



Literary Heredity and Variation in Selected Facebook Poems of Veralyn Chinenye and Her Collaborative Authors

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Keywords:

literary heredity, variation,
facebook, digital literature,
static, fluid, oral, print

Abstract:

Facebook has become one of the mediums of creativity and criticism of works of art as a result of the nature of its blended writing. At the “completion” of a composition, Facebook poems maintain a certain degree of the static form, which is a characteristic of print literature. Facebook poetry coalesces the oral and print into a “new” form of poetry and extends the boundaries of oral and print literature. Using Bolter and Grusin concept of Remediation as a theoretical framework, this paper examines literary heredity and variation in selected Facebook poems of Veralyn Chinenye and her collaborative authors and participants. The paper further examines the characteristics and criticism of Facebook poetry and explicates the functionality of “Emoji”, “Comments”, “Share”, and intertextuality in the on-going creation and criticism of Facebook poetry that is different from the conventional perception and practice of literary creativity and criticism. Through the examples of poetry analysed in this paper, our findings show that digital literature is, to an extent, fluid and shares identical characteristics with oral literature in terms of artist and audience participation, occasion of performance.

1. Introduction

The emergence of computer technology has relegated print and oral literature to the margins among the digital natives. Emphasis, thus, has shifted to digital literature. In view of the appeal of digital literature to the youths, and its unique characteristics in negotiating digital narratives and criticism in the 21st Century, it becomes necessary to examine digital heredity and variation in social media poetry.

One of the dominant social media sites in the virtual community is Facebook. Facebook is a social media platform of communications and relations among people of varied backgrounds and it bridges the gap that physical spaces pose to human communications and relationships. However, aside from its function of maintaining social ties, it is a medium of creativity and criticism.

Furthermore, many in the English literary tradition did not make a case for print literature at the inauguration of print in Europe but it was upheld as a catalyst for mass literacy. African literature did not have the privilege of this view and it demanded of it scholars of African descent many years to make a case for it as literature and as a literary product of a people. The foregoing disregard for oral literature motivated Akpobaro (2012) to predict in his attempt to make a case for oral literature when he states that:

The artist who performs in the medium of the spoken word is engaged in the same creative process as the modern writer who creates through the written word. (...) the oral artist shares with the modern writer the same element of creativity and language manipulation. This act of creativity has many dimensions such as the imaginative communication of experience, the communication of ideas of significant human value, and the heightened organisation of the resources of language towards the achievement of aesthetic effects (p. 2).



Interrogating the core of his submission, we are confident to state that the digital artist shares in the same case made for the oral artist in African oral literature. The digital artist who composes a work of art in the social media space is also engaged in a work of creativity using language as produced by various epochs and by the digital environment to the extent that it dissolves the existing forms into a “new” mold.

Social media poetry is unique in nature, and, without language competence in digital space, many would not be able to understand the art and the realisation of meaning in this space. Fiormonte et al., (2015) make a case for the all-inclusiveness of digital culture thus: “The history of modern computing is not simply the history of one particular technology, but is part of a larger history of culture and knowledge, which itself changes of perspective, epistemic loops and the emergence, at the end of a complex process, of certain devices at the expense of others” (p. 25). African digital literature shares in this larger history of culture and knowledge, which itself should change our perspectives and discourse of African literature in the twenty first century. African Digital literature is a form of art subdivided within the traditional subcategories and with newer categorizations of newer forms to accommodate its nature. It belongs to aspects of cyber culture as a result of its prominent role in the lives of most digital natives and some digital migrants. Castells and Haraway (Bell, 2007) conceive cyber culture as: “...a way of thinking about how people and digital technologies interact, how we live together...” (p. 5). The same temperament runs through the interrogation of Digital African literature in the twenty first century, which is a discourse on the interface of how technologies interact in our composition and criticism of African literature.

Twenty-five years after the inauguration of International Conference on African literature and the English Language, it would be a disservice to our time to discuss literature without paying attention to the changes that the digital interface is imposing on our literature. This is in line with Bakhtin’s postulation in *Speech Genres and other Late Essays* that: “...literary scholarship should establish closer links with the history of culture. Literature is an inseparable part of culture and it cannot be understood outside the total context of the entire culture of a given epoch” (1986, p. 2). Cyberliterature is part of African literature and a form of literary culture in the twenty first century. Twenty-five years after ICALEL Facebook poetry has emerged strong on the cyberspace expropriating the futures of print and oral literature. Through the power of remediation, as opined by Bolter and Grusin (2000), this process is creating a new form of art. Remediation (with apologies to Bolter and Grusin), can be conceived to be the ability of the medium to honour, rival, and revise a linear perception of literature. Bolter and Grusin submit that:

No medium today, and certainly no single media...seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than works in isolations from other social and economic forces. What is new about (remediation) new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion other media and the ways in which other media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media (p. 15).

The foregoing shows that most mediums determine the form and content of literature: this is an old argument which Eurocentric critics failed to explore in their discourse of differences African oral literature in their emphasis on written medium. Consequently, the cultural form or production cannot exist in isolation and this has closed the route to the concept of duality as propounded by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958). This concept of duality is reemphasized here and thereby demonstrates the elasticity of tradition to accommodate remediation that is the antithesis to the prevailing models of literature, such as the conservative print literature. It is necessary to state that remediation as a guiding theory demonstrates that digital literature lays the same claim to “reality” as every other literature. The nature of immediacy is time specific, and time is the determinant of content and form of remediation in literature. Bolter and Grusin (2000) corroborate the foregoing in their submission that: “remediation always operates under the current cultural assumption about immediacy” (p. 22). As Bolter and Grusin (2000) rightly observe, “the logic... immediacy, virtual reality is immersive, which means that it is a medium whose purpose is to disappear” (p. 23). Although the concept of immersion exists in immediacy, it does not obliterate the fact that aspects of oral and print literature exist within the concept of immediacy.

Facebook poetry is social media poetry and a form of atypical literature occasioned by the introduction of digital interface. Danesi (2017) elaborates on how technology is reconceiving reality thus: “The Internet Age is making new kinds of demands on writing practices, relegating the traditional practices increasingly to margins”(p. 7). Aspects of these are clearly illustrated from the selected texts under study. The existence of



oral poetry and the print poetry prepares the emergence of digital poetry which is an aspect represented as Facebook poetry. This is in line with Bakhtin's philosophy of literature that: "Great literary works are prepared for by centuries, and in the epoch of their creation. It is a matter of picking the fruit that is ripe after a lengthy and complex process of maturation" (p. 4). African Digital literature seems to be great literature because it requires the knowledge of digital learning to understand and some digital immigrants find it uncomfortable to participate in it because they are armed with past knowledge of present form. Bakhtin states that: "Trying to understand and explain a work solely in terms of the conditions of epoch alone, solely in terms of the conditions of the most immediate time, will never enable us to penetrate into its semantic depth. Everything that belongs only to the present dies along with the present" (p. 4). In this paper like Bakhtin, I allude to previous forms in an attempt to understand present forms using Veralyn Chinenye co-poets' poems to illustrate the claims of this paper and to state that digital literature breaches the boundaries of art and extent through appropriation of some of its features as a continuation of the preceding forms. Veralyn Chinenye co-poets demonstrate in their "poetic collections" these new demands of the Internet age. Danesi goes further to note that; "the internet has brought about new form of literacy" (p. 2) and this is clearly highlighted on Facebook poetry in its composition and the realisation of meaning.

The reality of the virtual in the twenty first -century has a direct effect on those whose DNA is technology. This affects their reality; this can be clearly seen in the poetry that is emanating from the cyberspace. Facebook is a mutation of the oral space (oral poetry) and print into social media space in digital written form. Social media platforms have altered the nature of poetry and have challenged the existing format of print poetry. Digital space is a fluid space and shares almost the same characteristics with the oral literature in terms of adjustments of the narrative to suit logic, grammar and the ideology of the writer, which are hardly possible with that of print literature after publication. Meanings in social media poetry are often on going and are derived in digital poetry through audience participation, which most times lead to the creation of another text. The writer is an active participant in the digital space either agreeing or refuting counter narratives to his or her submission.

The fluid nature of this space gives room for the impermanency of most narratives on the social media space after it has served its societal function like the Mbari act. Facebook poetry is social media poems that are published in Facebook spaces. They are not mainstream poetry but having the conventional characteristics of the print poetry and they share close links with African oral poetry. Facebook is a virtual space hosted by computer-mediated networks and icons allows of the oral realities that exist during the African preliterate times. The social platforms become the place of performance while the writer becomes the determinant of the occasion of performance through his or her presentation of literary compositions in the platform. However, the time of participation is timeless in the sense that the time at which the participant decided to respond to the composition becomes the time of participation and as such it is fluid in nature. There is the existence of the writer and audience participation in the platform. The participants are part of those who aid the writer's creation of meaning and the writer. They, like an artist in the oral literature, through their repertoires of collective history of the people create meaning that the people can actually associate with.

The social media poet is always "present" in the digital space either liking the comments or commenting to buttress or refute the comments. The nature of ignoring comments on poetry in social media platform is either deleting the comment –that the writer (artist) is the sole administrator of the page – or ignoring the comments. The print writers do not have the privilege that the social media writer has in terms of suppressing negative comments in respect to his narratives in a generic sense. There is the existence of the freedom of the oral space in the form of the social space. The social media poem is undergoing creation in respect to modification and contribution of other writers. Just as the artist is not a lone creator in the performance situation, likewise the writer in social media space is not a sole creator; he or she is influenced by the responses on the page.

The social media poetry is an on-going project that requires the virtual audience participants in the group to make comments and rate the piece. In the case of close groups like Veralyn's page ('Veralyn Chinenye (facebook)', 2017), it is relocating the African oral composition and print scene back to its former nature with a slight difference. The Facebook platform is an agent of performance that is held on the performance at the shifts of seconds until the performer who is the poet or co-performers are online to carry on "paused" performance to the continuous creativity. Bell (2004) in *Cyberculture and the Key Concepts* makes a profound statement about computer interface thus: "Agent...An application that organized and undertake tasks in an in an independent or quasi-independent way. The term is quite commonly used to describe software that takes



“decision” within the parameters set by those who authored it. Agent can also refer to an alternative human interface” (p. 2). Facebook as an agent of performance keeps creativity as on-going processes of criticism and recreation of new texts on social media platform.

The place of power and occasion of performance in African oral literature is community- based. There is a shared sense of communality in terms of the consumption of social media poetry appealing to the collective repertoires of the people. This motivates their responses and writing from the same worldview. Although social media bridges the gap of the physical space, it also emphasizes this gap through groups’ composition that the literary output is open to only members of the community like the oral art. However, there are exceptions as have been highlighted on the Facebook page of Eriata which is more or less an open page (‘Eriata Oribhabor (facebook), 2016). However, the difference of the nature of his poetry is that there are collective compositions that beckon on members of the group or those who appreciate the line should contribute toward the composition of the poetic piece. This page and nature has become a means to regenerate print literature as can be seen in the book published by Eriata after communal composition, which is titled *Join Me Write a Poem* (2016). The writers of the poetry are relative young and their poetry is motivated by the need to entertain their audience, which is one of the first functions of African oral poetry and secondly it is intended to chronicle the times they live in and it depicts their social realities as youths in the Nigerian society. The Facebook space becomes the place of performance while the writer determines the occasion of performance based on his or her creative muse. The Facebook space appropriates certain features of the oral and print culture in trying to emphasize its difference through the “innocence” of its composition in the virtual space.

The Facebook poetry is not mainstream like most African oral performance, although there are exceptions where we can have trained poets who post for commercial purposes. However, the difference between oral poetry and the social media poetry is that the composer is an existing being who one can point to as the owner of the piece, which in most cases was non-existent in the oral platform. The Facebook space is now a “book” that most persons spend their time reading and learning from. Ikheloa corroborates the forgoing when he states:

The most popular African books that are being read voraciously today are Twitter and Facebook. A vast vibrant readership of African youths, perhaps equivalent to the population of a good size African country is on social media, transfixed by the drama, heartbreak, poetry, prose that is Twitter and Facebook. They read the equivalent of whole chapters of a book daily. Where many thinkers despair about what they see as addiction, others see an opportunity and are re-engineering their writing to fit the new dispensation that is our digital world (1).

The foregoing is a prevalent fact in social media space as depicted in the poetry “collections” under study. The readers in this platform do not just read, they aid the creation of meaning through “comments,” “likes,” love, and “share” which boost the popularity of the text. Their responses sometimes serve as reviews which help to improve the text.

The Facebook also contributes to the development of the e-text as seen in *Join Me Write a Poem* which was collected and made into an e-book. This kind of poetry does not have page numbers but the hyperlink becomes a reference to the page while the title becomes a form reference with the page number in the highlight of various excerpts as lab rat for making critical comments about Facebook poetry.

2. Chinenye’s poetry as archetype

Chinenye’s poetry is often fictive narrative in nature, however mediated through the element of language and the medium in her presentation. It is observed that the audience is within her age bracket. The audience that exists in this platform responds either as captive audience or active audience. The participants in this platform use “share,” “Comments,” “likes and “Emoji” symbols as a form of criticism which is not the conventional approach to “traditional” form of literary criticism. According to Danesi (2017), “the word Emoji is an English adaptation of Japanese... the “e” of Emoji means “Picture” and the Moji stands for “letter, character”. Chinenye and her participants make use of various emoji symbols in the realisation of meaning within the text and as a form of criticism.

Emoji as defined by Danasi as "...a new kind of artificial, universally usable writing" (p. 4) for digital natives. Danesi further notes that this is a form of education, a prevailing literacy that comes as a result of the dawn of globalization and the digital interface:

the rise and rapid spread of emoji might signal an incipient paradigm shift

in how people perceive writing, literacy, and communication today. Unlike the Print Age, which encouraged, and even imposed, the exclusive use of alphabetic writing in most message-making media and domains of literacy, the current Internet Age encourages different modes of writing (visual and audio) to be utilized in tandem with alphabetic (and nonalphabetic) scripts in the composition of messages (p. 4).

Facebook poetry is a form of art which carries diverse messages for the critical and captive consumers as depicted by their actions on the selected poems of Chinenye on her Facebook page. Chinenye, through poetic muse appropriates and re-inaugurates love as one of the important aspects of the challenges of her time. Love is one of the issues that interest the youth; they have lofty ideas about it and this is actually seen in the narrative of the poet persona in the poem titled "Ade." "Ade's" is the name of a lover, which the persona mourns for not reciprocating her love. She mourns his action thus: "Ade, Last night depression wrapped me like a blanket. I lost my crown to live." Though Ade is her psychological crown, she still lacks the power to say what she feels and through poetic muse, she says: "I called your name, you looked and turned away. I can't trust my life in my hands anymore. I want to call your name and get a reason to live. But I get green marks /I feel you may never be mine." This is the lamentation of a female persona who lacks the voice to speak to Ade because wooing in the traditional African society is perceived to be more of the man's duty than the woman's. The object of her desire, Ade, becomes intoxicated and this keeps her awake, wrapped in her blanket as she anticipates his response to her love.

This poem is not just about love; it is a commentary of the plight of the youth in the context social norms governing inter-gender relationship. Thus, she has to keep silent even at the expense of what she wanted because she does not want to break the social conventions. Psychologically, she calls the name of her love but since she has not openly indicated her interest, she feels that her would-be lover actually turns away from her. The poet persona is in a critical situation because of the unspoken and unreciprocated love that is premised on assumption. The poet persona, in view of her situation, contemplates suicide when she says "I can't trust my life in my hands anymore." This reflects the psychology of most youths who feel that love is an ultimate union of happiness. The poet persona sees the lover's name as the only means to live, which is symbolic of all that she wished she would experience if her love were reciprocated. The narrator calls the lover's name in each page at the start of each stanza as a means to a poetic effect of the enormous importance of the name to her;

Ade,
It will soon be time to take my last breath
as the blood run dry in my wrist
and my heart as I say goodbye
but it's scary what a smile can hide.
A smile on my lips, but cuts on my hips.
My mangles body shall see
My head was all but a mess.

The lover is willing to die for unexpressed love. She smiles even in his presence but inside she dies because he could not see what she feels for him. She is dying gradually because Ade suddenly becomes the life that sustains her.

The poet persona's lament is symbolic and emphasizes that the love she seeks is erotic and a place where her blood runs dry is her wrist demonstrating that the unreciprocated love is a joiner. The persona's heart metaphorically becomes mangled because it bears her pains. Toward the end of the poem, the poet says: "Ade, I just knew you won't care, until I'm dead. Maybe you would write me a poem or edit my biography for free. I'm putting your name on my wrist, so that everyone would know/ you were the last thing that went through my heart." The persona is helpless; she feels her anticipated lover would not care until she dies and he would follow the virtual method of mourning a loved one. In the virtual space, poetry is a means of mourning the dead using icons to illustrate the tears one feels in one's heart.



There is no pagination of social media poetry; it runs straight downward with an indication “read more.” When one clicks on it, it opens further pages on the subject matter one further down the poetry and this one of social media poetry which is known as hyperlink. Toward the end of the piece, the poet persona becomes resolved to let go of the unreciprocated love and this is actually motivated by her love for him. “Ade, I’m done crying/I’m done fighting/ I’m done trying/ I’m done living”. There is the use of resolution through creative piling of metaphors to illustrate the poetess’ persona’s plight of all that she had been through because of her love for Ade and this she said she is done with. The persona becomes very assertive at the end of the narrative when she submits thus:

Ade,
I’m done waiting for your flaming tongue to lick my pains.
I just dropped the last fake smile as tears ran down my cheeks
I can’t do it anymore.
I bid my last farewell to those nights of drolling chats.

The poetess persona finally gives up on her love by giving up the fake smiles that nursed the love she had for him and this decision is actually painful but she did it so that she could continue living.

The nature of social media poetry allows for the poetess to compose and post while the audience participates through either the “like”, “comments,” and “share” buttons which are the characteristics of Facebook poetry. The first comment came as an advice from Bassey Asuquo an elderly man who shared the same social media space with Veralyn Chinenye thus: “Banish the suicide thoughts, fine girl! Life is worth living for. Ade can’t be the end of your life. We love you!” The foregoing illustrates the on-going creation of a poetic piece where the audience directly participates on the page as if they are at the oral context of performance.

The work had seventy “likes” at the time of this research and ten “shares” and many Emojis. The use of Emoji in social media poetry is a form of criticism championed by those who have language competence in the use of social media symbols.

Various emojis were used to criticise Veralyn’s poems, such as a walking man that captures indifference by the critic to her poetic lines. There is the use of various forms of emojis that question and accept the poetic submission of the poet. The characteristic of social media poetry is an on-going creation that most times encourages a counter composition in form of responses in poetic form as an element of intertextuality.

The use of emoji is a form of Facebook criticism different from conventional perception of criticism. Emoji aids the realisation of meaning and the creation of another text on the Facebook platform and its retention of the past with various modifications. The Emoji performs many discourse functions like the paralinguistic devices of the oral environment.

Social media poetry helps to preserve the platform through engaging the people through literature and increasing the interaction of the people to be there through their reactions and comments. One of the characteristics of captive audience is that they are full of praises most times without any critical discourse to the shaping of the art. However, the responses such as intertextuality lead to the birth of another text which is profound in its own right. John Ifer a participant on the page birthed a poem and chronicled the poetic love narrative of “Ade” thus:

Vera
Now I see your tired heart.
Of vain love planted in men’s world.
When I came for your hand,
It was Ade’s name you jingled.
Who put thoughts on marble
Of a fickle world uncertain.

The poet persona Ifer is also a victim of the poetess persona’s unreciprocated and represents a weaker man that the subject has failed to acknowledge that exist in the society. The poem demonstrates that young men are capable of emotions in the twenty first century and that African male identity contains weakness as is chronicled in *Things Fall Apart* in the nature of Unoka. The hand becomes a symbol of love, as the wrist is a symbol of life and love in the poet’s narrative. The poet persona acknowledges the poetess’ plight. Even when he is denied love, he could still see her tired heart. The poet considers Ade’s heart to be a marble incapable of love and the



demonstration of emotion and love because it is uncertain. Poetry acquires a new meaning in the depiction of love in the poet's persona's submission: "I was not a good poet, You said. Still in the class/ Learning the craft". Loves becomes poetry and a craft that those who engage in it need to spend time in classroom learning as if they would acquire a degree so as to demonstrate the depth of their feelings for the one their love. The poet persona uses contrastive comparison to illustrate how short sighted the poetess is:

Now Ade of excellent ink
Has written your name naked.
Ooooh Vera,
Heart broken you are.
Like a dismembered bottle.
You, I love still
Worth more than a fling.

He informs the poetess persona of the damage Ade has done to Vera's heart and lay her bare in public that she has to mourn his actions. The poet persona acknowledges poetess' plight and offers her solution that is resident in him that no matter what "you, I love still" and she is "worth more than a fling" which Ade might have taken her to be. The poet persona says he offers something different as he beckons on the poetess: "Come to me. My heart, your home. Where loveliness dwells in calmness". The poet persona is willing to take away the storm in the poetess' life and he radiates peace so that the poetess can also find peace. The poet persona is willing to heal the poetess and that is why he marshals out plans on how to heal her through various therapy of art thus: "Come, let me write you an Ode. Come, let me write a praise song/ And tell the world that your beauty /Is of ancient spell beyond measure". The poet hopes that by so doing, there would be healing in the heart of Veralyn and she would rise from the shattered life again. The poet persona also advise Vera to forget Ade and move on, irrespective of what she respects: "Ade, hmmmm! Wait not for his dirge, Wait not for his tribute. I still love you".

Facebook poetry is therapeutic in nature and heals the participants through alternate form. Ifer did assure the poetess persona of his intentions, which necessitated various criticisms from those who were in the group. However, Chris Sam wrote a reply not to Ifer but to Ada which he titled "Ade's reply to Ada" in which he informed her that he got her note and expressed his joy that he got to her. He informed her, "My distance, have never meant rejection". He revealed to her that he is fond of her and that words could not capture how he feels about her to the extent that his heart skips whenever he hears her call. Sam demonstrates that he is a carrier of the romantic feelings that is resident in the poetess persona even when she is not aware of it. The poet persona wishes he could reverse the past and he laments thus: "Within each moments I heard you call, A thousand times have my heart skipped in excitement. If only I could change the hands of time, I will you know". The poet persona is also afraid to express his love which the poetess has conceptualized as rejection and wanting to say goodbye due to the fact that she feels he is insensitive to her feelings. The poet persona expresses the torment he has been through due to his failure to express what he feels for her. The poet persona feels afflicted by the decision of the poetess to say goodbye to him and he lament:

This moment is my worst, as I wonder why
Like dream, I am faced with the reality of my love for you.
Memories becoming a nightmare, no matter how I try
You were the reason I visited mama Iyabo again and again
To have a moment of stolen glances
For within me, I've wanted you to be mine.

The poet persona in his attempt to express his plight makes comment about the youth and their feelings in the society.

The poem is a commentary on how some love affairs are prosecuted by the youths in the society. The poet persona informs the poetess how lack of "courage have robbed" him of his "pride" because his thoughts were mere wishes without any trial to approach the one he loves. The poem demonstrates that in Africa, men now free to express their emotions to the extent that they weep as part of their humanity. The poet persona did not permit his gender to surpress his emotion. He lets it flow and patronizes it as part of his identity. He laments, "My thoughts are heavy, I can't help but cry. You don't have to go this way, for I will be willingly give you my



life. Thanks to Monica who saw you at the right time. Doctor said I shouldn't worry that all will be fine". The poet persona makes promise to give his life which is a metaphor for care and attention.

However, from the forgoing, it is necessary to note that social media poetry appropriates intertextuality as a means of on-going construction of meaning in the sense that we have to read Sam's poem for us to understand that Ada attempted suicide but was saved by Monica who saw her. The poet persona sees her as a medium that has awakened him to the reality of what she felt for him. What this demonstrates is that poetry becomes a tool for wooing a man by an African woman in the twenty first century. The African woman reconceives poetry not just as a tool for expressing her subjugation in the society but also as a subtle device to woo the one she loves. This makes the man who is truly in love with her to make commitments that are in tandem with what she has expressed for him, And, this, the poet persona intends when he submits that; "...your notes have really opened my eyes". As the poet persona comes to this understand he pledges, "You don't need green marks/ For I am here to stay, to sing you a song. Let your past tears, become our whispers. As my heartbeat gives you strength to live. For without you, I've got no air to breathe". He offers to sing "a song" which is a representation of love and her tears become that of their whispers of the depth of their love of each other. The poet confessed that his life would be dependent on the poetess persona's decision to accept him back. The poet persona hopes through the poetic chant of love to exorcize the past:

Let your past pains, be lost within this restful sleep.
As you wake, a new you within the embraced of my love.
For in this love, we remain one, nothing else but one.
for in your dying fight
I now understand.

The poet persona acknowledges the poetess nearness. This motivates another response that is directed at the poetess by another poet (Happiness F Jacob) titled "Dear Ada". The poem is a response to the poetess persona who wanted to commit suicide due to unreciprocated love. However, he extends the boundaries of the narrative by informing the poetess about what he the poet persona has passed through in life in his attempt to inform his people about his love. He pleads with the poetess to forgo her suicide attempt because he is in a death row because of his love for her. He submits in his appeal thus: "Dear Ada, Out in the middle of the orison that connects the roaring rivers of Oduduwa, Oranmiyan and Obatala. Have I laid the ebo of my head as a sacrifice of cleansing/They say the sacrilege is grave". The foregoing opens up the consequence that will follow on the poet persona if he attempts to marry away from his own tribe. His head is about to be cut off for the sacrilege of conceiving to marry from another tribe. His community have warned him that he would be killed rather than let him marry from another tribe.

In the second stanza, the poet persona makes a poetic referent to the first stanza as a poetic pointer to his actions thus: "Ada, like you, I called the communion of ogun-the iron god/ Sango-the thunder god and Esu-devil/ As witnesses to my madness of love for you/As I unwrapped our throbbing hearts like Asaro from Erelu's pot". The poet persona buys into popular classification of his love as "madness" which is an anathema to the culture of his people. He goes further to delineate the content of his love for Ada in an attempt to report his people to Ada. First the poet persona tells his people what motivated his love for Ada but they would not buy into his conviction. The poet persona makes a critical statement about the marriage configuration of his people when he reiterates the questions his people asked him thus:

They asked me which kingdom you come
And when I told you're from the east
Wan ni ewor ni
They said it's a taboo
That who will cook the ewedu and obe ata when the grey heirs die
That who will teach Omo Oduduwa to kneel before Ifa and swear not by Ogun
And who will dance the banta and wear the aso oke
Or make the incantations when doom looms

Although one might criticise the decision of the people to prevent their son from marrying across the tribal lines. It should be noted that marriage for his people and many Africans is for the preservation of the community and the continuation of the culture of the society.

The poet reveals that the role of a woman in the traditional society includes the responsibility of training the children in the ways of their people, which a foreign woman might not have been exposed to. The poet persona in presenting in rhetoric the questions of his people to his lover re-centres the concern of his people including the issue of the rite of passage that requires the preparation of traditional dishes for the farewell journey of their own. The poet persona's understanding of the plights and concerns of his people makes a profound statement for the people and continues the co-existence of all in a multi ethnic society like Nigeria. The poet persona, in an attempt to answer his people's question invariably submits that marriage is the solution to inter-tribal clashes in Nigeria because marriage bridges the gaps created by our diversity. In answer to his people's questions, the poet says, "I told them a new hen who knows its house has been dragged by wings three times to the house". This is symbolic of what the Yorubas do to a newly bought hen. They would drag it three times to and from the house so that the hen would not miss its ways back home whenever it wanders off. The poet persona is convinced that his love would in a metaphorical sense be dragged that way so as not to miss the tradition she is married into.

The poet persona assures his people "that we will walk through the path of Oduduwa like we knew it before", he demonstrates through his words that nothing would change even when he marries a woman from the East. He makes a case for cultures of Igbo and Yoruba to coexist. The poet persona makes a case for the need to uphold blended culture for peaceful coexistence in the society.

The poet uses the various indigenous foods in the contending cultures to make a case why they should be allowed to coexist. He patronises the poetess' culture by saying that, "...the ogbono draws more than ewedu." The poet persona tries to use such to sway the thinking of his lover. However, in the line that follows we are able to see what the poet persona means when he says that; "And if ewedu is preferred, we'll practice its medicine", In other words, he is not giving up his culture for his beloved's, Rather he is ready to adopt whichever his lover prefers.

He still makes a case for his lover's culture even when he has taken a stand thereby demonstrating that, in modern times, cultures should be negotiated when engaged in the tunnel of love. The poet persona praises his lover's culture "That red caps with wrappers are adorable with eagle feathers."

Although the poet persona praises his lover's culture, he still goes ahead to make a case for his people's culture within the structure of marriage and inaugurates the concept of blended culture in marriage when he submits that:

That awon Omo, the children
Will dance the banta and dance the smoother ogene
And when the heirs are gray, they'll love both the ewedu
as much as the ogbono

The poet persona makes a case for his would-be children before they are conceived. It would not be a linear culture like that of a Yoruba or Igbo but would be a blended one having elements of the various cultures but existing as one without segregation in the name of tribe. There is a qualifier that follows the alternate culture of his lover which is a projection of the sacrifice the man needs to make for all that the woman has given up for him. The "ewedu" as a symbol of blended culture and an element of peace keeps coming first while "ogbono" comes second with qualifiers to emphasize the blended ties.

The poet persona compares his fear to the Harmattan. He says, "Your words I read like harmattan fears sipping into my veins." Since the publication of *Things Fall Apart* in 1958, the *harmattan* has acquired a symbolic status of destruction as Achebe associates the success of Okonkwo to a wild fire in a harmattan. The sipping of the harmattan winds into the poet persona's veins is capable of giving him pneumonia, which might lead to his death.

The poet persona asks his lover various rhetorical questions thus: "If you die who will bear the moonlight tales/ Of our silent night behind the iroko tree/ Or tell of my jokes out in the full moon?" The poet persona is of the view that Ada should live for their love rather than die because he wants the world to understand that love can exist across ethnic lines in Nigeria. The poet persona makes a case for his love and the reason she should not even think of taking her life or carrying out her thinking because "who will build that bridge that connects Amala and Ogbono soup/ Who will tell them that Chukwu is Olorun". Most importantly, the poet persona wants others to understand the attempt that he and Ade have made to build bridges in the collapsing geographical expression.



The youths are tired of ethnic strives in the society and they appropriate marriage and love to challenge the existing stereotypes in the society through alternative that negotiates the margin back to the centre. The poet persona is willing to die and accept the fate that is imposed on him by his people: "Ada, The butcher will cut my head and offer it at orison." This depicts certain cultures as destructive and preventive to the development of humanity. However, the poet persona is willing to die for his love. The poet persona believes that his willingness to die for love and seek for change qualifies him for a crown. He alludes to this thus: "for when I get to the seat of the one who really sits watching/ I'll watch you smile again". The poet persona indicts the god as the one who sits and watches while men run the earth into destruction. Even amidst this indifference, the poet persona is hopeful that his love would "smile again" as he joins in the same watch of his god. He tasks the lover to "...remember/ live for Ade", thus, Ade becomes a symbolism for a shift in ideology and cultural perception in which the poetess is expected to live for.

Although the poet persona anticipates his death and asks the poetess "Don't bother yourself replying", the poetess did reply as a responsibility she owes him. The reply opens with the last line of the poetess person's lover's last word "Ade" where the poetess persona informs Ade that she presents their love "...before the umunna" which is her father's people and asks for permission to go ahead and marry the one she loves. She says; "Ade, /... I broke our love before them like two sides of the native kola nut. As they swallowed it hard with fermented palm wine they gulped in".

The poem captures the plight of the youth and, most especially, the female child in the African society who is silent in her choices as a result of the dictates of tradition. The stanza like the reply of Ade makes a point about the African traditional system of marriage where marriage is contracted based on family and not an individual procession. The poetess reports the reaction of her father's people thus; "You needed to see the face of the elder with the red and white cap that spoke of years unwashed." In an attempt to lampoon her *umunna*, her father's people, the poetess persona makes a poetic statement about the holding of elders to their tradition to the extent that they resist the washing waters of modernity which is represented by her ideal of love. She reports to Ade the reaction of the elder thus, "He gave me a sneer look, but your face dark and innocent gave a spark to my lips". The poetess persona still draws from Ade's countenance the courage to confront the tradition. The poetess persona appeals to her *umunna* to allow her to get married to Ade by narrating his qualities: "Ade, /... my love is black and innocent, gentle as a quiet dove and compliments me like ogri added to a steaming pot of abacha".

What is interesting about this digital native is the appropriation of food as a means of expressing their love for each other and it is symbolic that what they feel for each other is from within. The young ones are spearheading the movement to extend handshakes across the Niger through marriage as a metaphor for peace in the Nigerian society. They do this by highlighting the qualities of the other that has been classified as bad by changing the narrative through the eyes of love. The poetess persona collaborates the foregoing thus: I told them my love arose from the west/ I told of my love for the west/ I told them my love is inter not intra". The youth are redefining their concept of love and are willing to breach cultural barriers by capitalizing on the digital technology despite resistance from the "...elder" who "shouted from the obi".

The poetess persona fails to acknowledge her lover when she says; "I don't know what he looks like", as a mark of denying his existence. However, she makes a profound statement about the same person she attempts to deny thus, "but he sounded as though a better part of his tooth was gone." The loss of the tooth symbolizes the passing of a tradition. The poet persona emphasizes the qualities Ade would bring to their union. But "Another elder sang a dirge...saying "can anything good come from Oduduwa?" The elders still hold on to the past prejudices and cultural stereotypes which displeases the poetess persona. She informs Ade, "I tried to preach the gospel of humanity to them. That we are all one created by one God despite our tribes. Only one youth nodded rhythmically to my gospel". But it is only a youth who understands because just like the elders they are speaking from a cultural position. The elders appropriate the power of their position to silence her, "Immediately I was sent to my room. The meeting was adjourned, because of our love". The poetess persona could understand that the meeting was adjourned because of their new ways and she, "...went in to my hut expecting my eyes to bleed, but my lips glowed as though I just applied a magical balm".

The point the poetess persona has made for her generation is that love is a magical balm to heal cultural cleavages. The poet persona faces her tradition with courage when she notes that; "Ade, I'm on my cracky bed, my back don't hurt again from its hard, at least not today." She draws courage from the blended union they

want to exhibit and she informs him, “I’m looking at our portrait of love, as smiles from the west and east come together to make a full moon”. The poet persona is prophetic that blended culture will foster peace that will make peace a full moon in the society.

3. Conclusion

Finally, social media poetry, although holding onto the past, comes with innovations as a result of the interface of computer-technology. The youths are by their compositions making a case for the kind of literature they are consuming. Social media poetry is a new form of art that appropriates the societal function of print and oral literature to challenge the narratives that are prevalent in their time and to re-centre counter narratives that are defined by their own experiences in life. Social media poetry represents the literature of a generation, a generation that cannot live without the interference of the virtual. This virtual is having a great effect on the literature of the time. It resists traditional concepts and classification while also accommodating the previous forms. As clearly highlighted in the analysis, what is considered as criticism in digital literature is quite different from the concept of criticism in traditional criticism and text owner in digital literature is collectively like in oral literature. However, there are differences in the sense that individual ownership can be given to the different poems composed by individual which can stand alone but is perfect they stand together because they bring diverse understand to human nature in the society.

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