

## The Writer's Art as a Reflection of Society: Exploring the Literariness in Wale Okediran's Novels

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### Abstract

This paper addresses one of the controversial issues in the literary domain: literariness. The literary artist is conscious of his social responsibility to society as the image-maker and the voice of the voiceless. His art should not be subjected to ridicule. Literariness has been given a colouration by text-oriented critics to mean a form of defamiliarization of text and meaning. This dimension sees the text with specific features which must be inherent to authenticate its literariness. However, the conventionalist approach of the text with emphasis on meaning and the readers-response, attempts to shape a more robust discussion on the subject of literariness. The method adopted in this study is a textual-analytical approach of Wale Okediran's *Tenants of the House*, *Strange Encounters*, *Boys at the Border* and *The Weaving Looms*. The novels are comparatively discussed to demonstrate the literariness in them while attesting to the creative ingenuity of the author. The conclusion reached is that literariness in a literary work is subject to the fecundity of the text, the consciousness of the critic; his ideological stance and mental deportments, and contextual factors enveloped around the text

**Keywords:** Literariness, Foregrounding, Fiction, Literary artist, Defamiliarization.

## **Introduction**

The writer is the eye of society. His engagement with his art helps to determine the scope and functionality of society being represented. His periscopic stance as landscapes in his oeuvre can either create social awareness for a positive change; if he deems to toe the path of social justice and rejuvenation, or enmesh society in social squalor and ignominy, if he chooses to glory in passivity and indolence. Therefore, the pace of any society is arguably determined by the pace of its artist as a mediator. The writer creates awareness and unveils the veil of ignorance from the people. This corroborates Sartre's assertion that "the function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it's all about" (14). There are many social responsibilities on the artist; as a teacher, a social crusader, a mediator, a counsellor, an advocate, and a journalist. However, in recent times, the writer seems to be losing grip on these roles, going by the excoriating social challenges, compromise and betrayal. Again, these are not excuses for the writer to wear the garb of shame and degrade into oblivion.

Osundare opines that "a real writer has no alternative to being in constant conflict with oppression. Like the prophet of the Old Testament, he is the guilty conscience of the king, his words, the nagging unremitting images in his mind, his words are an incitement of revolt... (7). His role, no matter the dissenting voices, ought to be unwavering in addressing societal problems and advocating prospects- the price he must pay. Hall sees literature as a "receptor of social reality" (32) He further explains that "the result of social action and inaction give rise to social action" (47). This attests to the fact that literature influences the course of society. Society and everything inherent in it forms the raw material that the artist uses in his work. As a social institution, both the writer and his art play, the role of a social influencer. Jadhav avers that "literature is not a part of social institution, it is a social institution. Like his works, the writer is also a part of society and he expresses his experience and conceptions about life and society in his works" (55). It is pertinent to say, considering the relevance of literature in society, that literature does not only reflect social image, it is the essence of society.

## **The Concept of Literariness in Literary Works**

The reading of literature could mean different things to different persons depending on the proposition and engagement of the reader, either as a

discourse process, cognitive functions or some forms of rhetorical devices to harness ideological engagement. In an extensive discussion on this, Miall and Kuiken have argued that "any text, whether literary or not, depends on functions common to all texts" (122). Literature is a unique art; its reading is premeditated on certain features and ideological repertoire. Salgado avers that "in literary theory, there is no agreement about the defining features of the aesthetic experience of literature/so-called literariness" (230). Given Salgado's trail of thought, what constitutes literariness or the essence of literariness has been embroidered in controversy. The concept of literariness was first introduced by Roman Jakobson in 1921. He says "The object of study in a literary work is not literature, but literariness, that is, what makes a given work a literary work" (19-2). To him, "the poetic function of literariness is to focus the reader on the message for its own sake" (69).

Jakobson's claim about literariness has attracted various responses and empirical studies on the issue. The discourse on literariness is a literary contestation between the traditional approach and conventionalist approach, i.e. the text-oriented and the reader response. Mail and Kuiken vehemently disagree with conventionalists' viewpoint which tends to support the context and conventions that necessitate the reading of literature. "We suggest that literariness cannot be defined simply as a characteristic set of text properties. On the other hand, neither can it be regarded as the result of applying a set of conventions. Through an empirical observation of text reading, they came up with three components that suggest the literariness of a text. According to them, the components are, namely, (1) the occurrence of stylistic variations that are distinctively/although not uniquely/associated with literary text; (2) the occurrence of defamiliarization as a result of the foregrounding of language; and (3) the modification or transformation of a conventional feeling or concept (123).

However beautiful these components are about literariness, the lacuna is that it has relegated the social implication or impact of the text. All these components do not work in isolation; they are the constituents that help to drive the import of a text, to create relevance and meaning. If defamiliarization helps in the modification or transformation of conventional feelings that estrange meaning, what happens to the ordinary reader of the text? Again, it, therefore, means the social referent and response to the text is likely ambiguous. The consumption of a text, its beauty, and taste, is in the incorporation of both the intrinsic and

extrinsic factors to derive meaning. Miall and Kuiken further say “we suggest, however, that the key to literariness is the interaction of these components processes. Rather than any special content; contextual condition (of educational practices) or ideological functions, literature is unique because it indicates a distinctive form of psychological change” (123). They have downplayed the role of literature as an agent of social change and its ideological relevance.

In their overstated defence for a formal approach to the text, to adjudge its literariness, with little or no regard for content and contextual relevance is a killjoy to literature and a disservice to literary texts as a compendium of social reality. Since literature is unique as opined by them, obviously it is a unique art, and it initiates a “distinctive psychological change, then, at what point does sheer aestheticism and triviality with only style bring about change? If it is for defamiliarization as a result of foregrounding and stylistic implication in a text, constitutes literature, then, the purpose of studying literature is defeated, as such, one can join Plato in his censorship, that literature should be banished and not worthy of study. Knowledge in whatever capacity is to bring about discernible change in society; and a better one for that matter, and literature cannot afford to do less.

On the other hand, Salgora avers that “not only has the conventionalist approach to literariness significantly influenced empirical studies, but empirical researchers have resisted unitary conception of literariness” (231). Bortolussi, Marisa and Dixon Peter have argued that literariness is “a systematic way a particular group perceives or processes a specific feature of narrative” (21). They agreed that literariness cannot be tied to one specific thing but a conglomerate of several factors “which make the work interesting and valuable,” for study (251). Winko, Fotis and Lauer also rejected the unifying classification of literature either as only a cognitive message or a text-oriented venture. They advocate for “a pragmatic concept of literature” that overcomes the difficulties of specifying the intrinsic features of literature such as fictionality and literariness, and the extrinsic function” (4). Literariness in their view is a quest for theory and this can be achieved in collaborative efforts of the intrinsic and extrinsic features. They therefore opine that “only collaboration between text-oriented and reader-oriented literary criticism on a wide corpus of literary text from times and cultures will facilitate the quest for the literary theory of everything” (392).

Scholars like Hoffstaedter took a stand to bridge the gap between the cognitive and defamiliarization narratives. She proposed that literariness is an interaction between text and the reader and not a mere specification of patrician mode. She suggested three ways literariness can be achieved, which are "the text, the context and the disposition of the reader" (232). In this suggestion, a text can be discussed literarily when "(a) there are difficulties in a text which demand clear emotional and imaginative reaction" (b) contextual factors propel the reader to read it literarily (c) the reader's expertise and fluency is needed (Hoffstaedter 219 and Salgado (232). Literariness does not only recline on defamiliarization based on the symbolic approach to foregrounding opined by Mial and Kuiken nor the cognitive perspective of Jacobson, rather; it is a collaboration of both the form, the content, contextual narrative and the reader disposition to the text. It is imperative at this point to note that the author, whose works are chosen for this discussion, is an African novelist, and also considering the reimagining functionality of literature. On this note, our scholarly orientation is a conscious effort to addressing core issues that bother on problems and prospects as the base for literariness.

Our discussion in this paper, from an African perspective and world view of literature, African literary texts are conceived mostly from a problematized background and the precipitation of asphyxiated social factors and cultural orientation. Therefore, the reading of African literature is issue-based. It might suffice to say, at this point, that literariness in a literary work is subject to the fecundity of the text, the consciousness of the critic; his ideological stance and mental departments, and contextual factors enveloped around the text

### **Review of Critical Comments on Wale Okediran's Novels**

Various critics have expressed their opinions on the critical engagements of Wale Okediran and his novels. Oyeh in his extensive critical discourse on Okediran's novels has adjudged that: Okediran X-rays and excoriates the evil of corruption in its multi-layered and multifaceted manifestations: political corruption (moral bankruptcy military dictators, political); the underworld of smugglers, quacks, homosexual, prostitution, native doctor and their diabolical clientele; criminals, policemen who provide information, arms and ammunition, etc. (79). Oyeh's perception captures the ugly trend in the society which the writer lampoons. This claim seems to cut across most Nigerian novels, especially contemporary ones. In some of Okediran's selected texts, Oyeh firmly maintains this stance. He says in

*Strange Encounters*, the author, Okediran, makes a derisive statement on corruption and social morality in presenting some characters who are deeply rooted in their corruption. He says that the novelist paints a society bedevilled with corruption in need of "moral rejuvenation" (79-80).

In reviewing *Tenants of the House*, Oyeh says that the author exposes "the shameful conducts of shameless, visionless politicians" (81). These comments about the texts show the despondency of Nigerians. They also lay claim to the disillusionment of the Nigerian writers about Nigeria. The critical comments affirm the perception of the critic in aligning with the pessimism of the author. Most of the time, we often bemoan our woes without carefully finding a way to escape from the problem. Oyeh maintains this claim in his assessment of *The Boys at the Border*: "In this novel, Okediran paints a haunting picture of systemic corruption that permeates every facet and institution of the Nigerian state. He exposes the hypocrisy of military adventurists who seize power under the guise of fighting corruption, only to turn out worse" (83). This shows that there is a systemic failure in Nigeria, and this calls for an urgent remedy or intervention. More so, in his generic but controversial remark about some of Okediran's novels, Oyeh says that: "... they all lack a certain seriousness and aesthetic appeal that marks all great novels; novels that belong to what some critics categorize as "serious literature," as different from thrillers. In my view, serious literature has something in common with tragedy; it takes thoughtful sober attitude toward its subject matter..." (80). The assertion of serious literature by classification on how tragic the events are does not hold sway while focusing on contemporary issues raised by the author. A writer might be comic yet passing a serious message. Going by Plato's criticism of literature in the *Republic*, being comic or serious has psychological implications.

To Plato, poetry, particularly tragedy aims solely at the gratification of its audience and not at moral improvement, so also that pleasure (comic) has nothing to do with value. On the other hand, Aristotle, Plato's student, in his defence of poetry in *Poetics*, argues that the ability to engage our emotions is an essential feature of tragedy and one that is positively beneficial. Again, catharsis which is a kind of homeopathic therapy, can be used in the treatment of neurotics, and pleasure to him is an intrinsic part of our response to poetry since all human beings instinctively take delight in imitation. So, Oyeh cannot justifiably say that because there are no elements of tragedy in some of Okediran's works, therefore, such works have lost their literariness or

what he calls "serious literature." Although he had earlier applauded the contemporaneous exigencies of *The Boys at the Border* and *Tenants of the House* as topical and also pointed out the flaws in narrative style, the idea of tragedy as a parameter to determine the seriousness of a novel is uncalled for. Even the issue of topicality is debatable. What may be topical in one society might be non-topical to another society as Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike observe: "...it should be pointed out that the distinction between topical and non-topical matters is not a distinction among literary themes but rather a distinction about the state of social interest" (259), therefore, critics should avoid ambiguous and over-generalized statements.

Agreeably, there are aesthetic flaws in some of Okediran's novels as pointed out by Oyeh, which give room for doubt about the aesthetic uniqueness that distinguishes the novel from a history text. As he observes, in *Tenants of the House* the "fictionalization of historical material is not artistically handled..." (81). This runs through the text as some of the narratives appear to be the ordinary telling of historical events or a form of "journalistic reportage". Parts of these critical observations that are germane in discussing the flaws of the novel are: the interpolation between the first person and third person narrative techniques, the inability to artistically provide the landlords of the house, since there are tenants; the unreliable attitude of the protagonist, Samuel Bakura, who switches from the politics of honesty to a dishonest life, and so on. The unreliable nature of the protagonist is also visible in *Strange Encounters*, *The Weaving Loom*, except in *Boys at the Border*. This narrative style gives room to question the stance of the protagonists on morality.

In *Strange Encounters*, Oyeh examines the text by saying that: "the events in *Strange Encounters* are handled in the tradition of pulp-fiction – a certain unsavoury piling of melodramatically shocking and suspense-packed chains of events. This takes away the seriousness and aesthetic appeal of the novel" (79). The question one may ask Oyeh is, does suspense take away the seriousness of a text? If at all it does, in the case of the novel under discussion, it helps to retain the attention of the reader while catching a glimpse of the variegated ugly trends of life. Again, the title of the novel is *Strange Encounters*; "these chains of events" which Oyeh sees as pulp fiction are the strange happenings in the society that the novelist wants to correct. These events are concatenated through a postmodernist feature known as fragmentation. Fragmentation, according to UAC Aliu, is "an artistic attitude in postmodernist fiction which

consists in a serialized, de-structured and, in fact, detotalised depiction of narrative to create multiple layers of discourse which are organically incoherent" (8). This also points to the fact that the novelist is disillusioned and has lost faith in society.

While one may agree with Oyeh to some extent on his critical comments about the literariness of Okediran's works, his objection to the canonical relevance of the author based on flaws in his craftsmanship is unnecessary. More importantly, Oyeh seems to trivialize the artistic commitment of the writer in an African setting, and bothers on 'universal value' and 'eternal verities', though relevant. The socio-political problems in Africa are becoming 'eternal verities' that any writer who artistically handles such issues would have carved a niche of universal value for himself. Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* also receives this harsh critical comment from Achebe, but, to date, the novel is still as relevant as Achebe's works. Therefore, only time shall tell of Okediran's works. For Chinweizu et al. "Treating the burning issues of the day is what is usually referred to as political engagement in literature" (260), which Okediran has engaged. Dick Tambari while X-raying the socio-political fecundity of *Tenants of the House* says that "the novel runs two parallel plots concerning Honourable Samuel Bakura, the political plot, which is the main plot, and the subplot about his love affair with a young Fulani girl named Batejo. Both plots are relevant ..." (71). This is relevant in the sense that it opens the threshold of the realistic nature of the novel.

That the novelist introduces a love affair while treating a serious issue of herdsmen and politics does not trivialize his discourse; it further strikes a balance of the verities of human pursuits, and eminent distraction when one is not committed to a cause as Bakura in the case of Batejo. Tambari also affirms that Okediran's works bemoan the plight of Africa. He states that "contemporary Nigerian fiction, as seen in Okediran's *Tenants of the House*, therefore, is still singing the old mournful song. We believe that African literature will not stop singing that song until the worm of corruption and related socio-political ills become at least listless" (77). This voice of despondency from Tambari runs through most contemporary writers and critics, and this is unhealthy for reform. To corroborate this disillusionment syndrome, Aminu Segun and Olowu Ayodeji while commenting on *The Boys at the Border* say: "Wale Okediran showcases the activities of the customs officials as they associate with smugglers. There is disillusionment in the heart of men..." (188). This shows the dissatisfaction of the Nigerian writers about the society. In their



word, "The writer is not happy about this because it sets the nation backward" (189). Tambari and Segun in their views have recounted the socio-political commitment of Okediran. Though their comments are nihilistic confirmation of Okediran's thematic concern, they can use their comments to channel a positive image for Nigerian literature, rather than joining the bandwagon of the literature of lamentation. This type of literature is what Charles Nnolim calls lachrymal literature.

That is, a literature that laments, weeps and bemoans the ordeal of the citizenry. Anthony Njoku and Gloria Eke describe the contemporary literature with these indications as lachrymal: "Literature emanating from the nexus of ethnic and religious forces leading to conflict and disaster across the continent is no less lachrymal; let alone a genre of literature dealing with political dictatorship, of totalitarianism, despotic and absolutism" (23). According to them, Okediran's works are part of the lachrymal literature in view of their thematic engagements. These despondent critical comments of Tambari and Segun et al. which have bracketed Okediran's works as projections of nihilism seem to be one sided in approaching literary works. There is the need to also embrace a positive projection while engaging literary works. This lacuna paves the way for a literature of assent in the African literary domain, which will not only chastise but also provide a solution through a deliberate portrayal of the African positive image. Oseghale while reflecting on the political decay in Africa says that: "Most contemporary African literature deals with the political problems ravaging the continent" (96). He affirms that African novelists such as Chimamanda Adichie, Joseph Edoki and Wale Okediran, "portray the corruption and moral bankruptcy of our political leaders" (96). In discussing the political terrain in Nigeria in *Tenants of the House*, he says politicians:

...Have removed morality from politics in our country, and honesty and accountability are thrown out. Our governments have been made up of mostly national treasury looters, men and women who come to politics primarily to enrich themselves by looting the national treasury without qualms of conscience. (96)

This is the sad reality of the political system in Nigeria. Politics in Nigeria is now a well full of gold where money flows, and everybody wants to get a share of the national cake. Nobody seems to be striving or concerned about maintaining integrity. In their paper on *Strange*

*Encounters*, Benji Egede and Oseghale assume the same voice of ridicule about society. They classify this as the commitment of contemporary Nigerian writers. Their critical appraisal of the text states that: in this novel entitled *Strange Encounters*, Wale Okediran vehemently attacks the vices, follies, crimes and the general moral decay in Nigeria. Such heinous crimes are bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds, religious hypocrisy, greed, killing, destruction of innocent people's property, increase in the rate of armed robbery, and a general sense of insecurity of life and property in Nigerian society (73). These critical assessments of Okediran's works show that society is morally depraved and in deep socio-political suffocation, which might smear it if urgent attention is not given to salvage it.

Egede and Oseghale have given a sociological reality of what Okediran's work stands for. This draws attention to our concern in this paper. To a large extent, Okediran is a realist; this is evident in his narrative style. In C. Hugh Holman's view about realism and realist, he says "realism is in the broadest sense, simply fidelity to actuality," that is, "the truthful treatment of material" (366). He further explains that a realist is one who believes in pragmatism and desires to verify experience based on "relativistic truth." A realist's interest is to imitate through close observance "a one-to-one correspondence between the representation and the subject" (366). Holman explains that: realists eschew the traditional pattern of the novel. In part, the rise of realism came as a protest against the falseness and sentimentality that realists thought they saw in romantic fiction. Life, they felt, lacked symmetry and plot; fiction which truthfully reflected life should, therefore, avoid symmetry and plot. Simple, clear, direct prose was the desirable vehicle, and objectivity on the part of the novelist was the proper attitude (366). This form of objectivity is seen in Okediran's works; more evident is the plot structure which does not follow the conventional plot, but rather a form of avant-gardist plot. To further convince Oyeh of tragic action as not the only indication of serious literature, Holman says that "most of the realists avoided situations with tragic or cataclysmic implications. Their tone is comic, frequently satiric, seldom grim or sombre. Their general attitude was broadly optimistic..." (367).

### **Reflecting Literariness in Wale Okediran's Novels**

Although Okediran has written many novels, it will suffice us to pay attention to four of his novels which are *Tenants of the House*, *The Boys at*

*the Border*, *Strange Encounters* and *The Weaving Looms*, for the purpose of this discussion. The issues raised in these texts are corruption, drug trafficking, the emergence of quacks in the medical profession, smuggling, tribalism, ignorance, revenge, betrayal, incompetent governance, greed, and thuggery in Nigerian politics. In *Tenants of the House*, the author condemns the antics of political leaders who have jettisoned the tradition of morality, decency, and chastity for the sordid manifestation of inglorious, inhuman and antisocial behaviour in the political arena. *The Boys at the Border* focuses on the depravity of the Nigerian society. Issues of systemic corruption in the Nigeria Customs Service, Police Force and inept leadership of military administration in Nigeria are symptomatic of unwellness in governance in Nigeria as highlighted by Okediran. In *Strange Encounters*, Okediran treats issues bordering on quacks in the medical profession, police brutality, death of moral values and corruption in Nigeria. In *The Weaving Looms*, issues that border on the wellness of family are portrayed by Okediran. Among many issues raised, Okediran in the *Weaving Looms* condemns greed, betrayal, rumour mongering, conspiracy, ignorance and discretionary conflict between the usage of phytotherapy and orthodox medicine.

A general assessment of Okediran's novels will amplify and demonstrate his commitment as a novelist whose literariness needs commendation. The language and styles in *Tenants of the House*, *Boys at the Border*, *Strange Encounters* and *The Weaving Looms* are such that paint a picture of political tomfoolery, venality, animosity, betrayal, greed and pessimism in the Nigerian society. The language of these texts foregrounds the author's perception of Nigeria. In *Tenants of the House*, Okediran gives a clear and lucid account of the happenings in the Federal House of Representatives. In *Boys at the Border*, his language delineates systemic corruption in the Customs Service. In *Strange Encounters*, the language captures the various strange happenings in the society, while *The Weaving Looms* linguistically pictures family and communal inter-relationship. The styles in these novels have fluid simplicity, with an incorrigible tendency to digress and catch the funny side of life. The author employs this with the use of suspense as a veritable tool to retain the reader's consciousness. Suspense as a literary device helps to make a piece of work retain the attention of the reader. It creates the yearning and aspiration either for the safety of a likable character who is depressed or anticipating the destruction of a despot. Holman explains suspense thus:

The poised anticipation of the reader or audience as to the outcome of the events of a short story, a novel, or a drama, particularly as these events affect a character in the work to whom the reader or audience has formed a sympathetic attachment. Suspense is a major device for the securing and maintaining of interest in all forms of fiction. (434)

Okediran uses chains of suspense to relate his thoughts and to retain the interest of the readers. In *Tenants of the House*, Sam's political adventure, his love for Hon. Elizabeth, Batejo, and the intrigue in tenure elongation by President Oneya and the National Assembly, are all full of suspense. In *Strange Encounters*, the love story between Rev. Sis Martha, and Dr. Abe, Rev. Sis Castello and Rev. Father Raleigh and Dr. Saheed, the robbery in Gom and other stories are suspense-packed. Also in *The Boys at the Border*, the revenge mission of Gladys Emodi over the demise of her brother and the dismissal of her husband retained a high degree of suspense, so also are the stories about the activities of the Ogbonis chiefs and the deteriorating health of chief Dende in *The Weaving Looms*. The author consciously uses this literary device in a psychotherapeutic manner to rejuvenate the readers' conscience. *Stranger Encounters* in particular exude various stories told in bits and are catchy in a way that they represent the different strange occurrences in the society.

The author's use of a realistic landscape attests to his ability to recreate historically, the politicking, conspiracy, intrigue, betrayal, greed and scheming in Nigerian society. As a realist who hardly separates history from literature, his language is a raw replication of the Nigerian situation. The language of the novels is real to life in a way that the author hardly makes use of symbols which could make meaning complex to the reader. The metaphor of systemic failure through a realistic portrayal by Okediran in the handling of materials gives a vivid overview of the decay in Nigeria, be it politics, military or Para-military, health sector, family or communal system of living, etc, Okediran's novels under study, can be seen as fictionalized reality. Therefore, there are direct images or what could be called visual imagery used in these novels to fictionalize the realities in the Nigerian system. The image of violence in the Nigerian political arena and individual greed are seen in Okediran's novels. In *Tenants of the House*, the direct statement by Hon. Samuel: "I handled a gun for the first time the day I saw one in Hon. Elizabeth Bello's bag.... I had never handled a gun in my life until that moment. It was a small light-

brown pistol" (1), shows that some politician and political intentions in Nigeria are evil personified.

To complement this assertion, Hon. Elizabeth claims that: "To kill is a crime, to kill at the right time is politics" (3). This metaphor about Nigerian politics is deliberately used by Okediran to typify the danger inherent in seeking political power. By this, the political arena is charged with aural of fear and trepidation, which implies that politics is not for saints. The dirty nature of Nigerian politics is what the author tries to showcase, that is, in a bid for you to correct the ugly trend, you are somewhat dragged into the mire. This is the harrowing experience of Hon. Samuel, who goes into politics to make things right, but he finds himself in the centre stage blending the bedlam of political incivility. The opening incident in *The Boys at the Border* is a gory description of violence. "They got Samuel! He was shot about half an hour ago" (1). "... for the next moment, the driver squeezed the trigger and pumped some bullets into Superintendent Samuel..." (3). These statements relate to the death of a Customs officer, Samuel, who is killed by one of the smugglers. The incident in Crossroad Hotel between Lati Baba and the assailant sent to kill him is horrific. In *The Weaving Looms*, the image of violence is also exemplified by the author while depicting Cletus's reactions to the Ogboni chiefs who prevent him and his brothers from carrying the corpse of their father for interment:

Angered by this indecent assault on his father, Cletus became annoyed and jumped out of the lorry. He went up to the driver. 'Get down if you can't drive I'll drive the bloody lorry.' And as the driver got down, Cletus started the lorry. Then leaning out of the window he shouted at the Ogboni chiefs still standing in front of the lorry 'Whoever loves his life should get out of the way if not, if not I'll knock all of you down.' He then revved the lorry loudly in an attempt to scare off the chiefs. As Cletus now put the lorry in gear, he accelerated and the lorry surged forward. Several of the chiefs jumped out of the way but two of them were not fast enough as the lorry knocked them down driving over one of them. (31)

This violence integrates and permeates all other issues raised in the novel. It serves as the premise upon which Bature's house is burnt. In *Strange Encounters*, the students of St Francis Boys School, Gom, kill Rev.

Father Raleigh as a stoppage to his assault on the altar boys and other students who are victims of his homosexual escapade. Violence in a typical African society as portrayed by Okediran is either initiated by greed for power, material gain or for self-defence. Furthermore, Okediran employs sexual images in his novels to peep into human minds and to unveil their desperate tendency to achieve their conceived and illicit ambition. Sexual image in *Tenants of the House*, *Strange Encounters*, *Boys at the Border* and *The Weaving Looms* foregrounds a means to an end. In *Tenants of the House*, Okediran uses it to showcase how sex can be deployed to gain political power, socio-economic relevance and self-satisfaction. Hon. Elizabeth unbuttons her shirt to reveal her cleavage to seduce Hon. Samuel to play along with her desire to work for the Wineke group against the Speaker: "She unbuttoned the top of her nightgown to reveal her perfectly formed breasts. Smiling wickedly, she lifted her left breast towards me. 'come Samuel, you have always wanted this'" (66). Okediran portrays Hon. Elizabeth as a seducer who is willing to use sex to achieve a political point. She is also said to have been sleeping with Ministers, senators, and some House of Representative Members. The use of words such as "my man", and "my very close friend" (164), while referring to Speaker Yaya, shows that she is a sex object to the Speaker. Although Samuel has a lustful interest in Elizabeth, he refuses to compromise his swerving political integrity. Samuel as portrayed in this text has no integrity politically, his inclination for not falling into the sex trap of Hon. Elizabeth is borne not out of integrity but selfish political interest.

In *Strange Encounters*, sex images are used to ridicule the moral decadence, hypocrisy and infidelity in contemporary society. Rev. Father Raleigh is portrayed as a homosexual. The matrons are immoral. The police and the doctors are all grouped in this randy game. Some expressions used in *Strange Encounters* to portray the image of sex are: "Are you her boyfriend" (29), " Martha, don't tell me you have a crush on the young man already" (35), " I guess beneath all these cassocks, we are still women, aren't we?" (35), "She would make the tea very hot so he would not be in a hurry to finish it. At last, she now had a male visitor to herself. She would be nice to him so he could be coming every evening"(38), " She was my girlfriend" (90), " Maybe Ama can find you a girlfriend among the young teachers there" (156), "lover boy!" (172), Soon Dr. Abe's dancing was out of control. He now held Kiki by the hip"(200). All these expressions in their different contextual usages reference sex as the gratification of emotional urge. Okediran inveighs the decay of moral

rectitude and integrity in society. In *The Boys at the Border* and *The Weaving Looms*, images of sex are used as entrapments. In *The Weaving Looms*, in particular, Arike seduces Cletus to escape marrying Uncle Kasali. Arike's conversation with her friend, Agbeke reveals this assertion:

I have also thought of it Agbeke. If a well-behaved and young person like Cletus can take me up, I know that my future will be well-secured but... "Look Arike, you don't have to allow that old woman to continue tossing you about as she likes. She will continue to be bitter about her son's death, therefore she too would want to make you sad if possible for the rest of your life." Then lowering her voice Agbeke said, "Are you not a woman? Why don't you move nearer to him [Cletus]...I mean move to his room? With his family so far away, he would be in bad need of a female company. And if you get pregnant for him, nobody not even the Bale can prevent you from marrying him. (85)

In *Boys at the Border*, Gladys hires Ajo, the slut, to entice Lati Baba for Gladys to take revenge for the killing of her brother, Samuel. Lati Baba has a strong urge for women. While in Crossroad Hotel, he develops a sexual desire for the proprietress: "As Mrs. Emodi walked away from Lati's table, the chief smuggler ogled her ample backside and he felt a hot sensation run up his spine" (126). Okediran uses the image of money to deride the avarice in the political arena. In *Tenants of the House*, the author uses the word 'fertilizer' to mean money. All the Hon. Members understand this agricultural metaphor in the political setting to mean money. It proves that the primary purpose or aims of these Hon. Members are to amass wealth for themselves. The word fertilizer used in the text implies that money from politics grows very fast and can help to fasten any political maneuvering. Hon. Lizzy advises Hon. Sam on what to do to win further election: "Elizabeth had told me what to do to win future election. 'Fertilizer,' she whispered to me urgently, cupping her hands first, then spreading them. "Huge load of fertilizer is what you need"(6). Senator Smollet also uses this metaphor to call on the President to woo the Hon Members to impeach the Speaker. He says

It has been done before, your Excellency, fertilizer! We shall spread the much and woo enough... hit them, sir, we must remember it is a contest of wills and resources. It's a tug of

war: naira, dollar for dollar. Money is the name of the game;  
Your Excellency. (29)

Sadly enough, the dirt in Nigerian politics is money and the author uses this image to satirically deride this greed as affirmed by the narrative voice: "But I found that most of the dirt in the dirty game was about money, not merit" (4). Although in the other three novels, this image of money is not too visible, however, in *The Boys at the Border*, the issue of corruption in the Nigerian system is also replicated with such avaricious metaphors as: "...why Lati? He's already paid us for safe passage of his cocoa trucks..." (1), "Despite my offer of two thousand naira for the three trucks, he insisted on taking six thousand naira. I told him I was broke but he persisted." (20), "We have the money as promised, Chief Peter, he said. Then turning to Taiye he added, can you please hand that money as arranged" (50), He kept the money there, pending the time the man would bring the bribe he had demanded. ...Just a little over twenty thousand...(81), "He wants a fifty-fifty share. Fifty-fifty? That means he wants ten thousand naira?" (94) These statements are representative of an asphyxiated system of bribe giving and receiving in Nigeria. Okediran uses these visual and tactile images to realistically bring out the devastating synergy among individuals who are engaged in this form of social pervasion.

On the other hand, Okediran deploys the image of smell and atmospheric pollution in *Strange Encounters* to buttress the monumental level of decay in society. Inspector Chika is said to puff out the smoke of cigarettes in public without recourse to its health implications on the citizens. As a police officer who is charged with the responsibility of maintaining public decorum, he is an embodiment of the breach of law. "Chika said as the room filled with smoke from his cigarette. The cheap tobacco smell was sharp to the nose" (133). Dr. Abe, though not a smoker, as a result of the confusion he finds himself in, has on different occasions had his pot of rice and fried eggs burnt. This also attests to the pollution and decay in society, a psychological disorder resulting from societal decay. The narrative voice states: it was half past one in the afternoon, and Dr. Abe's lunch was still hot, too hot for him to eat. The rice was partially burnt, while the salt was not enough... Yesterday, a ward maid had dashed into his consulting room to report that smoke was coming from his kitchen. Only then did he remember having left a pot of soup on the stove. He managed to salvage the pot and the flat from the fury of fire. The



charcoal-burnt pieces of meat were, however, beyond redemption. He just escaped a second-degree burn while frying eggs that morning (137).

These images of smoke, burn, and waste are a result of the onerous problems of quacks and the series of near-death abortion cases before the doctor. The society Okediran presents with these images is symbolic of the fact that even the most intelligent can be turned into the most stupid. It is a society infested with transmogrifying moral decadence and frustration emanating from the decay Okediran makes use of actual cities and villages in Nigeria as settings in these novels without fictionalizing them. Though this has robbed him of dexterous artistic touch in his novels, however, it is complementary in helping to relate and bring to bear the actual society he ridicules. With this approach adopted by Okediran, his novels appear like journalistic reportage or retrospective historical renditions. Corollary to this is the carefree featuring of flashbacks without having a firm grip on the story. Some of the skimpy flashbacks appear in the form of reported incidents that do not have a significant impact on the development of the plot.

Okediran also employs the use of the third-person omniscient technique, though not consistent, he often switches to the first-person viewpoint. Awosika says that the third-person omniscient techniques: ... is by far the most common mode of narration and perhaps the one that comes most naturally to the reporting mind. The author takes much freedom of report, revealing the minds of two or more characters at the same time and revealing information not available to any of the characters (33). Wale Okediran uses this narrative style in such a way that the stories are told in the third person and the narrator reports virtually most of the actions in the novels. The narrative style makes the narrator assume the role of God who knows everything about the characters. Most of the protagonists in these novels are unreliable, except Emeka Emodi in *The Boys at the Border*. Samuel Bature in *Tenants of the House*, Dr. Abe, in *Strange Encounters*, and Cletus in *The Weaving Looms* switch between moral rectitude and incivility. Correspondingly are other characters who have betrayed the moral values that society reposes in them. This raises the question of the ideology Okediran stands for.

Looking at the plot structure of these novels, there are variations in the plot in the four novels. *Tenants of the House* and *Strange Encounters* have linear plot structures, which are episodic. This form of narrative plot enables the narrator to capture the various societal misdemeanors which the author intends to correct. Again, *The Boys at the Border* and *The Weaving*

*Looms* are narratively poised with an organic plot structure. Okediran carefully chooses this to give critical attention to monolithic motifs respectively. This does not mean that other issues are not touched, he has been able to focus the attention of the reader on the subject matter of conflict of interest between orthodox and traditional medicine as seen in *The Weaving Looms* and the activities of Smuggler and the Customs officers as seen in *The Boys at the Border*

## Conclusion

It is pertinent to state that literariness is the characteristic that distinguishes a literary work from other forms of writing. To this end, we pay attention to the aesthetic value, artistry and creativity of the author such as language and style, symbolism, imagery and other devices used in a literary work. The social relevance of the work and its intersection with other body of literature that are highly productive to help the literary critic transmits his submissions are germane in the quest for the literariness in literature. Okediran's novels, as we have seen, have exuded a high level of literariness in both content and form. Our submission is in the fecundity of literature as an art that does not only entertain for the sake of entertainment but art deployed to address sensitive and serious issues in society for the wellness of society.

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