





## Text and Inter-Textuality in Contemporary Yorùbá Literary Works

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### ABSTRACT

The interface between oral and written forms of literature is predominant in Yorùbá textual creativities. The inclusion of oral genres in the written form of Yorùbá creative writings is purposive because it lends color to its rhythm, plot, characterization, setting, and aesthetic values. In this paper, the border-crossing between the oral and written genre is examined in select Yorùbá literary texts. A purposive selection of some Yorùbá literary texts is taken, and the texts are subjected to content analyses, using the theoretical framework of satire which derives from African cosmology and oral tradition. The select texts are Akin Ìs ò Ìá's *Bellow in My Belly*, Dèbò Awé's *Olo ùnlúgo*, and Gbémisóyè Àyàṅò's *Ayédáádé*. Findings of the paper include the fact that Yorùbá oral poetry is contemporaneous. That is, it serves as a thematic and stylistic source for modern writers. It is also established in the paper that the artists, in a bid to pontificate their themes and ideological views, make use of oral genres like myths, incantatory poems, songs, proverbs, and E se - Ifá. The paper concludes that the ethical and aesthetic values of Yorùbá literary texts are conceptualized in the use of oral poetics and, at times, oral narratives.

### INTRODUCTION

The transposition of oral tradition for aesthetic satisfaction and thematic purpose in African literature has been one of the pre-occupations of some African literary and cultural scholars (Ojaide 1966:33; Opata 2000:1-13). Most of these scholars are of the opinion that there is an inter-relationship between the oral and the written traditions because they constantly nourish each other (Ong 1982:3, 41). Hence, many of their works have focused the interface between the written literature in Africa and the oral tradition.

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However, little attention has been given to the reliance of contemporary Yorùbá written literature on the oral tradition forms. The reason for this neglect could be traced to the medium of expression of these literary texts. Many of the written texts with Yorùbá expression are locally bound. Therefore, many African scholars could not get access to them. Whereas, a diachronic study of text and inter-textuality reveals that there is a binding relationship between the oral tradition and the written tradition in Yorùbá literary forms (Akinyemi 2009:17-37).

The Yorùbá literary tradition finds its base in the spoken words. The written culture is alien to the Yorùbá. Norms and values of the society are transmitted through the use of the various poetics form like *Ìjálá*, *Òwe*, *È s̄ à-Pipè*, songs and oral narratives like folktales, myths and legends. Earlier attempts of adaptations of the oral narratives into the written forms have not yielded the desired result because many of the Yorùbá writings ended up as mere reproduction of oral narratives. For instance, Ogunsina (1992:11) describes A. K. Ajisafe's *Enia S̄ òrò* as a mere reproduction of Yorùbá folktales. Fagunwa and the novelists in his tradition also adapted the Yorùbá folktales to write their novels; there are instances where such are stylized to bring a characterization effect. In Bamgbose's (2007:17-27) opinion, Fagunwa does a mere reproduction of some folktales and stories. The deployment of oral tradition to bring out fantastic realism in the novels of Fagunwa's tradition corroborates the fact that the oral tradition is a living tradition. Hence, the contemporary literary artists also rely on the oral tradition for the creation of their literary works. Therefore, in this paper effort is made to examine the nexus between the oral and written traditions in select works of Akinwumi Is̄ ò lá, Gbémisóyè Àyàno and Dèbò Àwe. The literary works selected represent a remarkable period in the Yorùbá literary history. They belong to the middle course and contemporaneous writings. The thematic issues addressed in their texts also focus the global agenda for the development of all nations.

#### **A Representation of Generic Border crossing in Yorùbá Literary Texts:**

Oral forms are purposively used for thematization effect in the texts examined. The use of the poetic genre is prevalent in them. For instance, *Òwe* (Proverb), *E s̄ -Ìfá* (Ifá divinatory poetry) and *O fò* (Incantation) are used for aesthetic purpose, plot development, and thematic expansion in the texts. Proverb occurs informally in everyday communication (Olatunji 1984:169; Sheba, 2006: vii). Thus, Kehinde (2004:119) views it as a vehicle for thematic presentations in literature. The role played by proverb in literature owes to the fact that it occurs freely in the discussions that take place in the texts under study. For instance, in *O ló unlúgo*, a satirical novel, Awe's use of proverb affirms Mackenzie's (2002:353) view that the traditional storyteller develops a story around a proverb. In this novel, proverbs are used as sub-titles to encapsulate the theme and sub-themes, that

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is, the gullibility of some fanatical Christians. The oppressive and manipulative nature of some fake religious leaders is also exposed to ridicule through proverbs. In the novel, seven proverbs are used to give vivid descriptions of some oppressive exploits of Apán⇔pá, the protagonist of the novel. Two of the proverbs shall be examined in this analysis. Chapter Eight of the novel is entitled “Aké yínje kò mò pé idí n⇔ ro adie ” (The egg consumer does not know that the hen experiences pains while producing eggs) while Chapter, Sixteen is titled Ohun tí Akátí n⇔ je (What the jackal eats). ‘Ohun tí Akátá n⇔ je ’ is derived from the Yorùbá proverb that says “Ohun tí Akátá bá je ni fii lo o mo e gbé rè ” (A jackal prepares what it eats for its peer group). The two proverbs are for satirical, thematization and characterization effects. Aké yínje in the first proverb and Akátá in the second proverb signify Apán⇔pá, a hypocrite, who oppresses members of his congregation at will. The story narrated under “Aké yínje kò mò pé idí n⇔ ro adie ” is about naming ceremony of the baby of Apán⇔pá, the protagonist of the novel. Apán⇔pá, a fake prophet, has hypnotized members of his congregation. His wife, Monísó lá is barren. Suddenly, Monísó lá becomes pregnant and later gives birth to a baby- boy. The naming ceremony is done in a grand style. On the ceremony day, Apán⇔pá declares his affluence as he puts the church fund on musicians’ and audiences’ heads at the party (41). Above all, to show his oppressive nature, he declares that everybody in the congregation should give the new baby money. A ridicule of the attitude of placing money above the welfare of people as the scripture commands is satirized as Apán⇔pá wants his members to donate to the child under duress. This is captured in the following excerpt. Àwo n o mo ìjo náà kò sàita Wòlì Apán⇔pá, ló re o mo Àwo n e gbé o kùnrin da owó, ó fè rè lé ní è é dé gbè ta naira, wó n fí ta o mo titun ló re . Wòlì Apán⇔pá, kò ó . Ó ní e ní kò ò kan ni kó wáá màa ta o mo ló re . Ó loun ò fè o re alápapò ... bí wó n sì ti níl mú o re e lé ní kò ò kan wá ni Wòlì n⇔ ko ó sílè ... E nikan tilè wà ní bẹ , tí owó tá ló wó lásikò tí a n⇔ wí yí. Ìwò níl bá naira méjì tó rí níbi oko àgbàro ló dá fún o re alápapò tí àwo n o kùnrin s e... Iso mo lórúko ku o jó mé rin ni e ní náà ti fi ara re so fà sí oko ‘birisopé. Ìgbà tó sì máa fi padà dè ogún naira ló fi lé Wòlì àti iransé O ló run Apán⇔pá ló wó (41-42)

(Members of the congregation also give gifts to the new baby. The men’s fellowship contribute money well over five hundred naira, and it is given to the new baby. The money is rejected by Prophet Apán⇔pá. He insists that each man should bring an individual gift... As they bring the gift individually, Prophet Apán⇔pá opens a ledger where he records their donation... There is a man among them that is very poor at this time. The two naira he gathers from his laboring job is initially contributed for the corporate men’s fellowship gift... Four days to the naming ceremony, he has to go and serve

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as a pawn in a block making industry. By the time he comes back, he gives Prophet and God's servant Apán↔pá twenty naira.

The description of the hard labor the man undergoes before getting money is comparable to the pain a hen undergoes while producing an egg. Prophet Apán↔pá is metaphorically described as the consumer of the egg, who does not care about the pains members of his congregation go through before they get the money they give as offering. The second proverb, "Òhun tí akátá bá jé", is to satirize Apán↔pá's adulterous practice. Above all, Apán↔pá is portrayed as an adulterer, a glutton and a cheat. He uses his position as prophet and founder of the church to abuse Sade sexually. As a result of this, he begins to suspect any of his deacons that have discussion with ladies in the church. Thus, in the story that follows that sub-title, Apán↔pá visits Sadé, a member of his congregation and his secret lover. The following day, he goes to church and sees Gbádéga, a Deacon, discussing with Bó sè, and Eésítà, two ladies in the church. The semantic relevance of the proverb is encapsulated in the interior monologue that goes through Apán↔pá's mind as soon as he sights them: Kò pè púpò rẹ̀ tí o ko Wólì àti iráns é O ló run Apán↔pá yọ ló ò ò kan. Bó tí ri Dìkìn Gbádéga àti àwọ̀ n ò dó mo bìnrin tó dóyì ká a ló ti paná ojù pirá. Èrò miiran n↔ so ló kàn rẹ̀ bíi kúlúso. Àbí Dìkìn ti n↔ dán nníkan wò lára àwọ̀ n o mo ge wò nyí? Níjé kò ní so ìjọ mi di ìjọ alágbèrè bá yí? (96)

In a short while, Prophet and God's servant Apán↔pá drives in. The moment he sights Deacon Gbádéga and the ladies surrounding him, he becomes furious. A thought begins to roll in his mind like a mole "Has Deacon started abusing these ladies sexually? Won't he turn my church to an adulterous one?"

The above statement is a paradox. Gbádéga's discussion with Bó sè, and Eésítà is with a pure heart, whereas, Apán↔pá, who is accusing him falsely, is the one that has turned the church into an adulterous one. However, the novelist wants to emphasize the fact that like a jackal, Apán↔pá equates himself to all men.

In the same manner, the rhythm and structure of E se -Ifá is relied on for the creation of storylines in the texts examined, Eṣe-Ifá, a divinatory poem is embedded in the day-to-day activities of the traditional Yorùbá people (Abimbó lá 1976:10). Ifá is consulted before decisions are taken on several issues. Therefore, the Yorùbá authors carve it for the creation of their literary works. In *Bellows in my Belly*, mere reproduction of Odù Ò kànràn méjì, an Ifá literary verse which is believed to be the primordial source of S àngó and his mystical power of emitting thunder, lightning and fire, is recited by Ò rúnmilà when S àngó goes for àdórààn, a mystical power that Olódumarè bestows on him. The representation here is in line with the myth surrounding S àngó as a deity. O rúnmilà, in the play, says: Háà! Ò kànràn

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méjì Ò kànràn kan nihin Ò kànràn kan ló hùn Ò kànràn di méjì Wo n̄ a  
dire A difá fún S àngó Bambi Arigbao ta sé gun Nìgbà tó n↔ lo láarin  
ò tá

Ki lÀrira fì sitè Igba ò tá N lÀrira fì sé tè Igba ò tá (48)

The same original Odù Ò kànràn One Ò kànràn here Another Ò kànràn  
there When two Ò kànràn meet They spell good fortune Divination was  
performed for S àngó Bambi of the one who would use two hundred bullets  
to overwhelm the enemy When he was surrounded by his adversaries What  
will Àrìrà use to rout the enemies? Two hundred bullets That's what Àrìrà  
will use to rout the enemy

The rhythm and structure of the verse as recited in the play do not deviate  
from the norm of recitation of E se -Ifá. However, in *O ló unlúgo*, the  
rhythm of E se -Ifá is stylized to compose ọfọ for deconstruction purpose.  
There are several instances where O fò and E se -Ifá are either chanted or  
recited in the novel (29, 30-33, 74-75, 81). The deployment of the above  
poetic genre is presented in the traditional mode as the novelist juxtaposes  
O fò and Ìyè rè Ifá; the combination is now used as O fò. An example is  
seen when Apán↔pá goes for empowerment in Ewébintàn's, a traditional  
herbalist place. Ewébintàn says: Ó ya kùnlè kì n wí gbólóhùn méjì fún o  
tóó mó o n lo Gbònwewe-gbò nwewe ní sewé orí igi Hin in...

Gbònwewe-gbò nwewe ní sas o orí àsiá

Hin in...

Kíkí là á kibo n̄

Hin in...

Kíkí làá ki gaári ká tóó yan án

Hin in...

Ko mo dé gbò nwewe ki o Apán↔pá

Hin in...

Kawo n̄ àgbàlagbà gbò nwewe bùn o lé bùn

Hin in...

Kobìnrin máa kí o

Kó kùnrin máa kí o o

(Kneel down let me say two sentences on you before you go.

Blowing, blowing is the characteristic of the leaves on a tree

Blowing, blowing is the characteristics of a flag Hin in...

A gun is loaded

Hin in...

Cassava pudding is stuffed before being roasted

Hin in...

Young ones should blow to greet you

Hin in...

Adults should blow to give you gifts

Hin in...

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Women should greet you  
Men should greet you...

The use of the refrain 'Hin in...' betrays the fact that the novelist juxtaposes the rhythm of *Ìyè rè -Ìfá*, Ifá literary chant with the structure of *O fò*, to form his own manipulative *O fò* poetry.

According to (O latunji 1984:154), assertion is one of the elements of *O fò*. An assertion is an assumed truth or belief. Thus, in the *O fò*, cited above, the in-controvertible statements are found in the fact that, as a flag and leaves that are on a tree are bound to be blown by winds, men and women are bound to be drawn to Apán↔pá.

*O fò* is also deconstructed in *O ló unlúgo* for aesthetic effect. Usually, the assertion in *O fò* is based on truth and incontrovertible statement within the culture and mystic context, of the *O fò*. However, in this novel, *O fò* is composed for humorous and satirical effect as he deviates from the norms of using mystical statement to the use of contemporary imagery to form the assertion in his poetic form. He says:

Igba èyàn ní wo jà lóòjò  
Igba èyàn ní wólé lójúmo ...  
E sè girigiri nilé oninááwó  
Kó kúnrin máa dà girigiri wá  
Kóbínrin máa dà girigiri wá  
Ki dúdú máa sáré tete wo lé  
Ki pupa máa sáré tete wo lé  
A kí be òkú kó tó wo nú pòsí

Two hundred people enter the market daily  
Two hundred people enter the house daily...  
Many people go to the venue of ceremony  
Let men rush in  
Let women rush in  
The dark complexion should rush in  
The fair complexion should rush in  
We do not need to beg corpse before he enters into a coffin...

The researcher in her investigation of the structure of the lexical items used as assertion was told that the above lexical items are the author's creation.

A parody of the rhythm of E se -Ifá is used for narration in *O ló unlúgo* to form and image. For instance, when the narrator describes the performance of the choir at the celebration that accompanies the ritual usually done for the spirit carrier, he says:

“Àwo n e gbé ako rin náà ti fohùn orin bo nu.

Wó n n≡ fògo kígbé, wo n n↔ falelúyà se ohun aró láti  
fi pàdé àlejò tí a n retí (p 18)

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Members of the choir are singing. They were shouting  
glory, the dirge of halleluyah fills their mouth as they prepare to meet their  
expected guest.

In the above excerpt, “Wó n̄ n̄ ⇔ fògo kígbe, Wó n̄ n̄ ⇔ falelúyà sohùn arò”  
is a parody of Ifá literary verse that says:

Ó mé kún, ó fi dígbé  
Ó fiyè rè sohùn arò

(He replaces weeping with shouting  
He chants iye re as a dirge)

The above Ifá verse occurs when an Ifá priest is overwhelmed with a  
situation. In Ifá, the Ifá priest is not supposed to weep physically. In case of  
any challenge, and no matter the seriousness of such challenge, he is  
supposed to chant ìyè rè -Ifá. The overwhelming situation of the members  
of Apán⇔pá's church as they expect the descending of the spirit-medium is  
likened to that of an overwhelmed Ifá priest.

Parody is not restricted to Ifá literary verse in *O ló unlúgo*. Many  
Christian songs are parody in the novel for satirical effect. For instance, the  
song:

Be e ba n gbó wòó wòó  
Orí àjè ni baba n ⇔ wó  
Bé e bá n ⇔ gbó wòó wòó  
Orí èsù ni baba n ⇔ wo (p. 15)

is sung at the Glorious Holy Church where Apán⇔pá and Monísó l̄ first  
worshipped. The song is used here to ridicule worshippers that go to church  
to attack witches and wizard and Satan all the time. Instead, they are  
supposed to look inward as they face their problems and worship God in truth  
and diagnose the root of their problems.

The deployment of songs in Àyàno's *Ayédaadé* is different from the  
above. In *Ayédaadé*, songs are used as a prologue to the play. The main and  
sub-themes of the play which are female emancipation and empowerment,  
gender equality, gender discrimination, and family planning are encompassed  
in the following songs.

i. Ako ko lolù o mo  
Abo ko lolù o mo  
O mo tó bá yàn lolù o mo

A male child is not the best of all  
A female child is not the best of all  
A child that makes it in life is the best of all children.



ii. Tako tabo ni ó má s èlú  
Tako tabo ni ó má s èlú  
Báwa o kùnrin bá n̄ lùlù  
Kábo ó má jò  
Báwo n̄ obinrin bá n̄ lùlù  
Káko ó má jò lù o

Polity belongs to both the male and female  
Polity belongs to both male and female  
As the men drum  
Let the women dance  
As the women drum  
Let the men dance  
Polity belongs to male and female

Excerpt One condemns gender discrimination, an evil that has bedeviled an average African man. Traditionally, the girl child is not accepted as the best child. Hence, in the play Adégbité is not ready to sponsor his female children despite the fact that Bùkó l̄á the eldest of them is brilliant, and she is the best among her peers. In the end, Bùkó l̄á's performance earns her an award, and it is shown to the men in the play that a person does not need to be a male before he/she can be great in life. The song derides people who believe they must have many children because they want to have the best of all. A Yorùbá maxim that says "Iye o mo ténìyàn bà bí ni yòò wo yàrà r̄è" (It is the number of children somebody has that will enter his/her room) betrays the fact that Yorùbá are lovers of many children. If a woman has many children without a male child among them, such is assumed not to have any as it is in the case of Moré n̄ikè and Adégbité in the play. As a result, they end up having nine female children, and Adégbité is still looking for the best of children, a male child (40). Thus, the song in that context serves derisive and educative functions as the men are enlightened, and in the end they all embrace family planning method in the play (83-84).

Excerpt Two conveys the playwright's opinion on the fact that there should be gender equality in human societies. Men and women are to complement each other. The exploit of Association of Ayédáadé, an organization meant for the promotion of women and family support program, is used to stress the above in the play. The association through its leader, Tó l̄ání, a female medical doctor, enlightens the men who are anti-women, and at the end, the men realise that they have been playing fools all the year.

Akinwùmí Ìs̄ o l̄á, in *Bellows In My Belly*, uses songs for thematic purpose. *Bellow in my Belly*, a mythico-didactic play, is based on O ya, a Yorùbá goddess. The Yorùbá myth about the quarrel between Ògún and S̄ àngó over O ya and how Ògún eventually lost Oya to S̄ àngó because he was a male chauvinist is reconstructed to bring to the fore the issue of female

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emancipation and empowerment in the contemporary time. The songs used in *Bellows in My Belly* could be categorized into two. One, folksongs that are adapted in the story and songs that are original composition of Ìs̄ ò l̄á. In the first category is the following song:

Ó dábí n↔ má mà lo m̄ò  
Ó dábí n↔ padà sè yin  
Àraká Oya, Òriri  
E wobì ò ré sin ò ré dé

I feel like not going  
I fell like turning back  
Àraká Oya, Òriri

This is where friends take leave of friends

The above song is adapted from *E kún Iyàwó*, a traditional Yorùbá nuptial chant, which is chanted by bride on the eve of her wedding ceremony, when she is to be led to the bridegrooms, house. The context in which the song is sung in the play conforms to the cultural milieu in which it is usually sung among the Yorùbá. Oya is to leave her parents in order to go to the earth with her betrothed, Ògún. O ya while departing, sings this farewell song to her maiden as it is always the case with a bride in Yorùbá culture.

In the same vein, many of the actions are expressed through the use of traditional musical rhythm, drum and dance. For instance, when *S àngó* is making advance to *O ya*, as he works the bellows, he starts to make music with the bellows:

Ohun to w̄ó mi o to  
Ma fí gò gò fà á  
Fà á fà á fà á  
Ma fí gò gò fà á (p 18)

What my hands cannot reach  
I will pull with a hook  
Pull, pull and pull  
I will pull with a hook

The musical effect of the song helps in the development of the plot of the play because it is the sound of *S àngó*'s music that synchronizes Ògún's hammer on the anvil. This enhances Ògún to pay a total attention to his work, and it affords *O ya* and *S àngó* to consummate a relationship in the presence of Ògún without speaking a word to each other. This aids the conflict that arises in the play.

The second category of song is more prevalent in the play. Love songs are composed by Akínwùmí Ìs̄ ò l̄á to portray the deep affection between *O ya* and *S àngó*. For instance, the following excerpt unveils the unconditional love between *O ya* and *S àngó*, as he (*S àngó*) sings:

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O yá máa bo O yá máa bo ló dò mi o  
Tété tété máa bò  
Ìwo ni mo yàn o di tèmí tíí ayé  
Tété tété máa bò  
Ògún oníre kó padà lé yìn rẹ̀  
Tété tété ma tété máa bò

O yá come to me  
Come quickly  
I have chosen you, you are mine forever  
Come quickly  
Let Ògún leave you alone  
Come quickly

Women's subjugation and the oppression of women by men are also decried in the song as *O yá* replies thus:

Sà ngó gbà mi o, kí n ⇔ díyàwó rẹ̀ o  
Ìwo ni mo fé o  
Ògún oníre, o ti fiyà je mi  
Ìwo ni mo fé o (21)

S àngó let me become your wife  
It is you I love  
Ogun has mistreated me  
It is you I want

Ìs ò lá's use of love song in the play is revolutionary, because the songs are employed to uproot the conservative ideology on marriage in the Yorùbá setting. In his perception, love is supposed to be the bedrock of marriage. The marriage between Ògún and *O yá* in the beginning of the play is based on parental consent. *O yá* agrees to marry Ògún because she wants to please her parents. The altercation between *O yá* and her maidens reveals this.

Maiden 2: You are not leaving us  
O yá: I have just been thinking about our parents  
Maiden 3: Parents cannot help us today  
O yá: But you know they love us...

And yet they want to send us away!

Maiden 1: I don't understand parents!

O yá: My parents will be very sad if I do not follow my husband

Maidens: Oh! What a shame!

O yá: Parents are a burden.

After marrying *O yá*, Ògún does not appreciate her, and he feels a woman should be an object of physical molestation and abuse. Ògún's attitude to

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*O yā* could be ascribed to the fact that love which is supposed to be the bedrock of marriage is not between them. On the other hand, the genuine love between *O yā* and *S āngó* motivates both of them to take a risk. *O yā* could not even hide her feeling as she narrates her new experience in excitement to her maiden; she bursts into song with *gbedu* music,

Call: A dream come true, I love a new man!  
Response: Excitement and hope for a life full of fun!  
Call: The man of my dream is handsome and bright.  
Call: Rejoice with me and wish me all the best!  
Response: Excitement and hope for a life full of fun!  
Maiden call: We rejoice with you and wish you all the best!  
Maiden response: Excitement and hope for a life full of fun!

The conservative idea of marriage which makes a woman to be under permanent maltreatment of her husband within the traditional context is questioned in this mythical character, *Oya*. She sets to seek freedom for women, and she eventually achieves her aim as she leaves *Ògún* and marries *S āngó*, who sees her as a jewel and someone to be adored. Hence, her action concretizes the playwright's view that the excitement and expectation of a blissful marriage could be solidly found when ladies are given the chance to choose a husband of their choice unlike in the traditional settings where parents chose husbands for their female children.

### CONCLUSION

Finally, it has been argued in this paper that Yorùbá literary writers have deployed oral and poetic forms to explain and critique the social, political, and historical situation in the contemporary time. The authors under study have stylized the various oral and poetic modes for aesthetic values. The thematic concerns, as well as characterization and settings in the texts are also presented in style through the use of myths, *o fò* (Incantation), *e se Ifá* (Ifá verse) and proverbs. The deployment of the above genres and their effectiveness in the texts under study affirm Na Allah's (2002:62) submission that African oral performances are as contemporary as any form of African writing. However, the genres could be deconstructed by the authors as they use them to combat the conservative ideology in order to launch out the global concern for development in every part of the world as it is seen in *Bellows in my Belly* and *Ayédáadé* respectively.

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