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Individualism and memory: Robert Frost and Tanure Ojaide

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This article examines individualism and memory in Robert Frost's *A Boy's Will* (1913) and Tanure Ojaide's *The Beauty I have seen* (2010). The paper adopts existentialism as a critical approach. Previous studies on these poets, especially Ojaide, have neglected the individualistic nature of their poetry and stereotyped the poets. This article, thus, brings a new approach to the critical debates and scholarship on these poets. The aim of the article is to show the individualistic and existentialist nature of the poetry of Frost and Ojaide. In the analysis, individualism is examined at the level of form and content; starting with the use of the lyric form and poet-persona inclusion in the poems to the thematisation of gloom and the importance of memory, among others. The paper shows that, truly, these poets are largely individualistic in outlook, and they have expressed existentialist philosophy in their poetry.

Keywords: existentialism; individualism; Robert Frost; Tanure Ojaide.

Introduction

This paper examines the concepts of individualism and memory in the poetry of Robert Frost and Tanure Ojaide. Studies on these poets, especially on Ojaide, have not addressed the individualist and existentialist nature of their poetry. This has created a lacuna in the scholarship on these two poets and this article bridges that gap. The aim of the paper is to examine Frost and Ojaide as existentialists who believe in the individuality of man in the universe. Their philosophy hinges upon the idea of man's loneliness and that man alone must strive to attain meaning in a seemingly meaningless world. In expressing individualism, these poets frequently use memory (both personal and collective) to draw trajectories between the past and the present. These manifest in the themes and techniques of the poets as analysed in this article.

The concepts of individualism and memory are so closely tied to the theory of existentialism that they have become "signal words" to introduce the existentialist philosophy. Individualism is defined by Ellen Wood as the moral stance, philosophy, ideology and social outlook that emphasises the place of man above everything else (6). This view implies that the individual takes precedence above any social group and even the state in general. Hayek (17) contrasts individualism with collectivism. Individualism is concerned with man as a free agent in the world. Individualism is concerned basically with man, his place, his free will and his purpose in life. Human-

ity is seen from the personal perspective, and the assumption is that what affects one man affects all men.

The focus on man as a sole agent in the universe has its roots in medieval philosophy (Ainsworth 6). Humanism later evolved in the 16th century and resuscitated the focus on man and human rationality, dignity and ethics (Edwards 1). Humanism was the mainstay of individualist philosophy from the 16th century until the 20th century when existentialism was birthed.

The concept of memory is situated within the domain of man's mind. It is almost impossible to examine man as an individual without examining the mind of man. In this way, individualism has certain overlap with psychoanalysis. Memory is a product of man's consciousness, and it can be used to examine the role and place of man in the universe. Existentialists believe that memory guides man in his actions in life. As man has no predestined fate or superior guidance, he learns from his experiences which become memory and these memories, in turn, guide man in his choices in life.

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that evolved in the early 20th century and it examined the place of man in the universe. Solomon Robert (1–2) believes that existentialism is predicated upon the idea of an absurd world where everything is meaningless and void, and man has to find purpose and self-realisation in this seeming meaninglessness. Søren Kierkegaard is considered the father of the existentialist thought. Kierkegaard asserted that the individual is solely responsible for giving meaning to life and living life "authentically" (Walter 37).

Jean-Paul Sartre is one of the most vocal existentialist philosophers. His view is that "existence precedes essence" (qtd. in Copleston 19). This implies that man must first exist before he makes meaning and therefore, the search for meaning foregrounds man's existence. Another view of this assertion is on the grounds that man is an individual, conscious being (existence) rather than the tags, names, stereotypes, and so on, that man is given (essence). Sartre says that "man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards" (qtd. in Baird and Kaufmann 6). Existentialist philosophy treats humans as sentient, self-conscious and self-creating individuals.

Existentialists believe that the world is absurd as well as meaningless and that man is cut off from any form of transcendentalism. Charlotte Keys writes that existentialists believe that humans "create gods, religions, and theologies because they want to believe the world is ordered and purposeful. According to the existentialists, responsibility for one's life lies entirely with oneself" (15). To the existentialists, man's consciousness is the only form of existence, and every other thing in the world is a creation of that existence.

Existentialists also believe in the idea of choice and free will. To them, man's free will is the ultimate determiner of his existence, and the choice to exist is imposed

on man. This is argued by Charlotte Keys when she says humans “choose to exist because we cannot not choose to exist” (15). This choice of existence, to Sartre, is “absurd because there has never been any possibility of not choosing oneself” (501). Sartre goes further to elaborate on the concept of choice in existentialism by averring that “we are dealing with a choice, this choice as it is made indicates in general other choices as possibles. The possibility [...] is lived in the feeling of unjustifiability; and it is this which is expressed by the fact of the absurdity of my choice and consequently my being” (502).

Closely tied to the concepts of choice and free will is the idea of suicide. Existentialists believe that suicide is a rational manifestation of man’s free will to opt out of the meaninglessness of life. They believe that man is in a state of alienation and that this alienation arises from the perception of man’s individuality. Charlotte Keys asserts that, “[t]he individual becomes aware that they have an external nature or character that can be objectified or viewed from a third-person perspective. The individual’s realisation that another person can access this dimension of their being (which the individual cannot) makes them feel alienated and ashamed” (18). Existentialists have a negative and gloomy outlook on life which is tied to the idea of the absurd. Hope, to them, is despair and the actual nature of man is tragic. This is conveyed by using the metaphor of Sisyphus in Albert Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Other philosophers associated with existentialism include Martin Heidegger, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche, among others.

In literature, existentialist philosophy manifests in the presence of individualism, struggle, gloom, absurdity, hopelessness and meaninglessness in literary works. Writers, especially those of the Modernist and Postmodernist periods, employ existentialist thinking and ideas, as manifest in their form and content, in their works. In novels, existentialism manifests in the adoption of an individual character whose mind is explored in order to examine the hopelessness and futility of life as well as man’s struggle for meaning through the agency of his free will. The world is perceived through the consciousness of the individual characters and their philosophical concerns such as choice, evil, absurdity, struggle, hope, among others, are thematised. The focus is on the individual and his mind in its entirety. However, unlike psychoanalysis, existentialist literature does not probe into the remote cause of man’s actions and inactions but at their philosophical nature and implication for existence, free will and absurdity. All of man’s actions are seen as struggles for the attainment of meaning. Existentialism has birthed new techniques and advanced the use of others in literature such as stream of consciousness, fragmentation, lyricism, theatre of the absurd, individualism, interior monologue, philosophical language, use of myths, psychological presentation of characters, open-ended plot sequences, ambiguous plots, first person point of view, etc. (Lye 1). Writers who have employed existentialist thought in their works abound. Some of them include Jean-Paul Sartre,

Albert Camus, Franz Kafka, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Robert Frost, Tanure Ojaide, Dambudzo Marechera, Biyi Bandele, Wole Soyinka, W. B. Yeats, and a host of others.

Individualism and memory: Frost and Ojaide

This article engages the existentialist approach to examine the poetry collections of Frost and Ojaide. Frost was an American poet while Ojaide is Nigerian. Both poets have been selected from cultures considerably distant from the other in order to comparatively assess the forms of individualism in their poetry as well as to ascertain the cultural non-peculiarity of this manifestation. Representative poems are selected from the poets' collections based on their degree of relevance to the paper's scope. Analysis is done from both the thematic and stylistic purviews.

The first aspect of individualism that is noticeable in the selected collections is the use of the lyric as a poetic form, as opposed to other types of poetry. This use of the lyric form enhances the poets' personal vision and individualistic philosophy. The lyric is traditionally associated with the expression of individualism. The lyric form allows for freedom of expression without any form of restraint. This also implies the existentialist philosophy of free will and freedom in individualist existence. In Frost's "Into my own", the poet uses the lyric form of poetry. The poem is short and expresses a personal idea, that of change and freedom from the old order. This is also the form adopted by Ojaide in his selected collection. Ojaide's "When the muse gives the minstrel a nod" is in the lyric form and expresses the personal idea of inspiration and creativity at the individualistic level.

Another form of individualism in the poem is the use of the poet-persona in the poem itself. This is akin to the utilisation of the first person narrative technique and the stream-of-consciousness in prose fiction. The poets include their poet-persona in the poem itself, and the reader sees the direct expression of the poet-persona. This technique is used to individualise the poems and focus on man as a single being, as found in existentialist philosophy. The poet-persona's cosmic outlook is fully unveiled to the reader when this method is employed, and the reader has the opportunity to understand the concepts of choice, free will and hope in the face of a chaotic world. In adopting this technique, the poet necessarily uses the first person pronouns "I" and "my" in order to include himself/herself in the poem. The poet-persona's vision of life is fully realised using this form. In Frost's "Ghost House", we encounter an individualistic poet-persona who says:

I dwell in a lonely house I know
That vanished many a summer ago,
And left no trace but the cellar walls,
And a cellar in which the daylight falls,
And the purple-stemmed wild raspberries grow.

[...]

I dwell with a strangely aching heart
In that vanished abode there far apart
On that disused and forgotten road
That has no dust-bath now for the toad. (Frost 1)

In the extract above, the poet-persona intimates the loss of his “lonely house,” and through the use of imagery, the poet paints the picture of the lost home. This inclusion of the poet-persona in the poems is an aspect of individualism. The poet’s private vision of the house is laid bare, and the house can be said to be a metaphor of chaos and disintegration which the poet experiences. It is observable that the poet says “I dwell” instead of “I dwelt” which connotes the idea that the chaos and disorder that is thematised is not in the past but an eternal manifestation.

Ojaide also expresses this form of individualism by poet persona inclusion in some of his poems. His poem “Self-portrait” includes the poet-persona in a series of existential and philosophical reflections. The poet-persona says:

I am a river
journeying seaward,

blind to my fate.
Will the sea I seek

for all its fortune
shed a tear-drop

should mountain
or woodland

that I trespass
cut me off? (Ojaide 42)

The above extract from Ojaide’s poem shows the poet-persona who reflects philosophically on his existence. The poet-persona calls himself a “river” which connotes the idea of movement. Existentialist philosophy believes that man “moves” through the universe and the poet-persona has used the “river” metaphor to express this. The poet’s vision of chaos and uncertainty is expressed in the verse where the poet says he is “blind” to his “fate” which shows the existentialist non-belief in predestination. Uncertainty is further shown by the poet’s use of rhetorical questions in the second sequence of the poem. All these show the poet-persona as an inclusive entity in the

poem. The poet-persona's personal vision of life is shown frequently in the poems and all these are expressed from the first person point of view.

A form of individualism which has roots in existentialism is the thematisation of a chaotic and gloomy world. The world is presented from the poet's point of view as disorderly and without meaning. The poet-persona has no choice but to find shelter within himself in this meaningless universe. Chaos is expressed through grief, loss, death, suffering, and other images or symbols of disintegration. The poet presents the ideal state of the universe as unattainable. This can be found in Frost's "My November guest" where the poet presents the themes of pain, chaos and disorder. The poet-persona opens the poem by saying:

My Sorrow, when she's here with me,
Thinks these dark days of autumn rain
Are beautiful as days can be (Frost 2).

The idea of gloom is painted by the personification of sorrow in the above lines and the imagery of "dark days of autumn rain". These lines foreground the idea that the poet thinks of the world as gloomy. This idea is further strengthened in the poem when the poet says: "She loves the bare, the withered tree; / She's glad the birds are gone away" and "The desolate, deserted trees / The faded earth, the heavy sky ..." (Frost 2).

The images presented above are of disintegration, gloom, chaos, disorder, misanthropy and meaninglessness. The personification of sorrow is also used to individualise these images of chaos and assert their existence in the world as much as the poet-persona exists.

Ojaide also presents the gloomy vision of the universe as manifest in themes of disorder, chaos, disintegration, sorrow, grief and pain. Ojaide's "Today" echoes this gloomy vision of life adequately. In the poem, the poet describes his abandonment by his muse by asserting:

Today the muse trashes on my craft,
and that's not all I suffer in one day

[...]

The moon lives in the room in a blindfold,
the stars have gone to hide from their bride (Ojaide 38).

These images are of disillusionment and gloom. The poet uses his individual experience to express personal suffering and uses the image of moon and stars to express cosmic imbalance and chaos. This disintegration is further described when the poet-persona says, "The day has laid siege to my hope; / my faith suffocates in a cell of lust" (3). The hopelessness of man in the face of a meaningless world is shown here. Faith

and hope are suffocated and *besieged* by the day, a symbol of the chaotic universe. Gloom even extends from the immediate world into the afterlife. The poet believes, like other existentialists, that there is no transcendental hereafter for man. This is expressed when the poet-persona says, "On earth paradise is a daydream; / dream must give way to wakeful life" (38). Paradise, here, is an allusion to the Christian concept of heaven. This "heaven" is deemed a "dream" by the poet-persona. All these are instances of the poet's expression of a gloomy vision of life and existence in general.

Individualism is also manifest in the thematisation of dilemma and confusion. Man is presented with various choices in life and these choices overwhelm man, who must employ his free will to make choices. This confusion in making choices presents a dilemma and to resolve it, man asks salient questions and questions the authenticity of free will. In the poetry of Frost and Ojaide, this personal dilemma in the application of free will features in numerous poems. The poet is uncertain of the choices he is presented with, and this uncertainty is akin to that of existentialists who believe that the only thing man is certain of is his existence. Frost's "A dream pang" discusses uncertainty and confusion. In the poem, the poet recalls the reluctance of an unnamed person to enter into the forest that he had "withdrawn" to. This reluctance is captured in the lines:

And to the forest edge you came one day
(This was my dream) and looked and pondered long,
But did not enter, though the wish was strong;
You shook your pensive head as who should say,
'I dare not—too far in his footsteps stray—
He must seek me would he undo the wrong.
Not far, but near, I stood and saw it all
Behind low boughs the trees let down outside. (Frost 9)

The reluctance of the unnamed person to enter the forest shows the uncertainty that man faces in life. The forest represents existence and man is confronted with the dilemma of living or not. This choice cannot easily be made in the face of the hopelessness and meaninglessness of existence and thus constitutes a potent dilemma that can be resolved only by suicide or continual struggle (Knowlson 57).

In Ojaide's "The Market is a Thronged Crossroads", another dilemma is the persona's utter confusion about existence through the use of multiplicity. The poet-persona says:

The market is a thronged crossroads;
there, life and death meet to trade articles.
The crossroads is a confused market;
a cortege passes without a dirge. (Ojaide 17)

In the above lines, the poet uses the idea of crossroads to represent his confusion about existence. The poet contemplates the nature of this crossroads where “life” and “death” meet and he seems not to understand its nature. This convolution is what existence, represented as “market”, entails. The poet goes further to express his dilemma about existence by asking “but where is safety for one in a coma / return to recover or dash ahead to die?” (18). This rhetorical question is aimed at the idea of safety and happiness in existence. The poet crystallises his gloomy vision as well through this dilemma.

Alienation is another form of individualism manifest in the poetry of Frost and Ojaide. The poetry of individualism presents the idea of the alienation and solitude of man. This idea is echoed in existentialist philosophy. Man is seen as being alone and abandoned in the universe and, thus, has no one to look up to other than himself. Alienation is consequential to solitude. Man is alone without a guide, a messiah or any transcendental being to lead him. Man is not given rules for life nor is the purpose or essence of life explained to him. This alienation is expressed in Frost’s “In neglect” where the poet bemoans the alienation of humankind by the transcendental forces of the universe. The poet says:

They leave us so to the way we took,
As two in whom they were proved mistaken,
That we sit sometimes in the wayside nook,
With mischievous, vagrant, seraphic look,
And try if we cannot feel forsaken. (Frost 9)

The “[t]hey” represent the powers that be in the universe. However, he criticizes the fact that these powers stand aside and look at man while man makes his choices in life. These “seraphic” beings gave man the ultimate tragedy of thrusting him in a universe of despair without guidance.

Ojaide’s “Without a guide” also presents alienation through the metaphor of the minstrel and the muse. The muse inspires the minstrel when he performs and can, thus, be said to be a transcendental being who guides man. However, to express the absence of these beings, the poet bemoans his alienation and abandonment at the point when he truly needs metaphysical help. This is expressed when the poet says:

After the crossroads, the minstrel looks back—
his guide has performed a disappearing act.
With only his shadow following beside,
he must take the rest of the long road alone. (Ojaide 19)

These tragic lines show man’s ultimate plight in the universe: loneliness and solitude. Man is pushed into existence “without a guide” and on a journey that will “test” his fortitude. Ojaide further presents man’s individualistic plight when he writes

He must personally roast or boil the yam he grows to eat;
no 'Food is ready!' or a laid-out table to select his fill. (Ojaide 19)

Man must struggle to gain the things of the world. This is the ultimate crux of existentialist philosophy.

Memory is central to individualism. The two poets usually call upon their experiences in life in order to chart a direction or a new course. Memory is expressed when the poet draws directly from and paints a picture of past events as recollected in his mind. Memory is an attribute of individualism and existentialists believe that for man to make choices, he calls upon his consciousness, where memories are situated. Thus, it is apt to examine memory in the discourse on individualism briefly. Frost's poems are replete with various memories of childhood and innocence as he nostalgically recalls these experiences when faced with the complexity of life. One of such memories is captured in "In a vale" when the poet calls upon the innocence of his childhood by saying:

When I was young, we dwelt in a vale
By a misty fen that rang all night,
And thus it was the maidens pale
I knew so well, whose garments trail
Across the reeds to a window light. (Frost 8)

The poet uses vivid imagery to paint the picture of his childhood vale and all these point to nostalgia and a sense of innocence. The importance of memory in making choices and bestriding the world is emphasised when the poet-persona says:

And thus it is I know so well
Why the flower has odor, the bird has song.
You have only to ask me, and I can tell.
No, not vainly there did I dwell,
Nor vainly listen all the night long. (Frost 8)

The poet emphasises the value of memory in understanding the world using the metaphor of the "flower" and the "bird" to represent the shades of the universe and its complexity. The importance of memory is laid bare in the last lines where the poet says he did not "vainly" stay at his childhood vale and listen to tales that would shape his perception of the universe.

Ojaide also calls upon memory in his poem "For Lady Rose" in which he describes his encounter with Rose, an Urhobo *Udje* performer from Udu kingdom. The poet uses this recollection to express the importance of memory for the individual, that of eternity even in the face of oblivion. The poet-persona describes his encounter with the lady using vivid imagery. He says,

I heard your music and its echoes before I met you—
Godini had so sung your name that it tortured me
until I drove out to buy and play your DVDs.

This initial memory of the performer is fully developed when the poet says
Once I heard you, there was no dawn without you;
I knew the *otie* fruit had chosen to fall before me.
And then I met you at Otuama's home campaign. (Ojaide 87)

The poet's reliance on memory is unique as it shows its place in man's consciousness. Man's despair is also soothed by happy times and the hope that his memory shall live on. This is captured philosophically in the last verse of the poem where the poet says, "There will be no death of you, songs and dance alive". His succour is the knowledge that he lives on, in some way, through his memory. This last verse shows the value of memory to the individual who apprehends self-annihilation from existence after a futile struggle.

Existentialists believe that life is absurd and without meaning and, thus, death is the ultimate end of human experience. This view that man's quest in meaninglessness is conveyed by Sartre when he asserts that "man is a futile passion, condemned to be free" (7). Man's futility is a product of death. Consequential upon this, the theme of death has a strong place in existentialist poetry. Existentialist poets present the idea of man's "realization of the inevitable and ineluctable character of death" (Cruikshank 54). Existentialist poetry celebrates life's ultimate absurdity in the face of oblivion. Ojaide's "The minstrel wails" expresses the existentialist theme of death. The poet-persona introduces the subject from the first lines when he says, "At last death threw you down flat / after you wrestled with all your warrior heart" (36). The first line shows the ultimate fate of man in the world; the idea that death emerges the conqueror. The second line expresses the struggle for meaning and life even in the face of absurdity. Man's struggle for meaning is seen as a "wrestle", and the ultimate winner is death. Highlighting further his fixation with the theme of mortality, the poet-persona proceeds to show man's struggles in the world in these lines:

You who brought firewood to the communal hearth,
stoked it and kept warm everybody in the cold

you who placed your harvest of yams on the table
so that no one would be tortured by famine,

you made a road to the sun and to the moon
so that there will always be pathways to our dreams

[...]

You wanted to be president to share pumpkins to people (Ojaide 37)

The depiction of life's struggles in the above stanzas is shown in the face of absurdity as "Death tackles the young elephant to a fall" and "fate knocked down the reflective signs you set up". The struggle is ultimately won by death. This is a clinical depiction of existentialist thought.

In a similar vein, Frost's "My butterfly" foregrounds death as an indicator of the absurd in existentialist thought. In this poem, death permeates all and echoes the idea of absurdity. The poet-persona says:

Thine emulous fond flowers are dead, too,
And the daft sun-assaulter, he
That frightened thee so oft, is fled or dead:
Save only me. (Frost 18)

This post-apocalyptic imagery shows the ultimate fate of human existence. Life ceases to be and all struggles turn to nought. The image is strengthened further as the poet-persona says, "There is none left to mourn thee in the fields. / The gray grass is not dappled with the snow". This wasteland echoes futility, oblivion and meaninglessness. As usual in existentialist thought, God sits and watches as man struggles for meaning. Man is doomed to be alone. This is why Nietzsche asserts that "God is dead" (41). In this poem, God "let thee flutter from his gentle clasp: / Then fearful he had let thee win" (18). The depiction of God as fearful and beyond the grasp of man is common in existentialist thought. This poem presents man as a sojourner in a vast wasteland where God has no power and where he must walk alone until he meets his death.

There are notable differences in stylistic peculiarities between Frost and Ojaide. Although both poets approach existentialism in similar ways and thematise the same issues, their approach is different, and this owes largely to their unique employment of literary devices. One of the differences between both poets rests on the structure of their poems. Frost's poems are written without the use of multiple stanzas. The lines are packed tightly. All the ideas in the poems follow one another in a sequence of lines, rather than stanzas. All the poems in Frost's *A Boy's Will* follow this style. In contrast, Ojaide employs the couplet form in the poems contained in *The Beauty I have seen*. In the employment of this form, Ojaide amply deploys enjambment (run-on lines) to present his ideas. Almost all the poems in his collection follow this style. Each stanza contains two lines each, and each poem is written with multiple stanzas. This is illustrated in the poem "Oshue":

Today the community gathers to remember you,
eighty years after your loud no to the head tax

and asking others not to pay for your God-given head to
a fellow human being however desperate to enrich himself.

If life was so good for the hawk in the sky,
why would it descend so low to kidnap chickens. (Ojaide 82)

The lines above clearly demonstrate the use of the unrhymed couplet form. Enjambement manifests as each line runs into the next to form a narrative piece. The employment of this form contrasts with Frost's usage of the single stanza form.

The use of a rhyme scheme also contrasts Frost and Ojaide's poetry. In the poetry of Frost, one encounters the use of end rhymes and eye rhymes. The rhyming patterns include the use of a rhyming couplet and an alternate rhyming couplet. The rhyming patterns add a musical quality to the poetry. In Frost's "To the thawing wind", the use of the rhymed couplet is evident. The rhyming pattern follows as aa, bb, cc, dd, ee, ff, gg. Below is an extract:

Come with rain, O loud Southwester!
Bring the singer, bring the nester;
Give the buried flower a dream;
Make the settled snow-bank steam. (Frost 7)

Ojaide, on the other hand, writes in the free verse form and does not consciously employ any rhyming scheme. Ojaide demonstrates artistic freedom, devoid of rigid poetic conventions in his poetry. His usage of the free verse form is also reminiscent of European Modernist poetry, one of the traditions influenced hugely by existentialist thoughts and aesthetics.

Frost's use of language in *A Boy's Will* is conventional, and his diction is simple. His poetry is characterised by simplicity and subjectivity. He employs the language of philosophical reflection and through the use of symbolism, metaphors, simile and imagery, among other techniques, he presents his argument on the absurdity of existence, individualism and memory. In "Going for Water", archetypal symbols are employed by the poet. One of these is that of a "well". The well, in this poem, symbolises man's struggle for meaning and aspiration towards a degree of consciousness. However, as in existentialist thought, such meaning is elusive, and man must struggle for it:

And so we went with pail and can
Across the fields behind the house
To seek the brook if it still ran. (Frost 10)

Hyperbole is employed to show the degree of man's search for meaning when the poet-persona says: "We ran as if to meet the moon". The poet's deployment of the

imagery of nothingness is conveyed in the lines "The barren boughs without the leaves, / Without the birds, without the breeze". Furthermore, the poet alludes, through the agency of simile, to gnomes: "But once within the wood, we paused / Like gnomes that hid us from the moon". Gnomes are mythical humanoid creatures that dwell underground and on the air. They are creatures associated with work and contentment, ideals of existentialist thought.

Ojaide is experimental in his use of language. However, his diction is simple. Rather than introspection, Ojaide observes and comments based on experiences and happenings rather than total subjectivity. He also experiments with the Nigerian pidgin in some of his poems. In "Wetin man go do", for instance, Ojaide uses pidgin to reflect on human struggles as he quizzes

Wetin man go do?

He asks the god of fortune.

The udje singer wishes misfortune

to strike rivals for songs of ridicule. (Ojaide 106)

In "I no go sidon look", he comments on some salient issues as well as the struggles man must go through. Repetition is often employed in this poem as the line "I no go sidon look" recurs in every stanza. In the poem, "udje drums" is used as a metaphor for traditional religion, culture and worldview as the poet-persona says "I no go sidon look / make Pentecostal noise cover *udje* drums" (107). Humour is also one of the stylistic peculiarities of Ojaide. In "Wafi, my incontestable love", the poet uses humour to convey the struggles Warri goes through:

Ricochets of bullets perforate dusk into dawn.

'That na gunshot or knockout?' the locals ask,

as the outsider takes to his heels for dear life. (Ojaide 115)

Below is an instance of the poet's deployment of imagery to paint the city of Warri:

pain paints the streets with harsh colours;

a nightmarish sun and a depressed moon.

The contested city littered with aborted dreams,

The sick seek no cure from medication but chants. (Ojaide 114)

In all, Ojaide is highly experimental with regard to language, as opposed to Frost. However, both poets echo themes of individualism and memory. These themes are approached with different techniques. While Frost is introspective and employs a philosophical language, Ojaide is focused on description and uses imagistic, experimental and experiential language.

Conclusion

This article has attempted a reading of individualism and memory in the poetry of Frost and Ojaide. It examines representative poems in Frost's *A Boy's Will* and Ojaide's *The Beauty I have seen*, and shows that these poets use the individual to express existentialist philosophy through their form and content. This article adopts a new approach to read Frost's and Ojaide's poetry. Ojaide, in particular, has largely been stereotyped as a socio-political and environmental activist over the years. Few studies have been done on the individualism of his poetry, unlike Frost. This is why Frost has been placed side-by-side with Ojaide in order to affirm the individualistic nature of the poems that have been analysed. The stylistic peculiarities of their poetry have also been examined. A comparative reading of their poetry shows that Ojaide is largely an existentialist in his outlook, especially in his recent collections of poetry, and his existentialist thought is engineered with experimental language and form. Frost, on the other hand, echoes the existentialist concepts of individualism and memory but in much more philosophical and introspective language. Man is the sole indivisible unit of individualism and memory gives him shape and consciousness. Through the use of the existentialist approach to literature, I have underscored the place of individualism and memory in the selected poems by Frost and Ojaide.

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