy that was carved out by man for equality has become clearly unequal in Nigeria. This democracy ‘supplies health to a few’, signalling that those in power are the few who enjoy the proceeds and dividends of democracy for one, they travel out and seek better medical care and attention in advanced countries and thereafter sought for a life of luxury and relaxation and are often bold to call it Medical Leave. Sadly, it is this democracy that ‘supplies death to the majority’, thanks to the negligence and ineptitude display of those in power. For while those in power travel out to

seek better medical attention, they have neglected the health system and so cannot trust the system for their health and cannot also make work, leaving those who yawn to wallow in pains. The health care centre supposed to be a remedy centre has become a death trap centre.

The belching few here represent the political leaders who carve out democracy which should represent equality to mean supplying 'good health to a few and death to the majority' (Ushie, 2018, p.15). Through the acts by leaders, they have succeeded in providing basic health care for themselves and families with proper eating routine but have only been able to share death to the majority by their excruciating acts of wickedness which shows uneven development as a term in New Historicism. The next two stanzas reechoes the dichotomy mentioned previously where those who belch are in the imperial huts-referring to the seat of power and those who yawn are in the 'vales' staring at the height at which the belching few are. Those who yawn are described as 'staring desperately' at those who belch and it creates the imagery of what happens when a certain political figure is expected in a gathering. The people will be well-dressed in their most loved attire waiting to receive the political figure, staring unto the road until whenever he or she arrives. When the figure finally arrives, 'parcelled and decorated labels' as captured in the poem will be distributed (Ushie, 2018, p.15). These decorated grains can further be analysed to represent T-shirts and face caps carrying the shiny pictures of the said figure. Sometimes, the parceled grain is a few cups of rice of no more than three cups.

In stanza four, the description of the imperial hill is one that is 'fixed and compact' which presents the imagery of one that is well fed and has nothing to bother about, while the 'vales' which refers to those who yawn are 'low' and, of course, lowly placed and hunger stricken. The 'imperial hills' representing those who belch is fixed and compact, strong and unshakable when compared to those representing the 'vales' who are vulnerable and weak.

In stanzas five through seven, the poet persona points out the things that can make those who yawn and belch to be seen as equals, the greatest of them being 'death' and others like natural elements like volcanoes and earthquakes. In all of these, the trajectory of life which is death is a leveler of mankind. This reminds us of Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' where Gray points to the fact that no matter one's beauty or wealth, one only awaits the inevitable hour, death. This is the only thing that the belching and yawning class locks horns together where there is no disparity or segregation. Here, their 'fate rhymes' not only in cases of death but in cases of natural occurrences like 'earthquake and volcanoes'. He goes on to point out that those who belch do belch out pain to those who yawn forgetting that death which is a leveler of mankind is one that equals mankind. The poet persona also points to the fact that even when those who belch share life and everything it offers among them, they forget the natural law, and so when their 'season is ripe'; they will answer the clarion call. He uses metaphor to buttress his point;

Dick, B.

‘weightless straws on the flowing stream of impartial time’ (Ushie, 2018, p.16), which points to a lifeless body of a human that floats in buoyancy in the stream showing that those who yawn and belch must undergo the process of death. He stylistically represents such going down vertically:

g
o
i
n
g
d
o
w
n
.
.
.

At leisure pace of the stream, both the imperial hills and the lowly vales
Ending just where the muscles of the just stream or of Time’s whirlwind
Deposits us, where the earthworm or fish feasts on us, belching or yawning.

So, in the end, it is the earthworm or fish that feasts on the bodies, not recognizing if one was of the belching or yawning class. The poem concludes with an epilogue not different from the prologue.

Subjects of the furious tropical noon sun are we all
But the belching few shelter of the iroko or silk tree
Feel not the yawning’s writhing in the open furnace of sun (Ushie, 2018, p.15).

The writer’s success is in portraying the condition of those who yawn and those who belch. Although, Ushie concludes his poem with a natural phenomenon (death), one that equals the rich and poor, the belching and the yawning, political officer holders and non political office holders; Osundare concludes his own with the judge not able to decipher where his clerk should likely keep the bribe that has been given to him. Perhaps, he is thinking of a place that is yet to be filled with money, so that this new one can fill it up. This is the pitiable condition that Nigerian leaders have plunged the country into.

Conclusion

This paper has examined power interplay and dynamics between political leaders and their subjects. Osundare and Ushie as third generation and contemporary writers, respectively, have

aptly depicted the level of decay within the Nigerian judicial system and its polity at large which highlights corruption, greed, and bribery among others. While Ushie has shown the dichotomy between the lives of political leaders and the masses, Osundare has depicted through the lens of the court clerk what goes on in top governmental places like the revered sanctuary where justice is supposed to prevail. If this can happen in a place where justice is sought for, one can only wonder what becomes of other parastatals. These have resulted not only in loss of hope but in total despair. Writers then have resorted to use writing as a tool to interrogate these issues in order to mitigate its exigencies. Findings have

References

- Abrams M.H. & Harpham, G. 2009. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (9th edition): New York: Wadsworth and Cengage.
- Adebanwi, W. 2014. "The Writer as Social Thinker". *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. 32 (4):405-420. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2014.978556>. Retrieved 23 May, 2024.
- Alu, N. 2008. "Style and the New Poetic Revolution in Niyi Osundare's Poetry". *African Research Review*. ISSN2070-0083http/ www.Amazon.com. Retrieved 23rd October, 2024.
- Amali, I. 2000. *Generals without War*. Lagos: Malthouse, 2000.
- Amali. I. 2014. Effega: *The War of Ants*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- Childs, P. & Fowler, R. 2006. *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*. New York & Oxon: Routledge.
- Chirman, C. 2008. "Social and Political Satire in Tarok Cultural Songs of Abwa and Isur". A PhD Thesis of the Department of English, University of Jos.
- Collette, J. 2012. 'New Historicism and Hamlet by William Shakespeare.' <https://prezi.com/tyo4n221ko1k/new-historicism-and-hamlet-by-william-shakespeare>. Retrieved 26 April, 2024. (4): 405420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2014.978556>. Retrieved 4 May, 2024.
- Ebekozien, A. 2020. 'Corrupt Acts in the Nigerian Construction Industry: Is the Ruling Party Fighting Corruption?' *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.108002589001.175804>. Retrieved 10 June, 2024. [http/www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com). Retrieved on 4th April, 2024.

Dick, B.

Eke, G. 2016. Corruption in the Civil Service: Dearth of Effective Service Delivery. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 5 (2): 284-294.
<https://de.doi.org/10.4314/ijah.v5i.237>. Retrieved 8 June, 2024.

Lyu, X. 2021. 'An Introduction to New Historicism.' *Advances in Social Sciences, Education and Humanities Research*. 543, 1075-1078.

NBS Report. proshare.ng.com 2019 NBS Publishes Corruption in Nigeria survey report. 3 September 2020. Retrieved 13 May, 2024.

Ngugi T. 1981. *Writers in Politics*. London: Heinemann.

Nwosu, O. & Adeshina A. 2021. 'Corruption in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry: A New Historicist Perspective.' *Journal of Literary Studies*. Vol 37. Online:
<https://colab.ws/article>. Retrieved 15 May, 2024.

Nzeogwu, C. 1966. Radio Broadcast by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu –Announcing Nigeria's First Military Coupe on Radio Nigeria Kaduna on January 15, 1966.
<http://www.vanguard.com/2010/09/radio-broadcast-by-major-chukwuma-kaduna-nzeogwu>
10 July 2020. Retrieved 14 May, 2024.

Obasanjo, O. 2006. 'Foreword'. *The Servicom Book*. Abuja: National Press Centre.

Oni, S. & Obe, E. 2017. "Leadership and Good Governance: The Nigerian Experience". <http://eprints.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/9223/2017>. Retrieved 3rd May, 2024.

Osundare, N. 1983. *Song of the Market Place*. Ibadan: New Horn Press.

Osundare, N. 2004. 'My Lord, Where Do I Keep Your Bribe'. Online:
<https://www.thenewsnigeria.com>. Oxford: Routledge.

Petruszynski, P. 2006. "Early Modern Texts, Postmodernism Students: An Analytical and Pedagogical Perspective on Using New Historicism in Today's Classroom". PhD *Thesis*, Illinois University.

Tanzi, V. 1998. "Corruption Around the World: Causes, Consequences, Scope and Cures". *IMF Staff Papers* 45 (4), 1-39.

Ushie, J. 2018. *Yawns and Belches*. Ibadan: Kraftgriots.

