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Abstract

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EMMANUEL OBIECHINA

Market Literature in Nigeria

BACKGROUND

This discussion is based on three books that I wrote on market literature early in the nineteen-seventies. They are titled: *Literature for the Masses* (Nwamife 1971); *Onitsha Market Literature* (Heinemann 1972); and *An African Popular Literature — A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets* (Cambridge 1973). *Literature for the Masses* and *An African Popular Literature* contain critical commentaries on pamphlet literature, while *Onitsha Market Literature* is an anthology of selections from the writing supported by a long introduction. To gain a fairly comprehensive view of the scope, texture and thematic variety of market literature, one could have recourse to these books and to essays and reviews that are part of the enclosed bibliographic references. The discussion here is a drastically condensed view of a very complex subject matter.

At the end of the Second World War, a spate of popular writing of the type referred to by some people as chapbooks developed in Nigeria, in the commercial town of Onitsha, on the south-eastern bank of the River Niger. It became known as ‘market literature’ because of the importance of the Onitsha market in the production and distribution of the popular literature. The first three titles were issued by the Tabansi Publishing Company of Onitsha in 1947. They were *When Love Whispers*, a love tale; *Ikolo the Wrestler and Other Ibo Tales*, a collection of Igbo folktales, both by Cyprian Ekwensi; and *Tragic Niger Tales*, two short stories dealing with the tragic consequences of marriage by proxy, by Chike Okonya, an Onitsha schoolmaster. Cyprian Ekwensi is best known as the first Nigerian realistic novelist and author of more than twenty novels and short stories. What is not often equally well-known is that he made his debut as a writer in the field of market literature. The literature grew rapidly and by the late 1950s, a couple of hundred different titles could be amassed by a collector from the Onitsha market and bookstores adjoining it.

The rise of this popular writing coincided with the tremendous spurt in the growth of literacy in the southern part of Nigeria, the sudden population explosion, the drift of a large number of people from the villages into the cities, the rapid increase in Nigerian-owned and operated printing presses, and the diversion to commercial, industrial and technological development of the energy and money previously devoted to the war.

All of these factors and more were evident in Onitsha and ensured that that city became the seat of market literature. The town is a gateway to the densely populated eastern hinterland and a point of contact between that hinterland and

the rich mid-western and western parts of Nigeria. As the Niger River is navigable to the north and south, Onitsha is well-situated for trade and became an important trading and missionary centre from the mid-nineteenth century. Trade also gave rise to a rapid growth of its population; from a little over ten thousand people in 1921, the population of Onitsha had risen to 96,000 in 1960 and passed the 100,000 mark by the time of the Nigerian civil war in 1967. The increase in population was attended by an increase in educational institutions at the primary and secondary levels and a consequent growth in the number of primary and secondary schools in the east of Nigeria and perhaps in the whole of West Africa, especially since the 1940s when the maximum educational expansion first occurred.

The end of World War II had direct bearing on the rise of the market literature. The return, in large numbers, of demobilised soldiers resulted in an influx of primary school leavers from the adjoining villages to the town of Onitsha. The returned soldiers, armed with their war bonuses, came to set up trade as mechanics, furniture makers, shoe makers, blacksmiths, ironmongers, and so on. Others used their money to establish printing presses or to become traders. They invited their relations from the villages to join them as apprentices and trading assistants and these, in turn, increased the population of secondary and primary graduates continually turned out by the local schools.

The influx in the 1940s of Indian and Victorian drugstore pulp magazine fiction was a factor that affected the format of pamphlet literature. By far the most significant factor that made the rise of the literature in Onitsha inevitable was the concentration of large numbers of locally-owned and operated printing presses in the town. Before 1940, several weekly newspapers had been established in Onitsha, Aba, Calabar, Port Harcourt and other eastern Nigerian towns by the old-guard of Sierra Leonean editor-printers. These could not be well-serviced in the war years and fell into disuse. Their owners sold them to new proprietors who thenceforth converted them to the less ambitious function of producing stationery, posters, and business and greeting cards. At the end of the war, government and some private newspaper proprietors in southern Nigeria were able to import new printing presses. They used these to replace old worn-out presses which they sold at knock-down prices to the public.

These second-hand printing presses were bought and set up in and around Onitsha Market and were ready to hand for the printing of the pamphlets as soon as writers appeared. In a sense, the availability of the presses and their card-printing activities encouraged would-be writers to exploit the existing facility. The fact that pamphlet writing grew out of the earlier miscellaneous activity is still evident in the large numbers of advertisements inserted by publishers on the back pages of pamphlets, inviting readers to order business-cards, greeting-cards, school-report cards, work-rules, and posters which are also produced by the publishers.

The existence of the Onitsha Main Market itself was crucial to the rise of pamphlet literature. Most of the pamphlets were printed in or around this area

and could be seen, during the heyday of the literature, in their hundreds on racks in one section of the market. Numerous bookstores in the vicinity of the market which sold text books and stationery also stocked the pamphlets. The market also provided the hard-core readership and some of the writers and publishers.

AUTHORSHIP AND READERSHIP

Like most other creative writers in West Africa, the authors of the popular pamphlets were amateurs rather than professionals. They all had full-time occupations from which they earned their living, unless they were students. They were therefore more concerned with seeing themselves in print than making money out of their writing. Authorship was more or less its own reward and was regarded with great respect approximating awe. Publishers took advantage of the authors. A publisher offering '2s 6d to £5 5s for a good tortoise story' would pay an amount nearer the 2s 6d than the £5 5s. The pamphlet authors very often received a fixed amount and then forewent any further financial interest in the work. The idea of paying a royalty to the pamphlet authors was unknown

A large number of the pamphlet authors were school-teachers, local printing press owners and booksellers. Others were newspaper reporters, railway men, clerks, traders, artisans, farmers and schoolboys. Schoolboys sometimes wrote under pseudonyms in order to hide their identity from their school authorities. The fact is that those who wrote for the pamphlet literature publishers were not university people; at best, they might have had some secondary education but most only had primary education. The educational background of the authors rendered their writing as literature by the people; but the intervention of the publisher was always a palpable reality. At its peak, the pamphlet activity had assumed the form and appearance of a minor industry. The publisher who was also the printer sometimes briefed the author, especially if he was a new writer, with regard to what titles were most likely to catch the readers' eyes and what phrases were bound to attract attention.

Market literature speaks directly to its audience. Its authors escape the recondite styles and technical complexities that distinguish the art of the intellectuals. They are eager to make contact with their audience as easily and painlessly as possible. That is not to say that the popular authors have no concern for art or do not organise their material and present it on discernible creative principles. Rather, what is being emphasised is that their art is often functional and geared to communicating maximally and concretely with the reader without making too great a demand on his/her critical and evaluative judgment. Such creative devices as irony, paradox and bathos that characterize the works of intellectual Nigerian authors and multiply and deepen their meanings and insights are not generally encountered in the popular pamphlets, except when they get there unintentionally. It would, therefore, be a mistake to apply to market literature the critical tools fashioned for the evaluation of literature by intellectual authors. Since explicitness is the trademark of the market literature, the first principle of

its criticism should be to establish at every stage the vital relationship between the author, his audience and the matter of his communication. This relationship is so concrete and discernible that it sets the market literature apart from other forms of writing in Nigeria.

The explicitness of this tripartite relationship is best demonstrated by the brief prefaces which accompany the texts of market literature. The author of a market booklet or his publisher or a sympathetic third party supplies a preface which graphically explains the intention of the work, what the author/publisher expects the audience to gain from reading the text. It is obvious, therefore, that the target audience is always assumed by the author/publisher and produced according to the needs ascribed to it. It is quintessentially literature of the people — literature by Nigerians for Nigerians. Because of the obviousness of the assumed needs of the audience and the intention of an author to supply those needs in a direct means-ends manner, the pamphlet prefaces tend to read like manifestoes. A few examples would illustrate this distinctive convention of the market literature.

Of the welter of intentions behind the creation of the literature, three seem most commonly mentioned by the pamphlet authors. Most authors would insist that their works are meant to instruct their readers, to reform their moral lives and characters and to entertain them. These purposes are stated without any equivocation in the prefaces.

In his work titled *Beauty is a Trouble*, Ralph Obioha declares his intention as follows:

There are three points that stand as key or a guide in the writer's mind: first, to find out whether the story is educative, secondly, to see that it is entertaining and third, to see that it is instructive.¹

John Ngoh, a young grammar-schoolboy author writes in *Florence in the River of Temptation*:

My aim in composing this novel is to expose vice and praise virtue. To this end I hope my readers will find in this novel an unforgettable lesson which will be their guide in times of difficulty.

N.O. Madu writes in *Miss Rosy in the Romance of True Love*:

The case dealt with in this story is a valuable one, and readers will discover for themselves that the married life of today is often a force, a bargain or a vulgarity rather than a great spiritual enterprise.

Tomas Iguh, warning the reader against obsession with love in *The Sorrows of Love* writes:

This novel is designed to serve as a lesson to some of our young boys and girls who feel that there is another heaven in the game of love.

S.E. Eze says simply of his book, *How to Know a Good Friend*, 'It contains important facts and gives good advice to men and women'. G.O. Obiaga, a

pharmacist, writes in the preface to his brother's novelette, *Boys and Girls of Nowadays*:

The story is full of life, and it depicts the life of young men and women of Nigeria today. The moral drawn from it is educative, cautioning and forestalling all in one, and I hope all and sundry will read and enjoy this story and keep a copy of this interesting booklet.

Sometimes the language in which the moral purpose is stated is less soberly prosaic; it can be witty or even titillating as in Speedy Eric's *Mabel the Sweet Honey That Poured Away*, the story of a child-prostitute who lived fast and died young:

Her skin would make your blood flow in the wrong direction. She was so sweet and sexy, knew how to romance. She married at sixteen. But she wanted more fun. Yet it ended at seventeen. And what an end! So thrilling.

The last remark applies to the story, of course, not to Mabel's life which is seriously censured.

Sometimes, in their anxiety to declare their intentions, the prefaces may embody absurd or incongruous statements as in R. Okonkwo's *Never Trust All That Love You*, in which the author is said to be

showing modern Nigerianization ... [and the] ... capacity of educating the illiterates, who through the means of reading the good novels written in good English language learn greatly.

Absurdities abound in the short statement. The assumption that illiterates can read 'the good novels' and that only they need instruction in the use of good English is absurd, but it reveals the eagerness of this pamphlet author to instruct and improve his audience. In the view of the market literature authors, illiteracy is akin to a disease and the inability to communicate effectively is a serious handicap to anyone intending to make good use of contemporary life and its opportunities.

EDUCATION OF THE READER

The qualities of market literature appear in all their explicitness when discussed against the background of the uses defined for the literature in the authors' prefatory statements: namely, that they are used to inform, to reform morals and manners and to provide entertainment.

The educational role of pamphlet literature was regarded very highly by the authors and their audience. On the level at which the pamphlet authors and their readers perceived life, acquisition of knowledge was very important. The thousands of students who attended the primary and secondary schools in a town like Onitsha and the army of young men and women who poured into the night schools at the end of the day's work demanded extra sources of reading matter to supplement the sources available in the school system. Pamphlet authors cashed in on this existing need and flooded the market with revision and examination-

made-easy texts. Indeed, it is estimated that as much as one-third of the market literature texts were devoted to educational purposes.

In addition to the pamphlets that provide ready-made knowledge and reach-me-down answers used for educational purposes, there are other booklets which prepare their readers for more purposeful participation in the emerging industrial culture. Such works inculcate skills that range from the basic maintenance of simple machinery to how to launder clothes. Pamphlets indicating educational interests include *How to Write Good English Composition*, *How to Write Business Letters and Applications*, *How to Succeed in Life*, *How to Know Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and English Languages*, *How to Know Proverbs and Many things*, *How to Make Meetings* and *Pocket Encyclopaedia of Etiquette and Commonsense*. Pamphlets not devoted to educational purposes like those above have tucked away at their end certain types of information meant to increase readers' awareness, under the heading of 'Things Worth Knowing'. At the end of Mazi Raphael Nwankwo's *The Bitterness of Politics and Awolowo's Last Trial*, for example, the following information is inserted: 'The world population was said to have reached 3,180,000,000 in mid-1963. This amounts to a gain of 185 million in only three years. Of this population, the Republic of China occupies almost one quarter'. This is the sort of information a publisher could glean from *Reader's Digest* or United Nations statistical publications.

Critics are not lacking who find the educational aspirations of the pamphlet authors and their publishers less than beneficial to the growth of healthy educational habits. First, they question the pamphlet writers' capacity to play the role of educators when they themselves may be in real need of education. Then, while admitting that the acquisition of new knowledge is desirable, they condemn the tendency to give and receive it unthinkingly and thus promoting the habit of thinking and writing in clichés.

REFORMING THE READER

Next to providing education, the popular authors devoted a great deal of effort to reforming the reader the better to prepare him or her to face the social, economic and emotional problems of contemporary life. The booklet authors reveal their didactic intentions in their dealing with these problems. They are at their most didactic when they use their works to explore economic problems.

The theme of work excites them enormously. In many of the advice books, the necessity of hard work is stressed. It is rooted in the work ethic which it proclaims unequivocally. The writers also extol the virtue of frugality. Many pamphlets advise young men and women on how to conduct themselves in order to make the best of their economic opportunities. If it is remembered that most of the readers of the market literature are young men and women learning to become traders from the more firmly established masters, apprentices learning some trade or craft from master tradesmen and craftsmen, self-employed artisans and tradesmen and, of course, students soon to become immersed in one kind of occupation

or another, then it becomes obvious why the pamphlet authors feel this strong impulse to use the popular medium to advise the inexperienced town-dwellers. If it is also remembered that in the 1940s the drift from the villages to the city was proceeding at a greater pace than ever before, then the need to give guidance to the newcomers to the city becomes overwhelming. The authors use their works to warn against the snares of the city. They warn against sloth and indolence, as well as against extravagance and falling victim to the wiles of swindlers, money-doublers, card-sharps, good-time girls and prostitutes. The destructive effect of alcohol is also demonstrated in the pamphlets.

The authors warn their readers through cautionary tales, examples and anecdotes against the evils by which individuals lose their money in the city. Three causes of economic ruin are often heavily underlined. They are: getting involved with money-grabbing women; addiction to the bottle; and 'highlife' or the tendency to live beyond one's economic means. Thus the pamphlets carry such cautionary titles as *Money Is Hard to Get But Easy to Spend*, *Why Boys Never Trust Money-Monger Girls*, *Drunkards Believe Bar Is Heaven*, *Beware of Harlots and Many Friends*, *Beware of Women*, *Why Harlots Hate Married Men and Love Bachelors*, and *Money Is Hard but Women Don't Know*. If some of these works read like misogynist tracts, it is mainly because the writers reflect popular prejudice in a largely chauvinistic society. Their sentiments are not passed through an intellectual filter and they are not concerned with political correctness.

The authors adopt various devices for conveying their economic lessons. These range from straight-forward tracts on the need for hard work, frugality and avoidance of the numerous situations from which people lose their money, through simple catechisms, to didactic tales and anecdotes. Artistic sketches and cartoons are sometimes brought in to give concreteness to situations. In one of the novelettes, a character is shown chopping wood in the sun. Then he is shown in a drinking orgy, surrounded by bottles of beer (some empties on the floor). Then he is shown sitting on a wooden bench, very depressed, with his head in his hands. The caption says: 'This man is down and out and ruined by drink'.

In Okenwa Olisa's work titled *Money Hard to Get but Easy to Spend*, the positives of a money-making, working life are stressed in the following sermon:

He who seeks for money and wants to have it must not say that the rain is too much, he must work under it. He must not say that the sun is coming, he must work under it. He must sing his favourite song and work. He must not fear work. He must work hard. He must be obedient. He must be humble. He must be punctual to work. He must endure insult, abuse. He must take trouble of many kinds. He must not play with his business. If a tradesman, he must be honest and sincere to his customers. He must improve his handwork in order to attract customers. He must not charge too much. He must not play with his business, otherwise his business plays with him.

This tract is obviously directed at the small man, as a guide to the apprentice, the manual worker, the artisan, the shopkeeper and everyone within the lower income

bracket. This is why there is such emphasis on obedience, humility and honesty, sincerity and improvement of handiwork, in order to attract customers.

Or, take this brief catechism in R. Okonkwo's *Why Boys Never Trust Money-Monger Girls*:

- Question: Why do boys never trust girls of the present time?
 Answer: Because they are money-mongers and cannot tell the truth.
 Question: Can a money-monger girl love you if you do not spend money for her?
 Answer: No.
 Question: Why do many girls love some ugly men?
 Answer: Because they can get money from them.
 Question: Is it good for you to forget your business and think of your girlfriend?
 Answer: It is not. No money, no girls.

In fact, the last point in this catechism is typified by the incident described in C.C. Obiaga's *Boys and Girls of Nowadays* in which Jerry, the main character, is a young man with little education. The reader is told that because Jerry was 'a little bit educated but his education was not enough to put him into any office work', he had to settle down to petty trading. At first he works hard and conscientiously and becomes rich. Then success goes to his head and he changes his lifestyle, substituting extravagance for his previously sensible and moderate life. His new style is described disapprovingly:

Very soon, Jerry changed his abode. He who was living in a filthy room now had three rooms in a storied building. His house was so furnished that one would see one's reflection on the floor and (in) the furniture in his sitting room. People used to say that he had the biggest radiogram in town. And it was true, ducky. Jerry sewed many clothes for different occasions. He had upwards of five suits, many trousers, native dresses and all. Whenever one came to his house, music would be booming from the radiogram. He was as happy as could be...

The signs are written large that the change in Jerry's lifestyle does not augur well for his trading business. There is implied criticism in the carefully documented description of his new style of living — a move from a single bedroom accommodation to a three-room flat in a 'storied building,' the quality of his furniture (people could see their reflections on the furniture), the numerous suits of clothes for every occasion and the unceasing booming of music from the mighty radiogram. All this suggests that Jerry has already taken a false step which will bring him failure. He has failed to adhere to the motto of all those struggling for success: 'Business before Pleasure'. He is trying to have his pleasure before he has worked enough for it. He has not even paid back his brother's capital loan.

His fate is sealed when he falls desperately in love with Obiageli, a pretty but heartless schoolteacher who plunges him deeply into debt and then deserts him. Before she walks out on him, she delivers this abusive farewell speech:

You are bankrupt and that is why you are selling your things. It may interest you then to know that I don't love you any longer. I can't afford to marry a poor man. From today,

do not talk to me. Of course, I don't expect to see you in the bars of hotels (where he had lavished much of his money on her) — you are an idiot.

This last shot is probably the writer's opinion too. Only idiots and suckers allow themselves to be beguiled by feckless young women when they have already secured the means by which they could raise their economic status.

Some of the views expressed by the authors are tilted heavily against women, but it should be borne in mind that the popular authors are all men whose views reflect popular prejudices at the time of the appearance of their works. The picture has since changed as more and more women assume positions of economic responsibility within the social structure and women are writing back to redress the balance in their creative works.

THEME OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Side by side with the theme of economic success is the theme of love. The pamphlet authors are fascinated by it and explore it from different angles and perspectives. The following titles represent a fair sample of the varied perspectives from which different authors deal with the theme: *The Voice of Love*, *Public Opinion on Lovers*, *Love in the Real Sense*, *Salutation is Not Love*, *Love is Infallible*, *The Bitterness of Love*, *The Miracle of Love*, *Tragic Love*, *Disaster in the Realm of Love*, *They Died in the Bloom of Love*, *The Price of Love*, *The Disappointed Lover*, *Love With Tears*, *The Game of Love*, *Romance in a Nutshell*, *Love is Immortal*, *Love at First*, *Hate at Last*, *The Sweetness and Kingdom of Love*, and *The Temple of Love*.

The concept of romantic love is new in Nigeria and Africa, new in the sense that it came with European contact, especially with the introduction of European literatures. Any grammar-school boy or girl who has read Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night* or *As You Like It*; Jane Austen's novels; Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*; and Dickens' *David Copperfield* (these are among the popular set books for English Literature courses in West Africa) would be acquainted with the central position of romantic love in the lives of English people, especially in their marriage tradition. Other sources include the Victorian romance fiction of popular authors like Bertha Clay and Marie Corelli which entered the Nigerian market in the 1940s and 1950s and left quite an impression on the student population of those heady days. The cinema and certain romantic magazines, such as *Woman's Own* and *True Romances* kept the concept of romantic love alive among young people of school-going age. Through these sources, romantic notions of love and marriage make a strong entry into the Nigerian scene and set up parallel values to the old 'traditional' code of sexual behaviour.

Because romantic love and its rituals are new in West Africa, the pamphlet authors take it upon themselves to teach these rituals through their booklets. There are numerous booklets purporting to instruct the reader on the mystique of love and love relationships. There are such titles as *How to Speak to Girls*

and *Win Their Love*, *How to Speak and Write to Girls for Friendship*, *The Way to Make Friends With Girls*, *How to Get a Lady in Love and Romance With Her*, *The Art of Love In the Real Sense*. One of the most prolific producers of advices on love, Felix N. Stephens, has written, among other works, *The School of Love and How to Attend It*, *A Journey Into Love*, *How to Play Love*, and *How to Get a Lady in Love*.

As part of the convention of love relationships, love letters play a prominent part. The young lovers are often too shy to approach the objects of their interest face-to-face; they prefer to contact them through letter writing. Pamphlet authors attempt to satisfy this need by composing stereotyped love letters to meet all occasions and conditions of love relationships, or by teaching the reader to compose such letters. There are numerous booklets with such titles as *How to Write Love Letters*, *95 Love Letters and How to Compose Them*, *Our Modern Love Letters*, *How to Write and Reply to Letters for Marriage, Engagement Letters, Love Letters, etc.* The use of prepared love letters robs the relationships based on them of seriousness and spontaneity. To the pamphlet authors and their audience the theme of love sustained by love letters is handled at the most superficial level, more as a game than anything else. Occasionally, the matter is handled seriously and reveals deep insights into one of the most problematic areas of the relationships between young people of the opposite sexes. But, by and large, the love pamphlets reveal that the pamphlet authors seldom handle the theme with authenticity. They are often in love with the idea of being in love and the efforts to explore love experiences fall flat and become melodramatic.

Next to the failure of the pamphlet authors to explore love with credibility must be mentioned their subdued treatment of physical sex. The pamphlet writers are outstandingly reticent on matters of physical sex. They impose a severe censorship on themselves and out-Victorian the Victorians in their refusal to deal with such matters openly. Most of their potentially seductive scenes fizzle out because of the lack of will to follow things to their logical conclusions. In one or two cases in which physical sex is explored with openness, as in *Mabel, the Sweet Honey that Poured Away*, the intention is to reveal a fearful lesson arising from the breach of this most deadly taboo of pamphlet literature. The severe, puritanical determinism of pamphlet literature decrees that the penalty for sexual indulgence is affliction with a horrible disease, as is the case of Caroline in Ogali A. Ogali's *Caroline, the One Guinea Girl*, or death, as with Mabel in Speedy Eric's *Mabel, the Sweet Honey that Poured Away*.

The market literature authors devote a great deal of attention to marriage. It is a theme of considerable interest to the authors because, as young people, the problems of marriage apply to them as much as to their audience. The critical issue here is whether parents, according to traditional practice and custom, should continue to exercise their rights to determine their daughters' husbands or,

in accordance with modern, Western-oriented practice, the daughters should be allowed to determine whom they wish to marry.

The theme provides one of the stereotypical plots of the popular pamphlets. Usually, there is the father, the villain of the piece, who is portrayed as an old-fashioned and capricious autocrat with some private, often ignoble, motive for wishing to marry his daughter to a particular suitor whom his daughter has very good reason to abhor. The old man may show decided partiality towards this suitor because he is an old friend of the family (as in Cletus Nwosu's *Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny*), because he is rich and will pay a high bride-price (as in Ogali's *Veronica My Daughter*, Highbred Maxwell's *Back to Happiness*, and R. Okonkwo's *The Game of Love*), because he is both rich and an old friend (as in Okenwa Olisa's *Elizabeth My Lover*), or because he is a prominent politician whose glory would be expected to reflect on his wife's family (as in Olisa's *About Husband and Wife Who Hate Themselves*).

In confrontation with the father and his rejected candidate are the lovers, the daughter and her chosen suitor. Between these adversaries stands the mother of the family, torn between her loyalty to her husband and her maternal duty to her distressed daughter. In the end, her gentle persuasion and appeal to the parental compassion of her husband, sometimes helped by the opinion of some members of the extended family and the neighbours prevail on the father to yield to the views of the young people.

The authors' sympathy very often lies with the girls, whose attitudes are regarded as 'progressive' because they stand for the concept of marriage as an affair between two young people 'in love' and not with the fathers who, by insisting on their customary right to select their daughters' future husbands, are regarded as 'reactionary', old-fashioned and a nuisance.

The authors show their support for the daughters and their collaborating mothers by giving them the virtue of good education and by making them speak impeccable Queen's English. The fathers are made as unattractive as possible. They are not only depicted as arbitrary, autocratic and small-minded, but they are further damned by being shown as illiterate and saddled with the most atrocious 'pidgin'.

The best known of these pamphlets that deal with the crisis of marriage is Ogali A. Ogali's *Veronica My Daughter*. It was first published in 1961 but has been reissued very many times before and after the Nigerian Civil War. It is so popular that it may have sold more than one million copies. It sold 60,000 copies soon after its appearance.

In this Onitsha market evergreen, Veronica, a secondary school student, is in love with Michael, a young civil servant who is also improving himself by studying at home for higher qualification. Veronica's father, Chief Jombo, wants her to marry Chief Bassey who is wealthy and a friend to Chief Jombo. But Chief Bassey has all the negative qualities. He is forty-nine years of age while Veronica

ELIZABETH
MY
LOVER

A Drama



“LOVE WORKS WONDERS”

is only eighteen years. Chief Bassey is also an illiterate, which discredits him in the eyes of Veronica and her mother, Paulina. Michael, on the other hand, is twenty-four years old, physically attractive, well-behaved and working hard in his spare time to improve his education and status. The situation is explosive but is finally defused when Chief Jombo agrees to an arbitration involving some of his relations, the Principal of Veronica's school and some of the neighbours. As might be expected, Chief Jombo is persuaded to yield to his daughter's wish, and the crisis is resolved. *Veronica My Daughter* is also good theatre. It has been performed before school audiences and on public occasions. There is a lot of humour in the dialogue, in spite of the serious undercurrents. If there is one play many Nigerians know and love, it is Ogali's *Veronica, My Daughter*.

POLITICS AND POLITICAL PERSONALITIES

One area in which market literature authors have made a strong showing is in the large number of pamphlets dealing with political personalities in Africa and occasionally outside Africa. The most popular subjects are African nationalists, but illustrious and 'topical' non-Africans are also sometimes the protagonists. The titles include *Dr. Zik in the Battle for Freedom* (T.O. Iguh); *Zik of Africa, His Political Struggles for Freedom of the Black Race* (Chike Mbadugha); *Boy's Life of Zik, the President of Nigerian Republic* (M. Okenwa); *Heroes of New Africa: Zik, Genius of Today* (Okwu Izuogo); *Dr. Nkrumah in the Struggle for Freedom* (T.O. Iguh); *Dr. Julius Nyerere: A Tribute* (T.I. Nduka), *The Struggles and Trials of Jomo Kenyatta* (T.O. Iguh), *Sylvanus Olympio* (R.I.M. Obioha); *The Life of Alhaji Adegoke Adelabu* (O.A. Ogali).

The leader most mythicised and most written about is Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik) a frontline nationalist of the independence struggle and the first President of Nigeria. As Bernth Lindfors pointed out in *Heroes and Hero-Worship in Nigerian Chapbooks*, this had to do with his being a local boy who made good, a successful Igbo from Onitsha, the home of pamphlet literature. But it was more than that. He was also on the national level, the first nationalist to mobilise the evolving modern class of urban clerks, teachers and artisans into a mass political movement and to infuse them with a spirit of nationalism. His innovative journalism created his reputation in the eyes of the people, and his spell-binding rhetorical style helped to fire the popular imagination. He was vested with powers, some of which were plainly magical and apocryphal. Okenwa Olisa's pamphlet, *Many Things You Must Know about Ogbuefi Azikiwe and Republic of Nigeria* contains most of the popular beliefs about Azikiwe. His education and scholastic successes are seen through the eyes of hero worship. He is portrayed as the enfant terrible to the colonial administration.

The Nigerian and Congo crises of the 1960s were well-covered in pamphlet literature. Patrice Lumumba, the late premier of Congo-Leopoldville (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) became for the pamphlet authors a centralising inspiration. He is characterised as a Christ-like figure, a nationalist

and patriot done to death by a combination of brutal and corrupt adversaries. Tsombe, Lumumba's chief antagonist is painted as a demon, Dag Hammarskjold, the U.N. Secretary General as 'one of the main brains behind Lumumba's death'. The Congo Crisis yielded these pamphlet titles among others: *The Last Days of Lumumba* (T.O. Iguh); *Patrice Lumumba* (O.A. Ogali); *How Lumumba Suffered in Life and Died in Katanga* (Okenwa Olisa); *The Life Story and Death of Mr. Lumumba* (O. Olisa); *The Trials and Death of Lumumba* (F.N. Stephen); *How Tshombe and Mobutu Regretted After the Death of Mr. Lumumba* (F.N. Stephen); *Tshombe of Katanga* (T.O. Iguh); *The Ghost of Patrice Lumumba* (Ogali A. Ogali). Apart from Dr. Azikiwe, no other African nationalist is written about as many times and as committedly as Lumumba.

The Nigerian political crises are well-covered in pamphlet literature as attested by such titles as *N.C.N.C and N.P.C. in Political War Over 1963 Census Figures* (O. Olisa); *The Iniquity and Trial of Awolowo* (G.H.A. Nwala); *The Famous Treason Trial of Awolowo, Enahoro, and 23 Others* (W. Onwuka); *The Bitterness of Politics and Awolowo's Last Appeal* (Mazi Raphael Nwankwo); *The Complete Story and Works of Military Government and Nigerian Current Affairs, Past and Present, The Record of Northern / Western Crisis in Nigeria Since Army Takeover* (C.O. Uwadiogwu); *The Western Nigerian Crisis and the Army Takeover* (1966 Anon.).

Of the non-African personalities, the most written about are President Kennedy of the United States and the German dictator, Adolf Hitler, the first written about positively and the latter from a negative perspective. In *The Life Story and Death of John Kennedy* and *The History and Last Journey of President John Kennedy* both by W. Onwuka, Kennedy is portrayed as a noble soul who is out to bring succour to the blacks of the United States. He is given speeches that reflect the nobility of his spirit, speeches which are a mixture of his own recorded speeches and those of Abraham Lincoln. The *Trial of Hitler* by S.P. Olayede reports a fictitious trial of the German dictator which owes much to the newspaper and radio reports of the Nuremberg trials and that of Eichmann. Onitsha writers see nothing wrong with telescoping different events of historical significance or creating hagiographical accounts of admired public figures in Africa and outside of Africa, and obversely, demonizing historically discredited personages. They readily reflect the myth-making imagination of the population in general and of popular artists in particular.

MARKET LITERATURE AND THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR

Onitsha was disturbed early in the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) and its magnificent market, the home of market literature, was gutted. At the end of the war, a few political booklets appeared, containing the major speeches of the former Biafran head of state, ex-General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu and the ex-Nigerian head of state, ex-General Yakubu Gowon and texts of the Aburi Accord.

A few creative booklets have appeared, in addition to the reprints of the early pamphlet evergreens. Three at least of the new pamphlets deal with the civil war or its aftermath. Ogali A. Ogali's *No Heaven for the Priest* articulates, with a measure of anger previously absent in Ogali's works, the criticisms levelled at the 'relief' clergy who distributed food and medicine (relief materials) from the church aid groups. The end of the war also produced for the first time in Nigerian writing a figure well-known in Greek, Roman, and Italian theatres in the character of the braggart soldier or *miles gloriosus*, except that in the Nigerian case, the braggart soldier is not a comic figure but a sinister creature who was nowhere near the battle-fronts during the civil war but emerged at the end with a stolen rifle with which he terrorises innocent villagers. In *The Tragedy of Civilian Major*, (Nwachukwu) this roving criminal who awards himself a fictitious rank of major creates so much mayhem and disruption that the law-enforcement authority sets up a special task force to apprehend him. Nemesis catches up with him, and he is caught, tried, and executed.

Another pamphlet titled *Mamma-Uwa* (Universal Mother) explores the exploits of a married woman who abandons the respectable roles of mother and wife to become a prostitute and an all-purposes mistress. Her luck runs out, and she comes to an ignoble end.

It is quite obvious that the post-civil war pamphlets present a grimmer picture of life than those produced before the civil war. In the former, the mood has generally been towards the rehabilitation of errant characters. In the post-civil war booklets, no such indulgence is allowed. The feelings of the authors have hardened towards their characters. A very thin line, if at all, separates the evildoer from his or her death. In the large mass of booklets produced before the civil war, only Mabel, the child prostitute, in *Mabel the Sweet Honey That Poured Away*, is not forgiven or allowed to redeem herself.

CONCLUSION

All in all, it is fair to say that the market literature based in Onitsha and its market effectively petered out with the Nigerian civil war but, as stated earlier, it survived residually after the war, when a few new titles appeared and some popular earlier ones were reissued by surviving presses. It is also equally true to say that the literature has survived as a permanent phenomenon of the Nigerian literary history, because it lives in the works of numerous scholars and commentators, including Ulli Beier, Bernth Lindfors, Donatus Nwoga, Ken Post, and Nancy Schmidt, who have explored it in monographs and essays as a major repository of popular tastes and values of the emergent urban masses in Nigeria.

Market literature has also survived in many university and public library collections in Nigeria, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Germany. Major collections are highlighted in the book by Hogg and Sternberg titled *Market Literature from Nigeria: A Checklist*. Numerous private collections exist in individual libraries belonging to academicians, diplomats and even casual

visitors who were in Nigeria in the heyday of market literature. For example, the former Master of Clare College, Cambridge, Lord Ashby, had an impressive Onitsha collection amassed while heading the Ashby Commission on Higher Education in Nigeria. More recently, the literature has found a major promoter in Kurt Thometz, a New York private librarian and collector of rare books. He has a large private collection of Onitsha market booklets. More importantly, he has selected and anthologised the literature in a book titled *'Life Turns Man Up and Down': High Life, Useful Advice and Mad English* (2001). It is a fascinating book.

Finally, the burgeoning video culture of Nigeria which emerged in the 1970s was substantially based in Onitsha Market, as well as in Lagos and some other urban centres of Nigeria. It is regarded by some analysts as a true successor of market literature, but whether the supplanting of the literature by the popular market video is a cultural gain or loss remains an open question.

NOTES

- ¹ Because of the irregularity in the different versions of a published text and the vagaries of text production, it is often unhelpful to cite specific pages; it causes confusion rather than clarity.

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