

## **Decoding Contemporary Realities in Tunde Fatunde's La Calebasse Cassée**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper holds that literature and criticism are means of expressions of class struggles particularly on the ideological plane. This implies that literary production and criticism are not exclusively personal expressions, but they are basically social expressions. Satire is a literary composition which exposes the ills of the society and the foolishness of an individual or a group of people in a ridiculous way with the aim of correcting the follies and the vices. The paper emphasizes the connection between the personality of Fatunde and the author's choice of satire as an artistic device of painting reality. The purpose of this paper is to establish that it is possible to understand the psycho-social dimensions of a particular society or a group of people through the application of psychoanalysis. The appreciation of the sources of literary and artistic creativity is again facilitated because such mechanism will make readers of any literary work participate seriously in the emotional world of a given work of art. The paper concludes that there is a definite dialectical relationship between art and literature on the one hand and social class on the other hand. Each class produces its own literature and art.*

**Keywords:** Satire, psychology, literature, art, reality, society

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

With the adoption of psychoanalysis approach, we perceive that Freudian psychoanalysis provides for scientific proofs of what has been perceived for ages by philosophers, writers and artists because it is a systematized analysis. The application of this literary method becomes more useful since it makes possible our understanding of psychological sources of characters in literary compositions. One can discover the psychological roots of the author's own motifs, especially works which deal with psycho-social and psycho-sexual cases.

Satire is a common literary device through which the form and content of many African writers can be appreciated. Most of these writers elicit laughter in plays, poems and novels by enacting errant individuals and institutions in a humorous and witty way. Satire offers some indices of defense mechanism against shocks to which our writer, Fatunde often confronts as an informed participant, a social crusader and a human rights activist. It is obvious that Fatunde is a victim of anxiety emerging from the failure of governance in Nigeria since independence.

Fatunde, a writer and an international journalist, has been involved actively in the struggle for a responsive and accountable governance in post-independence; Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. He participates in public debates to expose or make right the perceived wrong. He is often troubled by political dynamics which brings to power African leaders like Idi Amin, Macias Nguema, and Jean Baptiste Bokassa, Mobutu Sese Seko, Sanni Abacha and other political aberrations in Africa. However, as a means of coping with anxiety-inducing contemporary realities, ironical views are practically displayed in his satiric play, *La Calebasse Cassée*. He calls our attention to the perceived inadequacies of the society we live in combing the sober and the humorous, the grim and the witty.

In scholarly studies over the years, the inter-relationship between literature and psychology has been strongly attested to. The writer is an individual subject to emotions and feelings and he/she is a product of certain social make-ups to which literary work is potentially a response. Since the aim of criticism is to elucidate the text and to give a perspective by which audience can access the core of its meaning, it will then be worthy if the effort takes into consideration the psychological drive or personal motivation of the writer openly and/or secretly embedded in the text. Sigmund Freud observes that the "unconscious" and the various nuances of psychoanalysis offered by his disciples like Carl Jung and Alfred Adler, exemplify the use of psychological light in penetrating the layers of meanings embedded in a creative work. Freudian psychoanalysis, for example, establishes a kind of link between the conscious/unconscious experience of the writer and the text. Psychoanalysis affirms that a literary work, like dream, is a more pro-social way of structuring experience, wishes or fears that are potentially dangerous if not promptly given a tempered outlet through seemingly

innocuous channels such as creating characters in plays, prose etcetera. It seeks among other things to “connect an individual author or reader to a text” (Schwartz and Willbern, 1982).

Any literary composition is therefore “a defensive transformation of infantile wishes” rendered in a more socially permissible and enjoyable manner. As interpretation reorders, the “arbitrary contiguity” of a dream into meaningful contiguity, a literary creation reorders so as to make meaning chaotic ordering of events in a dream. In an attempt toward constructing a meaning, a critic seeks to confer an order on the interrelationships of events, persons or situations in the text. Whether as spoken words or printed letters, literature expresses human experiences, observations, feelings, imaginations and world views among other things.

As a result of the World Wars, there had been an increase in the awareness of social, cultural, political, religious and economic prejudices and dominance against women in patriarchal dominated societies and the quest to assert individual identity, feminist interests had been expressed in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* as early as 1949 (Murfin, Ray. 121) Beauvoir reflects on many issues and concerns about women in male dominated societies of the world. Her writings inspired the French Feminist Critics, the British and American Feminists. Kate Millet affirmed the pioneering role of Beauvoir as a feminist by believing that her text, *The Second Sex* had taught women how to think and her autobiography had taught women how to live and build a new identity for themselves.

On the other hand, Engels championed the foundation of Marxist Feminism in his analysis of gender oppression in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*. He observes that a woman's subordination is not as a result of her biological disposition, but of social relations and that the institution of family as it exists, is a complex system in which men command women's services.

It is obvious that feminism has gained a strong acceptance in the continent of Africa, particularly among the long abused African women, and their male sympathizers. The truth is that the extreme radical tendencies which the concept acquired in the West have been handled with much care of moderation as required in Africa. Hence, African feminists draw a line of distinction between their own tolerant brand and the die-hard feminism by projecting a new concept of womanism. Womanism recognizes that the needs of the black women are not totally the same as those of the white women, although, it is affirmed that the African woman has gone through series of oppression under the male dominated system.

The womanist holds that man and woman have supportive/complementary roles and that neither of them can survive alone. Bâ, a Senegalese female writer believes there could not be any self-fulfillment outside the “couple” situation. Womanism goes beyond the husband and wife matter. Ousmane and Bâ kick against the abandonment of children. They want children to be trained and educated. However, the meeting point of feminism and womanism is in the area of political marginalization with respect to women. Politics is strongly interwoven with religion, traditional laws and culture; this is evidently defined by popular religions as demonstrated in the Holy Bible and the Glorious Qu'ran and our traditional religion. Political issues are also connected with society and economic matters.

Womanism as a movement, celebrates woman strength as a pillar, the strength that brings black-men to recognize and compromise for harmonious co-existence of both sexes. Womanism is a peculiar culture which reminds men, with outstanding indices that without women's full engagement and involvement in the system; politically, socially, economically, culturally and religiously, man is incomplete in action as well as in achievement and this is the central message of Ousmane in majority of his artifacts. This confirms the popular adage: “Beside every successful man, there is a successful woman”.

A genuine African feminism should recognize a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European/American exploitation (Davies and Graves, 1986). This is not confrontational to African men; rather it paves the way for them to be aware of various salient facets of women's subjugation which are not the same as the popular oppression of all African peoples. “Stiwa”, Social Transformation including women of Africa is what we want in Africa. It is not about warring with the men, the reversal of role, or doing to men whatever women think that men have been doing for centuries, but it is trying to build a harmonious society. The transformation of African society is the responsibility of both men and women and it is also in their interest (Omolara Ogundipe Leslie, 1994).

Traditionally in Africa, the image of a woman is that of one who quietly accepts her responsibilities and shares blames with respect. The miserable condition of women in Henri Lopes' *La Nouvelle Romance* shows the typical picture of African women in real life and in the man-made imaginary world of fictional narratives. “It is Sunday evening; Sunday, a day of feasting and rejoicing, a day of rest from daily duties. But she is in the yard pounding cassava leaves. The married woman is faded the next day after the wedding. She no more has that smile on her face and that quick wit which fascinated the young boys of the village. She is simply a cook, a woman on forced labor...” (Lopes 1976:14). With this statement, Lopes is making it obvious that African women's problems are seriously, the creation of male chauvinism. Hence, feminism should play a significant role to redress and reconstruct the ugly trend.

As a way of social mobilization, “a strategy and an instrument of creating awareness, sensitizing and conscientising the populace so that they can develop interest, grasp social issues at stake and take active part in the development process,” (Oso, 1997); it is against this background that Tunde Fatunde enacts *La Calebasse Cassée*

## II. TEXT ANALYSIS

*La Calebasse Cassée* is an x-ray of a dislocated African State ravaged by social, political and economic woes. The events in the play are characterized with jungle justice, epitome of power abuse and absolute exploitation. The Etekis are the people at the centre of the play where the head of the family, Eteki collaborated with a foreigner, Pierre and other colleagues in government including the President of the imagined African Republic to enrich themselves at the expense of the ordinary people and the country at large. Hypothetically, a National Conference which did not see the light of the day filled our hearts with the picture of African societies in search of a new order: social, political and economic developments in the face of all manners of dirty dealings.

Apart from unacceptable restrictions imposed on women through religious injunctions, African culture itself is a thorn on the flesh of women. An ugly social norm wide spread in Africa is the parental intrusion into marriages of their children. The parents, often motivated by interests contrary to those of their young ones, drag their children away from genuine love and sacrifice their happiness on the altar of greed and social stratification, ethnicity, political difference and local taboos. In Nigeria and Cameroon for instance, girls are especially prevented from having their ideal choice in marriages because of those hideous reasons already identified above. This vexed issue interests some feminist writers who might have either experienced it or have observed this social ill in their society. Through the character of Elhadj Oumar in *Chaque Chose En Soon Temps*, the author holds that men are really disgusting whether they are fathers or brothers, they are all the same.

We are therefore of the view that African men, more than their counterparts from the other climes, are hostile to their women whether in love or in the other socio cultural relationships. “The African husband or lover is more prone to selfishness, pretence, self-pride and physical aggression than his wife or girl friend. Infidelity in marriage is more widespread and more open among men than women. Because of the age-old male domination and prejudices, women are easily tagged as prostitutes’ while no names are given to male prostitutes roaming around. If women ask for money, it is because the society has made them economically dependent on men. If statistics is anything to go by, there are more married men who sleep out of their homes with other women than wives doing the same thing. Any woman suspected of such act by her male partner would be lucky, if she is not beaten up or simply given a ‘red card’ in the marriage. As for men, they come back home without feeling threatened or guilty. There are more unmarried men involved in free love than unmarried women. Many boys would not mind having two or more lovers while they raise hairs if they suspect that a rival is on the way to take one of them from them. This is what we call societal double standard in matters concerning women and men and which calls for action from responsible individuals,” Okeh (1999:108).

This is an x-ray of women’s woes especially in Africa. Some of the negative social tendencies, which pave the way for feminist condemnation and, or revolt include polygamy, male infidelity, parental and extended family intrusion into the marriage of their young members and female encouragement of male maneuvers in love and marriage at the expense of their fellow women folks. Apart from Media reports, as students of the society we also observed these ugly situations African women are subjected.

As a matter of fact, polygamy is a destructive social element against women. When relationship becomes pluralized in a marriage as it is in polygamy, the marriage which ought to be a unique union of two hearts is jeopardized. Hence, because of the questionable nature of man, feminists frown at the existence of polygamy since it is a social evil against women. Also, male infidelity, which is the genesis of polygamy, is another focus of feminism. Since men do not see anything bad or strange in taking two or more wives at a time, they are not likely to be disturbed by catching fun with other women.

It is well established that mental attitudes and behavioral tendencies guided by literature are designed in honor and favor of men folk to the debasement of woman. It is widely believed that men have had every advantage of women in telling their own story since western education has been theirs in so much higher a degree and the pen has been in their hands for many years.

As a matter of fact, many adages also demonstrate derogatory remarks on womenfolk. In many African folktales and songs, it is the women who are often used as scrape goats or guinea pigs. For example, it is either the step-mother is a witch or the co-wife is jealous, envious or intolerant. But, the behaviors of irresponsible and arrogant husbands are never questioned or investigated. Masculine superiority or male chauvinism is again evident in our written literature. Events in African writings – novels, plays and poems remain “stomach-turning”, annoying and vexing especially to feminists in the way womenfolk is portrayed, decorated, painted, presented or framed-up.

As we can see a defective image of the woman dotted African oral and written literature. "To heal herself, however, the woman writer must exercise the sentences which bred her infection in the first place," she must overtly and covertly free herself of the despair she inhaled from some "wrinkled maker" and she can only do this by revisiting the marker's texts," (Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 1979:76).

However, Tunde.Fatunde tries to reconstruct the ugly image of our female characters by making them more responsible and dependable as well while the male characters are viewed as good for nothing, self-centered oppressors.

Apart from being economically and politically corrupt, Eteki maltreats his entire family, imprisons them and engages in extra-marital affairs with young girls. In short, women do not matter anything to him. They (women) are not more than objects to be used/enjoyed and thrown away like sanitary paper. The play exposes the infidelity nature of our so-called highly placed men, who sap and abandon their legally married wives and sleep around recklessly with concubines/mistresses or girlfriends.

Il m' a demandé d' aller  
chez une dame pour qu'  
elle lui prépare un bon plat  
d' ignâme...(P6)

(He asked me to go to a woman that she could prepare a delicious plate of pounded yam for him P6). According to Joseph, Eteki's driver, there are at least five different women outside who do cook for his boss on a regular basis. Eteki wastes as much as fifty thousand CFA on one of the women to prepare food at a time.

Madame pour vous dire la vérité,  
Vous avez perdu votre temps et  
Votre argent en préparant le dîner  
pour le patron. Parce qu'il m'a  
remis cinquante mille francs pour  
la jeune dame en question pour  
un repas copieux( P.7)

(Madam, to tell you the truth, you are wasting your time and money in preparing dinner for my boss because he gave me fifty thousand CFA to give the young woman in question to cook a great meal p.7)

Sending a man one does not pay his salary/wages as and when due this kind of message portrays one as wicked and insensitive. In other words, the person is psychologically found waiting. T.F. (Tunde Fatunde) paints his male characters in this way for the purpose of ridiculing them and showing that they are not in any way superior to their female counterparts. As if that was not enough, in a state of drunkenness, Eteki unconsciously names his extra-marital women: Pauline, Maria, Victoire, Cécile and Précile (P8). The writer as a student of the environment where he operates is angry about the recklessness of our men, particularly the so-called rich people and this is why he fire back at them by exposing their dirty practices.

Salimatou, one of the female characters enacted by T.F. in *La Calebasse Cassée*, satirizes the situation where most of our political leaders, office-holders and directors of institutions find themselves when they are in the position of authority or at the corridors of power. Eteki who used to be a simple, easy-going and kind man before becoming a director had turned into an irresponsible drunkard who wastes the state money on useless things (P. 10). At the end of the month, Eteki refuses to pay his driver; leaving the poor man at the mercy of Sabine. As an intelligent woman, Sabine pays the driver to use him as a tool, an informant to get important information about her husband especially activities he engages in after official hours.

Je t'ai toujours dit  
de m'informer sur les  
endroits où il te dit  
de l'amener en dehors  
de son bureau(P.5)

(I have always told you to inform me about places he tells you to carry him to apart from his office p.5).

It can be established from this scene that the women created by T.F. in *La Calebasse Cassée* are decorated as bold, intelligent, enduring and daring. From the inception of the play, we see Sabine, Eteki's wife comments that when one cries, one can still see things all the same. (Quand on pleure, on voit tout de même)(p.1). Hence, since women, as demonstrated here are not psychologically inadequate, they will contribute meaningfully to the growth of the society and humanity in general if they are economically, socially and politically empowered. Where a man fails to perform his responsibility, a woman can rise up to arrest the ugly

situation in an attempt to hold the home and put things right. This is what T.F. postulates and defends in the creation of his female characters particularly Sabine and Salimatou.

“I am constantly reminded that the invention of literature in any of its forms is analogous to the proliferation of a linguistic system, which in turn, is the cultural reification of existence, a way of life, a pattern of conceptualization and a mode of thinking or knowing. This, inadvertently or otherwise, reinforces what I affirmed earlier in the appropriation of a linguistic system, *la langue*, whether corollary as used by a speaking subject, parole...” ( Layiwola Dele,2010 ). Buying into this platform which sees language as an important aspect of people's culture, T.F in his literary creation gave his female characters adequate language power to face effectively their oppressors. The writer does this by simply allowing his female characters to use proverbs freely, meaningfully and constructively.

Proverbs on their own are words of wisdom; well-known phrases and statements which give advice, warning or encouragement. Such expressions are generally believed to be true. However, proverbs or conventional multiword expressions are scarcely marginal in language structures (Olateju & Oyeleye 2005).

These expressions (proverbs) form an area of vocabulary with a unique appeal for learners of languages whether as a first, second or foreign language. It is believed that the ability to use proverbs often and accurately is one of the proofs of good usage. Apart from the entertainment value or the aesthetic function, through the use of dramatic situations, exciting imagery and actions, proverbs have pedagogic function. People tell stories and use proverbs to teach social values of life. Tunde Fatunde, not only as a committed African writer but also to underscore the intelligent quotient of his female characters, allows them to use conventionalized expressions called proverbs.

An examination of some of the proverbs used in the play by female characters will be of great value here.

1. Quand on nage, on essaie d'ouvrir les yeux afin d'éviter les écueils (P1). [When one swims, one tries to open the eyes to avoid danger]. This proverb is a source of warning instructing people to take caution or be careful in anything they do so as not to find themselves in a dreaded trouble.
2. Un chat qui prétend être ami finira un jour, par manger la viande de la fête si la porte de la cuisine n'est pas bien fermée. (P. 12).  
[A cat which appears/pretends to be a friend, ends up one day by eating the festival meat if the kitchen door is not properly closed]. This word of wisdom is another element of instruction drawing people's attention to the practical reality that an enemy might pretend to be a friend.
3. Une poule sans dent sait comment se protéger.( P. 14 )  
[A hen without tooth knows how to protect itself]. This proverb is premised on the reality that women themselves are conscious of the fact that they are armless, yet they can develop a mechanism to protect themselves when an occasion demands. This is a form of encouragement and a reassurance for women folk.
4. Un chien errangé oublie de protéger son maître (P.22).  
[A mad dog forgets to protect its master. It is true that when someone is in a problem/ trouble he/ she cannot help another person].
5. Le chasseur qui agite le nid d'abeilles rentrera chez lui le visage enflé (P. 23)  
[The hunter who shakes/stirs the bees nest returns home with a swollen face].  
This proverb warns us not to look for trouble and apart from the didactic element in the statement, its aesthetic ingredient entertains the readers or listeners as the imagery created makes people to laugh out their pains.
6. Tous les poisons ont le même regard innocent. Mais personne ne sait ce qu'ils pensent (P. 11)  
[Every fish looks innocent but no one knows what they are thinking]. It is true that people may appear gentle and harmless but only God knows what they think in their minds.

The proverbs as we can see are indeed sources of warning, advice and encouragement apart from giving good sense of humor through the mental pictures created. All these again further emphasize the genius of the intelligence of T.F.'s female characters.

The use of long sentences by male characters in T.F.'s *La Calebasse Cassée* proves that they are not focused, principled and disciplined. Long sentences are common features of frustrated or oppressed people, believing they have to explain or say a lot before they can be believed or taken seriously by their addressee.

As a matter of fact, T.F. portrays women as members of a community who are practically conscious of their environment. They are not push-over, never-do-well or mere objects to use and dump like rags or sanitary papers.

*La Calebasse Cassée* as a social satire exposes the corrupt nature of man using Eteki, an African who collaborates with one Mr. Pierre, a foreigner to loot the public treasury. And in an open confession, Mr. Pierre got this to say:

...Peut-être le sais-tu déjà  
auquel cas tant mieux: dans  
presque tous les cas et partout  
dans le monde, tout homme riche  
y parvient par des moyens peu  
honorables. Ils tuent, ils  
assassinent, ils mentent,( P. 59).

[Perhaps you know it already, in which case much better in almost all the cases and everywhere around the world, every rich man becomes what he is, through less honorable means. They kill, assassinate, and tell lies...]

Men do hide under religion to perpetrate their domination over women. Eteki lashes at his wife thus;

Tu devrais te taire  
Quand je te parle  
C'est comme ça que  
Dieu a établi sa loi...(P2)

[You must keep quiet yourself any time I talk to you. This is how God establishes his law].

Another contemporary reality x-rayed by T.F. in *La Calebasse Cassée* is the hypocrisy of most religious leaders of our time. They do not practice what they preach. Kolingba, a well-established pastor (P11) is the contractor who supplies young ladies to Eteki.

The social responsibility of the press is not under estimated in *La Calebbese Cassée*. It is proved that journalists have a role to play in exposing the ills of our society (P. 58). The media is always perceived to be the fourth arm or organ of government which serves as the watch-dog over other organs. The writer as a journalist himself is justifying the need for that sector of the system.

Since human society is rooted in the principle of co-present, co-habitation and co-existing, "The common bond uniting them (male and Female feminist exponents) is their love of humanity, concern for the democratic ideals and rights, self-realization; a burning desire to see the woman – the suppressed half of the human species – achieve happiness within the conjugal construct. When more families are united in love and harmony, our world will be saner and happier," (Rose Mezu, 1994: 231).

It is this same ideal of peaceful and mutual co-existence that Fatunde is preaching in *La Calebbese Cassée*.

### III. CONCLUSION

It is evident that literature performs certain functions which include: aesthetic function (delighting and pleasing as it appeals to the sense of beauty), didactic function (to correct man's imperfection as it teaches moral lessons), therapeutic function (healing of emotional, pathological, economic or socially connected illnesses) and linguistic function, which helps in developing the language of both the writer and readers. Satire stands out as a literary technique in exposing the ills in a given human society with a view to combat such ugly trends. This essential literary tool has been effectively applied in *La Calebbese Cassée*. The playwright has redesigned the image, the role and the psychological being of women differently from the common and primitive order of ordinary things. Decoding contemporary realities in *La Calebasse Cassée* has identified corruption, self-centeredness, religious hypocrisy and generational conflict as the bane of underdevelopment and the unending brouhaha among people in different communities. As an instrument for social mobilization, integration, development and global advancement, literature is believed can fix or mend those collapsed sectors of human social system. There is a definite dialectical relationship between art/literature and social class.

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