

REFLECTIONS ON OLUSEGUN ADEKOYA'S NOTION OF PARADOX IN *HOMAGE TO PARADOX*

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Abstract

Olusegun Adekoya¹'s Homage to Paradox is significant because it offers unique perspectives on paradox in a way that unravels the indispensable nature of the concept in literary discourse and everyday situations. Despite the relevance of his notion of paradox, sufficient critical attention has not been paid to it. This study, therefore, engages in reflections on Adekoya's idea of paradox as encapsulated in his Homage to Paradox. It discusses the principles that underlie Adekoya's concept of paradox. It demonstrates how the critic's idea of paradox intersects with some literary theories. The study concludes that Adekoya's idea of paradox is relevant to literary analysis and everyday life, for it aids deeper understanding of conundrums that often characterise the universe of cultural texts and human conditions.

Keywords: Segun Adekoya, Notion, Reflection, Paradox, Homage to Paradox

Introduction

Literature, being a language in use, has boundless literary and linguistic ingredients that give literary artists ample opportunities to penetrate and capture, very graphically, every aspect of human condition and, in a profound manner, lay it bare to ordinary willing mind to understand and enjoy. Oyin Ogunba acknowledges this reality when he remarks that “whether one is thinking of a folktale, an oral chant, or a pseudo-philosophical poem (...), the ultimate aim of the author or cantor appears to be the same, namely, to probe the fundamentals of our nature to the farthest reaches of our being and also to make available to the ordinary man in mode he understands the great truths of our situation”.² Apart from the intuitive or imaginative power, various

¹Olusegun Adesina Adekoya is a distinguished Professor of African Literature who has contributed immensely to the exegesis of Wole Soyinka's exploration of Yoruba mythology, especially the Ogun myth of creation, to interpret human experience and the universe through exploration of the trope of paradox in his imaginative writing. A former Chairperson of Association of Nigerian Author (ANA), Osun State Chapter, Adekoya is an accomplished poet and literary scholar. His collections of poems include: *Guinea Bites and Sahel Blues* (2004), *Chameleon and Chimeras* (2011), *Here and There* (2012), *Escape* (2012) and *Ife Testament* (2020). He is a Fellow, the Nigerian Academy of Letters. In 2023, Adekoya retired from the service of the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.

²Oyin Ogunba, *Literary Art and Literary Creativity in Contemporary Africa*. Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, Nigeria, 1978:1

literary/poetic elements are the major tools that literary artists often deploy to interrogate, to use Ogunba's expression, "the fundamentals of our nature to the farthest reaches of our being and also to make available to the ordinary man"³. This is, perhaps, the reason literature is generally conceived as a work of art created with words, either oral or written, whose value lies in its impressive nature and ability to arouse admiration. As an imaginative piece, the enduring values and the universal relevance of every literary work, either an oral or written form, lie not only in its thematic concerns but also in the manner its producer adroitly uses various literary resources to represent human realities. Hence, literature and literary discourse in general are sites of figurative use of language. On figurative language, M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham explain:

Figurative language is a conspicuous departure from what users of a language apprehend as the standard meaning of words, or else the standard order of words, in order to achieve some special meaning or effect. Figures are sometimes described as primarily poetic, but they are integral to the functioning of language and indispensable to all modes of discourse.⁴

There are countless figures of speech or literary tropes from which every writer selects to tell his or her story. Notable instances include simile, metaphor, personification, metonymy, apostrophe, hyperbole, synecdoche, transferred epithets, euphemism, irony, pun, epigram, antithesis, oxymoron, litotes, climax, bathos, onomatopoeia, pleonasm and paradox. Among the aforementioned figures of speech and others, Olusegun Adekoya, however, considers paradox, a logically self-contradictory statement or a statement that runs contrary to one's expectation, as one that requires more critical inquiries. Adekoya believes that "paradox is the great problematic that humans have been wrestling with" from time immemorial to the present day.⁵ He sees paradox in every object and human being. Every human with his/her activity, according to Adekoya, is inexplicably implicated in paradox because incompleteness and impurities, occasioned by contradictions, define human life and his/her universe. Thus, in his inaugural lecture entitled *Homage to Paradox* and his *magnum opus* entitled *The Inner Eye: An Oriel on Wole Soyinka's Poetry* (and many of his critical essays), Adekoya consistently points out that whether dead or alive, an animate or inanimate object, female or male, young or old, no one escapes the ubiquitous power of paradox.

³Ogunba, *Literary Art and Literary Creativity in Contemporary Africa*, 1

⁴M. H. Abrams & Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston: Wardsworth, United States of America, 2012: 96.

⁵Olusegun Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria, 2008:2.

Commenting on Adekoya's idea of paradox, Gbemisola Adeoti explains that "Adekoya has accorded paradox a primacy of place in his creative and critical interventions. He has projected paradox as the ultimate concept in the attempt to seek meaning in the mysteries of the world and understand the complexities of the universe".⁶ Adeoti explains further:

In private discussions, at seminars, and conferences, he expounds the enduring aptness of paradox as a summative code in representing the totality of human experience from creation. Paradox is, indeed, the introduction and conclusion of treatise on the binary principle that fundamentally upholds the cosmology in many cultures. He celebrates paradox with rare poetic gusto, not just as a figurative device or epistemological concept, but also as a sign that activates and quenches the thirst of the semiotician for the roots of the universe. As he has eloquently captured it, paradox provides the first and the final words in an elaborate definition of humans and their relation to the cosmos.⁷

This study reflects on Adekoya's notion of paradox and its implications for literary criticism. What is the link between Adekoya's concept of paradox and other conventional literary theories? How relevant is Adekoya's idea of paradox to the interpretation of literary texts? To what extent can the critic's idea of paradox be regarded as a 'theory' or philosophical idea that can be used in the interrogation of literary texts? The foregoing questions are what the current study seeks to address.

Adekoya's Philosophy of Paradox: A Synopsis

In his inaugural lecture entitled *Homage to Paradox* (henceforth *Homage* in this study) delivered on Tuesday 22 of January, 2008, at Oduduwa Hall, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Adekoya explains that paradox is ubiquitous in all affairs, but "human beings do not always take cognisance of it until they encounter it either in speech or writing and it shocks them out of their complacency into a keener awareness of the duplicity of life and duality of reality".⁸ He shows that paradox, which is inescapably characterised by binary oppositions, permeates all spheres of life. Adekoya, thus, throws a huge question on the notions of perfection, completeness and plenitude. While noting that all pairs of opposites are paradoxical, Adekoya contends further

⁶Gbemisola Adeoti, "Paradox is the Final Word: Homage to Professor Adekoya", *Celebratory Words: Tributes in Honour of Professor Olusegun Adekoya*, Ademola Adesola and Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba (eds.). Ilesan-Remon: Write Right Publishing, 2023: 4.

⁷Adeoti, "Paradox is the Final Word", 4-5.

⁸Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 3.

that, owing to its ever-present nature, “a paradox could manifest in deeds, deities, objects, phenomena, persons, places, processes, relationship, thoughts and statements”.⁹ This implies that manifestations of paradox are not limited to verbal and non-verbal expressions. On the definition of paradox, Adekoya remarks:

Paradox works simultaneously on two levels. On the surface level and seemingly transparent, it appears to be contradictory, confusing and untrue, while on a higher philosophical and translucent level, it resolves itself, eliminates confusion and its comprehensible. Even if resolved, the paradox does not thereby dissolve its contradictory nature.¹⁰

As evident from the foregoing definition, paradox comprises two major structures: the surface and the deep structures. Its surface structure which tends to be clear suggests that paradox is an unrealistic and confusing phenomenon because it contains a self-contradictory statement or situation. However, the deep structure of paradox, according to Adekoya, is where the contradiction unravels and offers itself to human understanding. Despite this, the inherent contradictory nature of paradox remains totally indissoluble, for it is this very contradictory nature that makes paradox a storehouse of multiple truths, yielding interminable interpretations that contain an iota of incomplete truth about a situation, event, object or phenomenon.

The main feature of paradox is binary opposition. Adekoya explains that “all pairs of opposites are paradoxical”.¹¹ Underscoring his claim with instances of some indissoluble binary opposites such as “creation and destruction, beginning and end, male and female, birth and death, heaven and earth, body and spirit, fullness and emptiness, hot and cold, good and evil, rise and fall, strength and weakness, day and night, light and darkness, paradise and hell, black and white, knowledge and ignorance”,¹² Adekoya contends that “we live in paradox”¹³ and that “life itself is one huge paradox”.¹⁴

Having outlined binary opposites as the ever-present characters/features of paradox, Adekoya goes ahead to map out some domains of paradox. One of these domains is language. Adekoya explains that language exhibits a paradox owing to its binary opposition feature. Different aspects of language constitute storehouses of paradox because, according to Adekoya, language “unites and

⁹Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 3.

¹⁰ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 3.

¹¹ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 3.

¹² Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 3.

¹³ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 3.

¹⁴ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 3.

divides” people¹⁵ as well as promotes inclusion and exclusion. Language, just like other phenomena, is incomplete and far from being perfect. The critic explains that “language, the tool of communication, is an imperfect tool, an epicentre of confusion and misunderstanding”.¹⁶ Human beings, the inventors of cultures, often fall victim to these inherent perils of language in their daily interactions with one another and during the processes of creating cultures. However hard they may try, human beings are often encumbered by deficiency essentially because the only tool available for communication and cultural production embeds and is embedded with endless layers of confusion that defy complete correction. It is on this basis, therefore, that the ambition of some patriarchal hegemonic forces to create a perfect world continually remains an illusion. Adekoya explains further:

It is a droll thing to watch men who can neither overcome themselves nor break the bounds of language, the tool of discourse, nor control their wives and children struggle to rule, recreate and perfect the world. Even though their strife stems from failure to recognize that the entelechial principle is lubricious, it is nonetheless a paen to the will to power, which itself is bifurcated.¹⁷

Culture, a product of language and human invention, is equally characterised by boundless paradoxes. Whether it is religion, economy, politics, traditional cultic lore or written literature, culture, in its multifaceted nature, often exhibits confounding infinite contradictions. In any field and in all fields, including philosophy and science, there is no single complete answer to many perplexing existential questions challenging humans. Adekoya contends that every form of knowledge, including science, is “a partial truth”¹⁸ that continuously seeks supplements/complements to make its meaning. He underscores this point with Achebean Igbo expression: “nothing can stand alone, there must always be another thing standing by it” and the Yoruba epigrammatic expression: “*Tibi tire la dá ilé-ayé*” (The world is created a paradox of good and evil) (translation in the original).¹⁹ Invoking a fragment of Yorùbá cultic poetry that foregrounds a puzzling, but inescapable connection between the initiates and the non-initiate, and the ruling elite and the ordinary people, Adekoya queries the epistemological arrogance of modern knowledge system and its Western promoters who often arrogate to themselves a univocal and totalising method of knowing. He, thus, destabilises all relations that promote unicentricism and undermine epistemic polyphony.

¹⁵ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 4.

¹⁶ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 4

¹⁷ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 4.

¹⁸ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 12.

¹⁹ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 9.

Acknowledging the paradoxical nature of eulogy that inheres within literary creativity and criticism, Adekoya explores Wole Soyinka's works (especially *Idanre*, *Madmen and Specialists*, *The Bacchae of Euripides*, *Ogun Abibiman*, *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems*, *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known* and *Myth, Literature and the African World*). He pays glowing tributes to Soyinka for his fecund exploration of paradox in his creative and critical writings. Quoting copiously from Soyinka's influential book, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Adekoya acknowledges Soyinka's Muse-God, Ogun, as paradox personified, for it constitutes "the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man".²⁰ He explains further that "the ubiquitous of paradox rends every action so that whatever it produces is inherently split".²¹

Contending further that "action and inaction constitute (...) an insoluble paradox",²² Adekoya remarks that neither doers nor thinkers possess the final solution to "all cosmic and existential problems".²³ He insists that thought, the fountain of solutions, is fractured and this fractured character of thought forms the basis of conflicting philosophical ideas and warring-world views among global intellectuals. Thus, philosophers, whose ideas and knowledge are expected to serve as the balm of humanity, exacerbate their lunacy. Adekoya underscores this point by drawing allusions from Friedrich Nietzsche who, in his *The Gay Science*, "conceives of ideas as insanities and symptoms of a sick body".²⁴ Thus, coherent and sagacious as they may sound or appear, philosophers, across ages and cultures, are, paradoxically, fallible, for their thoughts constitute the bases of the endless chaos in the world.

Interrogating the notion of purity often ascribed to the Yoruba God of creation, Obatala, Adekoya remarks that "the mere fact Obatala keeps a slave (Atunda) violates his moral purity and the oneness of the beginning that he symbolizes".²⁵ Again, Obatala's tragic errors of creation—albinos, the blind, the deaf, the lame and the humpbacks—occasioned by his intoxication with wine throw a huge doubt on his purity, a metaphor of perfection. Comparing the imperfect creations of Obatala with those of the Christian God, Jehovah, Adekoya shows that Jehovah "orders an angel with a flaming sword to guard the tree of after the Fall" indicates that Jehovah, becomes "wiser after an act of creation and its tragic error".²⁶ Just like Obatala, Jehovah, flawed in his purity, brings about "creation that is not only characterized by duality and marked by time duration, but also coterminous with chaos and disorder".²⁷ Similarly,

²⁰ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 7.

²¹ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 7.

²² Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 7.

²³ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 7.

²⁴ Quoted in Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 7.

²⁵ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 8.

²⁶ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 8.

²⁷ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 8.

Adekoya notes that “although revolutionary action liberates Atunda from the oppression imposed on him by his master, it does not totally banish tedium and tyranny”.²⁸ What this point implies is that the actions of both masters and their slaves are limited and far from bringing perfection to humanity. Thus, Adekoya concludes that “Jesus Christ, the gentle Lamb of God, is also the terrible spirit that will judge the world and cast unrepentant sinners into the eternal infernal lake”.²⁹

Adekoya states further that every life generating agent/element carries with it some doses of pains and destructiveness. He explains that “human imperfection leads to accidents, constitutes impediments and an impetus for development”.³⁰ Science and technology, medicine and love, for example, are not only enablers of life, but they are also harbingers of pains. He contends that “the more science and technology fills the world with light, increases humanity, efficiency and creates greater comfort and leisure, the deeper the human angst and fear that the world will be destroyed by the increasingly powerful weapons of war made possible by the same knowledge”.³¹ Inflicting pains is the manner through which medicine and its practitioners deploy to cure their patients. The critic remarks: “Medicine hurts to heal and tends to robs its practitioners of the pity, for they seem not to have regard for patients’ shame or hear their cries, or feel for them as they examine their naked bodies and private parts, take their medical history, plunge needles in their buttocks and open their bowel with scalpels”.³² Capturing the paradoxical relationship between love and hate, Adekoya writes:

The paradox of love and hate as it plays itself out in the relationship between Jesus and the Jews whose rejection of the redeemer opens the way of salvation for the Gentiles; of capitalist accumulation through self-denial and frugality and its incalculable damage to capitalists and workers; of the difficult relationship between the lonely I and the gregarious others and its metaphoric warp and weft; of little wisdom leading to a prolonged drought and of excessive knowledge tripping its possessor; and of total sexual abstinence and human extinction is finally resolved in favour of balance, a sense of moderation and proportion.³³

²⁸ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 8.

²⁹ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 9

³⁰ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 32.

³¹ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 31

³² Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 33.

³³ Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 28.

As evident from the foregoing excerpt, Adekoya considers balance, a sense of moderation and proportion as the strategy of coping with the conundrum of paradox. However, his idea of balance as the coping mechanism to the indissoluble nature of paradox is inverted by the concept of imbalance. Thus, his idea of balance as a means of confronting paradox remains elusive.

Adekoya's Philosophy of Paradox and the Critique of Literary Theories

Adekoya's idea of paradox is inexorably linked with various notable theories of literature. Because literary theories, in many ways, embed binary oppositions and are embedded in binary oppositions, they inevitably manifest various dimensions of paradox. Thus, interrogating the link between paradox and literary theory is quite necessary.

The subject of art, together with its philosophical interpretations, has engaged the critical attention of scholars and philosophers from the ancient period to contemporary time. During the classical era, Plato,³⁴ in *The Republic*, offers some philosophical perspectives on literature and the literary artist. In his attempts to philosophise principles to establish a more rational and ideal society, Plato "classifies art as a third-order imitation since it was neither the ideal form nor the actual thing".³⁵ He sees art as one that is removed from the truth and the literary artist as a peddler of lies.³⁶ Insisting that Homer's stories and those of other Greek poets and story-tellers are lacking in truth, and contain emotional manipulation of youth, Plato remarks that such stories fall short of moral education needed in the ideal republic to morally educate the youth.³⁷ In Plato's view, the arts are anathema to the pursuits of truth and knowledge, which are the fundamental principles of the ideal republic.³⁸ Hence, he repudiates arts in general but recommends state-approved arts, that is, stories that eulogise the gods and promote patriotism.

In many ways, Adekoya's idea of paradox is quite relevant to the critique of Plato's concept of art in *The Republic*. First, Plato's ideas that literature is inferior to truth and knowledge because it is an imitation of imitation is destabilised by the mere fact that the ideal can be imitated and recreated. Second, that literature, the imitation of imitation, is capable of offering alternative truth and knowledge to Plato's unicentric truth and hegemonic knowledge which provide different images of the Athenian gods shows that Plato's concept of ideal form is not only incomplete but grossly illusory. Third, Plato's idea that literature is incapable of instilling morals on the youth because it contains lies is equally invalidated by the fact that Plato's concept of the ideal

³⁴Townsend. "Plato", *Historical Dictionary of Aesthetics*, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, United States of America, 2006:244-245.

³⁵Townsend, "Imitation", *Historical Dictionary of Aesthetics*, 161.

³⁶Thomas Thornburg, *CliffsNotes Republic*, New York: Hungry Mind, United States of America, 2000:88-91

³⁷ Thomas Thornburg, *CliffsNotes Republic*, 88-90

³⁸Thomas Thornburg, *CliffsNotes Republic*, 88-90

only exists in the fictional realm but not in a real-life situation. Thus, it is paradoxical that Plato's ideal form cannot be divorced from fiction because the ideal form and the fictional realm are products of human contemplation and intuition. Just like Plato's philosophising, fiction or arts of story-telling often offer deeper and more rational knowledge and truth in a manner that blurs the binary that Plato erects between truth and fiction. Indeed, Plato's recommendation of special form of art—one that serves the interest of the gods (the ruling class) and promotes patriotism, shows that the ideal form that he contemplates cannot exist without fiction.

It is on the foregoing basis that Aristotle's idea of *mimesis*³⁹, in *Poetics*, becomes more useful and more realistic than that of Plato. Contending that humans are mimetic beings and that they have an urge to create art that reflects reality, Aristotle remarks that literature (art) is more illuminating than history because history deals with specific events that have taken place and which are contingent while literature deals with events that could have taken place or ought to take place.

By fusing *hamartia*, *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis* and catastrophe into the life of the tragic hero, Aristotle's tragedy fundamentally seeks to provoke *catharsis* in the minds of the audience. It is, therefore, not surprising that he considers tragedy as a very valuable art form essentially because tragedy helps to purge the audience of harmful emotions, thereby boosting the moral fibre of individuals and society. Aristotle notes that, for catharsis to occur, there has to be a certain distance between the work of art, on the one hand, and life, on the other hand. He believes that the audience draw lessons and consolations from tragedies only because they do not happen to them directly. Without distance, tragedy could not give the audience catharsis.

Despite the relevance of Aristotle's idea of tragedy, it is inadequate. For example, Aristotle's privileging of the ruling elite over the ordinary people, his elevation of the gods (government) and their desires over the masses, his overestimation of *hamartia* over all other human features in the life of a tragic hero and his excessive emphasis on catharsis as the necessary tragic effect on the audience imply that his idea of tragedy is premised on binary opposition. Aristotle's erection of a binary opposition between the tragic hero's certain 'ungodly' attitude (*hamartia*) and the perfect ethos of the government (the gods/regulators of society) is destabilised by Adekoya's notion of paradox, for the tragic flaw which constitutes the fundamental basis for which the hero is often set up for a catastrophic end is not naturally rooted in the personality of the hero but it is embedded in society and its complex culture. The totality of tragic hero's personality is not essentially pre-given, as Aristotle wont the reader to believe; rather, it is determined, defined and shaped by society's sociopolitical and cultural forces. The hero's flaw is at once a reflection and a

³⁹Townsend, "Aristotle," 27-30.

refraction of the so-called ideal ethos of society set down by the gods (government). Contrary to the binary opposition that Aristotle's tragedy creates between the tragic hero and the 'perfect' ethos of society set by the gods (the government), that the hero is a direct product of the so-called perfect ethos of society suggests that the perfect ethos of society is, from its conception, contaminated and flawed. The gods and their rules, as encapsulated in Aristotle's principle of tragedy, are as flawed as the character of the tragic hero. Contrary to Aristotle's perspective, both the gods and the mortals are in mutual complementarity with each other in a manner that they are continuously in the acts of transformations. This point is underscored by the Yoruba aphorism that "bi ko si eniyan, imole ko si" (meaning that "without humans, the gods do not exist").

Similarly, by formulating catharsis as the fundamental effect that tragedy must have on the audience, Aristotle's notion of tragedy seeks to make the audience ('demos') permanently subservient to the gods (the state and its agent). Aristotle's attempt, as exemplified in his idea of catharsis, of exorcising the audience of alternative views, which may likely lead to their revolt against the gods (the government), is a way of undermining the intellectual development of the audience. Hence, his notion of state morality that tragedy is meant to preserve is evidently tyrannical and anti-progress, for human advancement is initiated and achieved on the altars of integration and contradiction that Adekoya's idea of paradox exemplifies.

Just like Aristotle's perspective of tragedy, the Russian formalist theory of literature establishes a binary opposition as a part of its central principles of dissecting a text. However, unlike Aristotle's idea of tragedy, the formalist critics often consider a literary text from ahistorical perspectives by stripping it off its political, social, psychological and cultural backgrounds. Considering a literary text as a thing in itself with its independent life, the formalist critics often focus on literary elements embedded in the universe of a literary text. Conceived of literary theory and criticism as acts of "making the stone stonier", the formalist school insists that neither the author nor the context is relevant in determining the meanings of a literary text. Rather they are concerned about "the literariness of the literary text".

As parts of their philosophical principles, the formalist critics insist that language of a literary text must be different from ordinary or everyday language. Ordinary language, according to them, is stale and automated and, therefore, unfit for literary expression. "The routine of ordinary experience, Shklovsky contends, renders invisible the uniqueness and particularity of the objects of existence. Literary language, partly by calling attention to itself as language, estranges the reader from the familiar and made fresh the experience

of daily life”.⁴⁰ To the formalists, literature is a special use of language that deviates from and distorts everyday language. Thus, the term “defamiliarization” (or “ostranenie”), coined by Shklovsky, is the art of making strange through literary devices. “Defamiliarization” implies that literary language is different from ordinary, practical language that is meant for everyday communication because literary language not only calls attention to itself but it also offers new perceptions about everyday experience which the ordinary language is incapable of offering. According to Viktor Shklovsky in ‘Art as Technique’:

The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*⁴¹

From the foregoing, it is quite evident that the Russian formalists’ theoretical perspective is grounded in the art-for-art’s sake principle. While their effort at elevating art to an enviable position is quite relevant, the binary opposition that they draw between literature and the object of artistic representation is quite false, because the object of art is as important as how the artfulness of the object is experienced. The idea of making the objects unfamiliar essentially for a mere aesthetic purpose and without social relevance is in itself illusive, for all arts are themselves socially bound. Indeed, language, the fundamental tool of arts on which the claims of Russian formalists depend, is not only slippery, but it is also bound with sociopolitical and cultural realities. The Russian formalists’ isolation of the literary system is evidently at odd with the inherent sociality of language and arts. Thus, Adekoya’s notion of paradox destabilises the Russian formalists’ idea of art-for-art’s sake because it shows that the devaluation of sociocultural backgrounds of the text for the independence of literary text and the centrality of language, as postulated by the Russian formalist critics, is circumscribed by the paradoxical nexus between art, language and sociopolitical and cultural firmaments. Indeed, the binary opposition that the Russian formalists draw between the literary and the non-literary expressions, as the basis of their theoretical position, is illusive, for the aggregate of words or expressions deployed by any writer is a blend of ordinary and symbolic codes. Because what goes into the literary text in terms of language is an endless interaction between the symbolic and the literal; it is, therefore, impossible to set a clear boundary, as the Russian formalists have

⁴⁰ Cited in Ngozi Dora Ulogu, *Understanding and Practice: Of Literary Appreciation and Criticism*. Onisha: NewCrest Publishers, Nigeria, 2023:44.

⁴¹ Viktor Shklovsky. “Art as Technique”, *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* David Lodge (ed), London and New York: Longman, n.d. 20.

done, between the literary and the non-literary elements as the basis for defining a literary text.

Also, Adekoya's notion of paradox is equally relevant to the exegesis of Marxism and its illusive binarity. Marxism engages in a radical critique of Western capitalism and the ruthless inequalities in which human societies are categorised based on their relationship with the modes of production. According to Lois Tyson, "Marxist theory asserts that the struggle for economic power is the underlying motivation for all socio-political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government, the arts, science, technology and the media. Economics is, therefore, considered as the *base* upon which the *superstructure* of socio-political and ideological realities is built".⁴² Marxism contends that the history of the world is a continuous struggle between the "haves" and the "have-nots". However, it envisions that this stratification would eventually result in a revolution in which the *bourgeoisie* would be displaced by the *proletariat*. This revolution, according to Marxism, would bring about a classless society. Thus, the ultimate goal of Marxism is to establish a communist society where class inequalities are totally eradicated.

The Marxist univocal/linear idea of human history as a continuous conflict between the haves and the have-nots is quite limited because history and its trajectories are quite complex and slippery and, therefore, negate the predetermined end that the Marxist interpretation ascribes to it. In many indigenous African societies, prior to the incursion of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism, there seemed to be no binary opposition between the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak. For example, among the Yoruba people, one important proverb, "Olówó kan láàárín òtòṣ ì mẹfà, òtòṣ ì ni gbogbo wọn" explains the Yoruba worldview that repudiates the Marxist's view that sees material wealth as a site of struggles between the haves and the have-nots. "Olówó kan láàárín òtòṣ ì mẹfà, òtòṣ ì ni gbogbo wọn" (meaning a single materially wealthy person among six paupers, all of them are paupers) signifies that a materially wealthy person exists not in opposition to the poor, but in connection with them. Thus, in the Yoruba philosophy of *Omoluabi*, a wealthy person is not regarded as the enemy of those who are yet to become wealthy, for, in the Yoruba worldview, it is the ethical/ communal responsibility of the wealthy to deploy their wealth to ameliorate the living condition of their family and community members. The principles of individualism and individual survival that essentially define the European capitalism upon which Marxism anchors its univocal claim of history is quite incomplete and circumscribed by the collaborations and cohabitation that have existed and has continued to exist between the rich and the poor in various non-White cultures across the world. The class *cum* intergeneration collaborations that define life among the Yoruba

⁴²Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*. New York: Routledge, United States of America, 2006, 54-55.

are also expressed in the Yoruba proverb that says “*ṣwó ọmọdé kò tó pepẹ tàgbàlagbà kò wọ kẹrẹgbẹ*” (meaning that the hand of the minor does not reach the rafter that of the adult does not enter the gourd). This proverb underlines the inexorable connection and collaboration not only between the young and the old but also between the strong and the weak. Hence, the proverb challenges the Marxist essentialist claim on the binary opposition between the rich and the poor.

The Marxist notions of collective revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat as means of achieving a classless society are anchored on the fallacy that all members of the proletariat are essentially immune from greed, corruption and acquisitive predilection. The essentialist ideas of collective revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat are premised on the assumption that all members of the proletariat not only share common fate but they also have a single common thought, taste, interest and ambition. In fact, the ideas assume that the greed, corruption and the acquisitive predilection that characterise the lives of members of the bourgeoisie that make them expropriate the resources are non-existent among members of the proletariat. However, the Marxist’s assumptions on which the dictatorship of proletariat and their revolution are built are grossly flawed by the fact that greed, corruption and acquisitive predilection are borne out of human propensity for self-preservation, which is often considered as the first law of nature. According to Adekoya:

Three Yoruba proverbs emphasize the problem of selfishness as primary weakness of human nature, which paradoxically is a source of its strength. They are: “*Kosi eni ti won ma gba gori esin ti ko ni sepako lukeluke*” (There is nobody mounted on a horse whose head would not move majestically); *Ti a ba fun were loko, odo ara e ni yio kobe si* (If we give a mad person a hoe, he/she will make ridges on his/her side); and *Ko si eni ti won ma tewo bodi e, ti o ni rami* (Every arsehole harbours shit). If self-preservation is the first law of nature, how will the proletarians who seize power from the bourgeoisie be protected from constituting themselves into another privileged class during their dictatorship? The problem then is how to find honest-hearted souls who will translate the vision of world communism from fiction into fact. Nobody is good enough to make choices for others all the time.⁴³

⁴³Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 23.

Collective revolution of the proletariat and their dictatorship, the Marxist pathways to attaining a classless society, would always degenerate into another form of elitist class that would corruptly expropriate resources to itself. This is evident in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, a fable allegory that fictionalise the events leading up to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and then on into the Stalinist regime of Soviet Union, where Russia was ruled through the Marxist-Lenin ideology of Joseph Stalin. As captured in *Animal Farm*, the animals' collective revolution against Mr Jones of Minor Farm (a metaphor for the *bourgeoisie*) neither brings about a classless society nor ameliorates their suffering; rather, it complicates their suffering as a new ruling class, led by Napoleon (a pig), emerges immediately after the revolution. Napoleon not only inflicts worse oppression on his fellow comrades, but he also sells Boxer, the most patriotic and workaholic of all the animals on the farm, to a knacker (a horse slaughterer) in order to get money for whisky for the pigs. The final resolution of the novella clearly invalidates the Marxist assumption of binary opposition between the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat* as Napoleon, together with the animals on the farm eventually, becomes friends with human beings whom they earlier regard as their enemies. Thus, as depicted in the text, Marxist notions of collective revolution, dictatorship of the *proletariat* and classless society are mere phantoms that often create a dystopic society that is characterised by totalitarianism, oppression and anguish. It is on the foregoing basis that Adekoya, in the truth of paradox, offers cautionary advice:

To petulant socialist ideologues and revolutionaries who refute the truth of paradox, I recommend a nitty nostrum: the corrective art of self-criticism, which might not erode or shake their faith in the perfectibility of humanity but will certainly teach them a lesson in the face of all-conquering death that makes a mockery of every ideology and struggle and their propagators and doers, respectively. In Laurence Sterne's words that weave the trammels of human nature: "the radical moisture is nothing in the world but ditch-water and [...] the radical heat ...is burnt brandy...we know not what it is to fear death". Skeletons of those who had overcome the fear of and sacrificed their lives for the liberation of the proletariat in the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 must be squirming in reverse gear and relished the vomit of capitalism. That reversal, too, is change! The permanence of change gives cause for hope and despair.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 9

From the above, it can be argued that the Marxists' univocal self-position that all other philosophies have come to explain/interpret the world but Marxism has come to change the world does not only negate the truth of paradox but it also contradicts the complex notion of change and human realities, which are rooted in endless contradictions. Hence, the Marxist's unicentric idea of change that is steeped in a violent revolution is far from complex realities and human nature.

Adekoya's idea of paradox is inexorably linked with the tenets of poststructuralism. For example, his idea of paradox shares Jacques Derrida's idea that "language is not the reliable tool of communication we believe it to be, but (it is) rather a fluid, ambiguous domain of complex experience in which ideologies program us without our being aware of them".⁴⁵ Hence, Adekoya's notion of paradox, just like Derrida's poststructuralist perspective, challenges the principle of a binary of opposition on which Structuralism grounds its argument. By acknowledging an endless chain of signifiers (which the Structuralists refer to as the signified) and its attendant ambiguities and incompleteness, Adekoya not only recognises the validity of indeterminacy and polysemy, the poststructuralist tenet that there is no limit to the number of meanings that a signifier could generate, he also shows that the presence of meaning is lacking. Just like view of poststructuralists, Adekoya's principle of paradox contends that human "mental life consists not of concept—not of solid, stable meanings, but of a fleeting, continuously play of signifiers".⁴⁶ Commenting further on the poststructuralist idea of the impossibility of stable meaning, Tyson contends:

(. . .) signifiers may seem to be stable concepts—they look stable enough when we hear them spoken or see them written down!—but they don't operate in a stable manner in our mind. As we saw earlier, every signifier consists of and produces more signifiers in a never-ending *deferral*, or postponement, of meaning: we seek meaning that is solid and stable, but we can never really find it because we can never get beyond the play of signifiers that is language.⁴⁷

Meaning, as evident from the foregoing, is the mental trace produced by the play of signifiers. Because what is called meaning is continuously postponed by the play of signifiers and such meaning is as a result of differences (*différance*) between two or more signifiers, the presence of meaning is lacking in each word/signifier. For example, the term proletariat carries with it

⁴⁵Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 249.

⁴⁶Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 235.

⁴⁷Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 252-253.

the trace of *bourgeoisie*. The meaning of the word proletariat is not fully present, for it is contaminated by the word *bourgeoisie*. Thus, neither the word proletariat nor the word *bourgeoisie* possesses stable, pure, independent meaning, for both words are contaminated by each other. From the foregoing, it can be extrapolated that meanings are not fully present in all ideologies, philosophies, codes and maxims grounded in binary oppositions and, they are, therefore, remain incomplete. Acknowledging the incompleteness of all matter (and ideologies) as the reality of paradox, Adekoya declares:

But the paradox of dearth and surfeit, accretion and depletion, birth and death is characteristic of all matter. Indeed, everybody—animal, human, material, stellar or vegetal—is an *abiku*, that is, born to die. If the world is not destroyed by nuclear conflagrations and pollution, it certainly will come to an end through lack of sustenance when the sun, the source of light and energy for the planet earth, burns itself up. Thus, the conquest of the earth by humanity is a deceptive illusion.⁴⁸

Despite the poststructuralist bent evident in Adekoya's concept of paradox, Adekoya does not escape the trappings of binary opposition. Apparently enamoured with Soyinka's animist poetics, Adekoya, in a caustic manner, offers a defence for Soyinka's animalist *cum* pro-modernist aesthetics against the claims of Negritude writers and other nativists/traditionalists such as Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike who insist that African writers, including Soyinka, should do away with foreign cultures and return to indigenous folklore as aesthetic strategy of socio-cultural and economic self-retrieval and development. According to Adekoya, Negritude poetry is escapist, extols superficialities of black civilization, overconcentrates on self, annuls the human paradox and shuts out the Other".⁴⁹ He notes further:

Unmediated by the power of paradox, their (Negritudists') poetry is characterised by extreme oversimplification and distortion of truth and of the African reality. Ascribing emotion to the blacks and reason to the whites bifurcates human nature, violates African personality and wrecks the wholesome of the world of African animist whose existence is thereby reduced to only pure sensations without an iota of intellection. Such a Manichean categorization is a negation of all epistemology.

⁴⁸Adekoya, *Homage to Paradox*, 27.

⁴⁹Olusegun Adekoya, *The Inner Eyes: An Oriel on Wole Soyinka's Poetry*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, Nigeria, 2006: 5.

There is no race that is either all emotion or all reason. Assigning emotion to the blacks denigrates the people and functions as an insidious justification of their low productivity and of the racial myths and negative stereotypes woven by white racists to undermine them.⁵⁰

Indeed, the veracity of Adekoya's defence of Soyinka's poetry and poetics as well as his criticism of Negritude is not in doubt. However, the critic, despite his insightfulness on the discourse of paradox, is also involved in promoting a 'Manichean categorization' with which he charges Negritudists. While inferiorising Negritude and its promoters, Adekoya tends to consider Soyinka and his poetry (poetics) as a sophisticated, superior and superlative specimen of poet/poetry to have come from Africa: "The poet (Soyinka) employs the inner eye and the inner ear to gasp the incomprehensible, the invisible, the inaudible, the unspeakable, and the intractable. If the reality represented in his poetry is complex, the style used is equally arcane and convoluted".⁵¹

Nonetheless, Soyinka's vast body of works, including drama and poetry, is not lacking in traces of Negritude. From *The Swamp Dwellers* to *The Lion and the Jewel*; from *A Dance of the Forests*, *Idanre and Other Poems*; *Madmen and Specialists*, *Death and the King's Horseman* to *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Soyinka's creative and critical works bear indelible, bold traces of "critical Negritude" in a manner that challenges the essentialism and romanticism that characterise "Senghorian Negritude". Indeed, Adekoya acknowledges this reality when he notes that Soyinka's repudiation of ideological purity "enables him to look critically inward and expose the fallacies and weaknesses of Negritude, even though all he has written could conveniently be placed under the rubric of that literary ideology".⁵² Despite "the inner eye and the inner ear" that enable Soyinka, through his arts, to penetrate what Adekoya perceives as "the incomprehensible, the invisible, the inaudible, the unspeakable, and the intractable", the poet's arts, like that of Negritude poets, remain incomplete. Indeed, Adekoya alludes to this fact when he notes that "every act of interpretation is bound to be inconclusive".⁵³ In spite of the flaws of Negritude and contrary to the binary opposition that Adekoya erects between it and Soyinka's animist realism, Negritude and Soyinka's animist realism are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are mutually complementary in a way that reveals multidimensional and complex character of African cultures.

However, it is pertinent to note that, in a number of ways, Adekoya's idea of paradox is quite useful to the understanding of philosophical underpinnings,

⁵⁰Olusegun Adekoya, *The Inner Eyes*, 5

⁵¹Adekoya, *The Inner Eyes*, 2.

⁵² Adekoya, *The Inner Eyes*, 4.

⁵³ Adekoya, *The Inner Eyes*, 5.

which underlie diverse cultural texts and the theories that are often deployed in their interpretations. First, Adekoya's notion of paradox acknowledges binary opposition upon which nearly all cultural texts and (literary) theories are often constructed. Second, his idea of paradox, however, indicates that cultural texts and, indeed, theories deployed in interpreting them are usually unstable, incomplete and incoherent. Thus, most binary oppositions upon which cultural texts and theories are grounded are grossly artificial and, therefore, prone to disruption or demolition. Third, his idea of paradox privileges mutual complementarity of cultures and ideas in a way that promotes healthy interactions and collaborations among seemingly opposing ideas, phenomena and people. By thinking and acting in terms of mutual complementarities on phenomena, ideas or people who are apparently mutually exclusive, Adekoya's notion of paradox can be viewed as a theoretical insight and a praxis that are useful in literary analysis and in everyday life.

Conclusion

This study has examined Adekoya's notion of paradox as evident in his inaugural lecture entitled *Homage to Paradox*. The study has shown that Adekoya's idea of paradox is relevant to various cultural texts, phenomena, situation, events and humankind. It has also been established that literary theories, just like other forms of knowledge, are implicated in paradox. Thus, Adekoya, in *Homage to Paradox*, contends that paradox is an inescapable phenomenon. By insisting, through his idea of paradox, that there is no idea, situation, event, system, ideology or human who is 'unicentrically pure', Adekoya shows that all phenomena are never complete; rather, they are contaminated and always in the processes of completion. It is, therefore, established that Adekoya's theoretical idea of paradox advances mutual collaborations and interdependence. Even though he recommends balance as a means of addressing the conundrum of paradox, his perspective of balance transcends the binary opposition between balance and imbalance. His perspective of balance is rooted in mutual complementarity that destabilises and unites all binary differences. It is, therefore, practically useful for literary exegeses and in ordinary human situations.

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