

Akinwumi Isola. *Treasury of Childhood Memories*. Translated by Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith. Austin, TX: Pan-African University Press, 2016. 192 pp.

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Treasury of Childhood Memories is a recapitulation of aspects of Akinwumi Isola's life up to his early teenage years. Recalling the time when he went by the childhood name Delodun, the author packs together a wide array of childhood memories into 192 pages of breath-holding narrative full of prosaic and poetic renditions, which only a competent user of the language could accomplish. His experience would include full interactions with three other friends. The author does not give specific dates in the memoir, but since he seems to come from a family where Western education is fairly familiar, and assuming that by the time the author finished at the village elementary school he would have proceeded to the city for middle-school education, he could not have been more than twelve to thirteen years of age at the end of his narrative. Originally titled *Ogun Omode* in its original Yoruba rendition, the author provides thirteen captivating chapters accentuating events that depicted his youth — years full of excitement, childhood exuberances, and tremendous youthful hyperactivity.

Isola is a prolific writer, a household name, whose works have long since elevated him to the rare status of an extraordinary celebrity in the circle of ardent promoters of Yoruba culture and accorded him an iconic image in the pantheon of Yoruba creative writers. Isola writes from a perspective that effectively merges and projects the old and the new cultural artifacts. He does so in such a way that they complement rather than hurt each other. Only an individual grounded in the old and the new order — culture, language, education,

etc. — yet is endowed with a repertoire of global knowledge and creative genius can pull off such a feat unscathed.

In his foreword to the memoir, Professor Biodun Jeifo, one of Professor Isola's colleagues, captures the essence of the author in the most succinct and eloquent way:

The writer of this "Treasury of childhood memories," Akinwumi Isola, is one of the best storytellers, or fabulists, or spinners of exquisite yarns I have met in my life (xi).

Having been a student (undergraduate and graduate) of Isola in the 1970s and early '80s, I could not agree more with Professor Jeifo's brilliant assessment. The love affair of Professor Isola with the Yoruba language and culture is demonstrated par excellence in this memoir and indeed in all his works. Although *Treasury of Childhood Memories* is a translated work, anyone with more than just a casual acquaintance with Akinwumi Isola's style of writing, unique aptitude in the use of the language, and rare ability to superlatively utilize its oral tradition would hear his unique voice, energy, fun, and natural theatricality embedded into this memoir in spite of the expected loss through translation. In other words, the writing demonstrates that the author is, on one hand, an embodiment of the culture, and on the other, a master in the maximum utilization of the Yoruba language and all its figures of speech.

In the last few years, I have had the opportunity to read a good number of childhood memories from individuals who grew up in rural Yoruba communities with minimal Western cultural influences (Togun's *Victoria's Son*, Falola's *A Mouth Sweeter Than Salt* and *Counting the Tiger's Teeth*, Odejide's *I Said I Do*, and even my own *Fate of Our Mothers*), and having juxtaposed these with memoirs from non-Yoruba rural communities (Ogbaa's *Carrying My Father's Torch: A Memoir* and Assensoh's *A Matter of Sharing: My Memoir*), I see a consistency across cultures in the narrative patterns, but also the rigid, almost predictable constants in the Yoruba child's experience. This provides a ground for inquiry into the unique genus of themes quintessentially Yoruba to the extent that one might come up with a typology of experience that can be seen only through the eyes of the rural Yoruba child.

Within this paradigm of the author's experience are elements of growing up in the nurture of the family. In most Yoruba communities, the father is the indomitable figure, the receptacle of the family traditions, supremacy, roots, norms, and values, yet the child is secretly powered by the relentless spirit and behind-the-scenes mega-activism of the mother figure/s. The village community is the macro-world of the child, while under the family roof the child feels the most sacred safety of the immediate world to which he owes allegiance. The orientation of the village child is never complete without his

being surrounded by a bevy of friends whose influences augment those from the home, for better or for worse. The child must always be exposed to various forms of education — traditional, Western, etc.

As we see in *Treasury of Childhood Memories*, the home provides a theater for education, both intuitive and acquired knowledge. The child is not without an orientation towards the embrace of a religion (or even religions) — traditional, Christian, Islamic, etc., and, sometimes, a blend of the three (what Mazrui calls the triple heritage of religions). Consequently, there is always a crossroad of conflicts among traditional and foreign religions. Somehow, the Yoruba child is privy to deep and exclusive cultural and other social conversations through eavesdropping, feigned sleep, etc., giving credence to the Yoruba adage that “*Gogo l’eti olofofo; o ni nibi won gbe n so o ni mo ti fi eti ko o*” — literally, the ears of the eavesdropper are always like the hooking stick. That is why he will always say “my ears hooked onto it, when they were talking about it.” Issues of marriages among relatives and neighbors, etc., as well as the relative fairness of marrying girls off despite their reluctance are common themes. Roaming the farmland, getting lost in the forest, coming face-to-face with the intimidating shadow of the dark, and daring adventures in the woods are among the village child’s repertoire of stories.

As the memoir has shown, oral tradition — folktales, taboos, riddles, jokes, etc. — are an integral part of the folk life of the village. The Yoruba child witnesses an upward physical mobility, from the rural to the urban, in order to acquire Western education beyond the basic provision that the village is intrinsically endowed to provide. Migration outside the village community is often regarded as upward mobility, akin to a form of promotion for the one experiencing it. There are always circumstances that highlight the pride of the knowledge of the English language, prompting the less knowledgeable to wear the deceptive cloak of special ability to speak English in the village. The rural Yoruba child’s narrative is almost a genre in itself and while it has yet to be accorded such status, it remains a distinctive subgenre of narrative in the Nigerian literary academy.

In *Treasury of Childhood Memories*, the diabolical gusto of the four stooges, especially the troublesome two — Delodun and his seemingly monozygotic twin brother, Iyiola — is something that calls to every adult’s memory his childhood past, giving credence to the Yoruba saying, “*Àgbà wá búra béwe ò bá se o rí*,” meaning, literally, let the elders swear if they had never been young. The four friends manifest innate childhood neuroses with their attendant spirited antics. The memoir avails us of a wide array of juvenile rascality and the inexhaustible energy of youth. At the same time, the reader clearly sees riddles, jokes, and the battles of wits that make *Childhood Memories* not just about energy-pumping juvenile maladies, but about culturally endowed,

intellectually motivated youngsters who were grounded in intuitive native intelligence.

The first three chapters, which are reviewed more closely here, set the stage for the entire book, introducing us to the four youngsters around whose lives the memoir circles. After these three chapters, we see life in the village and the whole cultural panorama that makes it a complete way of life. Among such are normal communal activities, including the humorous snake lounging in the loose pants of Pa Lafia, a village elder, during what seems like his "slumber of death," as well as the comic relief woven into the labyrinth of gibberish that gushes from the exchange between Olu and Atoke, giving credence to the saying that "*agboogbotan Egun, ija nii da sile*" (half-baked knowledge of a foreign language only gets one in trouble).

In what follows, I provide a fairly detailed sketch of the first three chapters, especially the first. They three chapters set the stage for the remaining segments of the memoir.

The first chapter, rightly titled "The Holidays," is about the long school break experience of the four acquaintances, Delodun, Iyiola, Dolapo, and Akanmu. The truth of "*ore o gbeleta; eleji l'ore gba*" (friendship is crowded with three; two are the real friends), as the Yoruba are wont to say, is demonstrated in the relationship of the four. In the group, Delodun and Iyiola are the closest. Yet, one could still see the four as being close. Yet, as close as they seem to be, the individuals manifest unique natures — physically, mentally, and emotionally. It was during this holiday that those peculiarities were made manifest and individual personalities became apparent. This first chapter is the tale of the four jolly friends and it would be a mere lifeless skeleton void of flesh and blood without a quick peek behind the veil of the four human characters that put life into the memoir.

First and foremost, the quartet aptly demonstrates the sociological reality that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and so each member fills in at any point of weakness in the chain. For instance, among the four buddies Delodun fills in at the moments when reason is needed; Iyiola provides strength, especially in squaring off against the bravado of a tormentor; Dolapo is the sweet talker but is readily available when the need arises to do the most demeaning of all chores; and Akanmu is the person needed to do manual labor like clearing the field. More importantly, each of the four characters is a didactic element that Isola's memoir insists on disseminating. With them, the reader quickly learns that there are redeeming qualities in even the worst of all humans and every angel has its own devil's moments.

That life does not have to be taken too seriously is the message conveyed in the characterization of Iyiola, the one whose flat belly never divulges his ravenous propensity for eating, and the oldest of the bunch. He would poke

fun at anybody, dead or alive. Iyiola, with his kamikaze style of living, would look death in the face and laugh it to scorn; as, for example, in his relentless challenge to the knife-wielding Hausa man and disarming him with unabated boldness, making the audacious medicine man to eat humble pie. What about his insistence on chasing the deadly snake, an asp, until he beat the serpent into submission, smashing its head to a flat pulp? If a child cried in the room, and Iyiola was not too far from the vicinity, it was asking the obvious to inquire into who caused the child the pain — it had to be Iyiola! Needless to say, causing mischief was Iyiola's second nature. "In adolescence Iyiola was a handful; incorrigible was what he was! He was the lightning in thunder, as strong-willed and headstrong; stubborn as a mule and always the one daring enough to push the envelope" (p97). Occasional class clown, Iyiola was the one who ridiculed the fake trousers of the village teacher that got the entire class in trouble and led the village headmaster to an uncharacteristic outburst of an uncontrollable laughter on hearing the details of the event from the teacher.

Iyiola is a unique character, enigmatic in all ways. Yet he has the magic of turning enemies into friends after humiliating them and bringing them to their knees. Imagine the saga of Iyiola and Sade, in which Sade would have lost her life were it not for providence in the person of the lumberjack who came to the rescue. Yet, "Perhaps the most surprising, even ironic thing about the whole incident was that after all the hot feelings, the embarrassments, and the punishment, Iyiola and Sade became not just pals, but they turned out to be the best of pals thereafter" (72). That the victim became the best pal of the victimizer is an enigmatic paradox. Iyiola is the only spin-doctor capable of providing a logical explanation to the otherwise illogical scenario. Or, how would one explain the extreme prank played on the classroom teacher, Mr. Oduote, who was bamboozled into the game of Iyiola's name-calling and eventually became a laughing stock to all students in class and the object of the headmaster's irrepressible amusement. Yet, "it appeared that after the incident, (the teacher) had sort of warmed up to Iyiola; he must have realized that to maintain control in the classroom and minimize conflict, he and Iyiola would have to be on friendly terms. Of course, there is no denying the fact that Iyiola's trouble-making can truly test any teacher's mettle" (76).

Delodun, the slingshot specialist, is the symbolic representation of the intellectual wing of the four jolly rascals. Occasional serving as the lead horse, he would do the brainwork — finish the homework and pass the end product around for his intellectually challenged comrades to copy. He had a way with words and sporadically played the role of the *agent provocateur*, the Èsù at the crossroad, who would spark rancor among his friends, especially Dolapo and Iyiola, and end up being the hero to settle the dispute. And of course

because occasionally there was no love lost between Iyiola and Dolapo, Delodun was always the messenger of peace at hand to diplomatically quench the in-house imbroglio. This was amply demonstrated in the duo's exchange of quick jabs during the scuffle between them. Delodun stepped into it, and the tense situation soon turned into an atmosphere of peace and tranquility as the warring friends quickly graduated to the exchange of high-fives at the instance of Dolapo's call for peace: "Okay! Now, you two, let's have no more fighting. That is it, it's done, finished!" I, the peacemaker announced to all. This was how I patched up the disagreement, whatever it was, between Dolapo and Iyiola" (31).

Delodun was not only endowed with the diplomatic skills of quenching fiery darts between associates, but he was the adults' pet, a teacher's dream, and could also run with the velocity of quicksilver because, according to him, "boasting aside, speed is my middle name, my forte, if you will" (30). He downplays his astute brightness, making it clear that his outward manifestations of perfection and pacific behavior were intuitive survival instincts. For here is the secret: "To the adult world," he writes,

I was the picture-perfect child, the one every parent wished for. But what choice did I have? Little did people realize that I was 'clever' for a reason. It was the only way I knew how to earn and guard my 'great kid's reputation. Who would deny that ingenuity does go a long way? There was good reason why they lauded me as "*The-one-whose-silence-never-betrays-his-allegiance.*"

In addition, Delodun believed in *quid pro quo*, the personal philosophy that earned him such a great reputation not only among his comrades but even among the elders in the village square. "There was good reason why they (the elders) lauded me as "*The-one-whose-silence-never-betrays-his-allegiance.* Another reason why my friends so willingly acquiesced and were at my back and call was because I practiced unconditionally my belief in 'one hand washing the other,' and like them," the author writes, "I, too, always washed theirs" (99).

That outward display of macho-militancy may add to the longevity of the coward is one huge lesson to learn in the modes of operation of Dolapo, the third in the hierarchy of the chronological age among the friends. He "had an acid tongue and an arsenal of crafty fighting tricks" (29). Delodun would occasionally let him loose on adults who tried to harass the former, and of course, the loose cannon, Dolapo, would reduce an adult woman to tears through his tongue-lashing skill. He was all mouth with little muscle, as his encounter with Iyiola quickly revealed. You could call Dolapo "a mouth sweeter than salt," and you would be just right. Dolapo was "a master

of elocution whose tongue never tired. Talk about the gifted ventriloquist! His gift for narrating was incomparable. To hear him tell a story, one would think he was there in the moment of the act" (p100). Dolapo is not only good at using the word, he makes it work to ensure his continuing survival in the village world governed by the law of survival of the fittest.

That life is a "dirty job but someone has to do it" is not a cliché but an empirical reality when close attention is paid to the youngest of the bunch, Akanmu, who "was known to be the industrious one, the work horse" (100). For example,

During the season of reed-grass harvesting and field clearing at school, Akanmu not only harvested his share in little or no time but also always turned up to help others meet their quota. There was never a load too heavy for him to handle, and literally, there was no tree he could not climb. He even climbed lean, sky-high palm trees to the very top without the support of climbing garters to cut palm leaves for broom-making. Unquestionably, the most dependable one of our four-some, Akanmu was the one our elder brothers always sought out to entrust with errands because no errand was ever too demeaning for him (100).

Chapter 2, "Respite," is the romantic recapitulation of the blissful and delightful dry season through the eyes of the Yoruba village child. Hunting for and trapping small game, the pastime of the village lads; quiet and peaceful sleep in the dead of the night; and the absence of the wet, unpleasant and irritating vegetation and filthy environment are those pleasing endowments of life that help the Yoruba to jubilantly declare that life in the village is like the final wish of a triumphant entry into the realm of eternity! In this chapter we see Delodun as the master catapult slinger. He fired his peculiar but popular organic ballistic missiles with pinpoint accuracy, felling birds, squirrels, and other small game with the skill of a true hunter. In fact, one day on an errand to gather cocoa leaves for his mother, our main character, Delodun, ended up bagging a big squirrel, an experience that would encourage him to go farther on a hunting expedition to impress his relatives who were going to visit the family from afar off. But as the people say, warfare is always the nemesis for the warrior — it is whatever a person knows to do best that becomes his own undoing! This hunting success would encourage him to strive for greater glory, ending in an escapade of epic proportions that ended up with the entire farmstead having to go on a search party for the young hunter, who had dozed off on the farm and snored through the dead of the night. Although it would be an experience that would earn him the title of the "brave one," the aches and pains of it were memories that Delodun would never forget.

The third chapter, "School Resumes," touches on the problems of colonial education practices and their attendant dread for the village child. Teachers in the village are held in high esteem; and like the village pastors, their roles in the community are sacrosanct. The main motivation of the parents sending their children to school is so that they may grow up to be a teacher or be like a teacher. Corporal punishment is the bane of learning for many a child. Doling out heavy sanctions on the child through heavy pummeling is enough to encourage playing hooky, getting late to school, and even dropping out altogether. Delodun once confessed that, trashings aside, school was the perfect fit for him. It is in this chapter that the reader witnesses many of the school-related antics of the four. School would certainly be boring without occasional antics. Students' ability to prey on each other's weaknesses and play on their teachers' peculiarities are a safety valve for surviving the dread of the teachers' relentless beating.

Childhood excitement is further displayed in our characters' participating in the Eegun (masquerade) festivals, as well as the oxymoronic fun in the tragedy of Baba Ode's overdosing on the cure-all medicine administered by Arisaya (Isaiah), the itinerant bush apothecary, who would quickly slip away from the villagers' sight after what seemed like malpractice following his patient's death. The exchange of blows between obstinate Iyiola and the lethargic Olusola continue the growing saga of the farmstead, while the unannounced visit of the hostile school superintendent, which threw the entire school into utter pandemonium, adds to the fun of village life. Finally, we see the inseparability of Iyiola and Delodun — physically and emotionally, which often exposed Delodun to the collateral damage of the former's antics. (The inevitability of their separation will terminate the memoir.) This final chapter on the four friends' separation underscores an integral part of the rites of passage that they must endure on the highway of life and in their journey towards maturity.

The whole essence of the memoir is clear: this, indeed, is a reflective and enthusiastic celebration of the joyous childhood years as well as of the dreaded moment of parting when the saying that "twenty children don't play together for twenty years" is seen to be part of the natural stream of life, an empirical truth that must flow through the course of age — a natural idiosyncrasy that is time-tested and experience-proven. This is a medley of thoughts, a stream of consciousness of a Yoruba village child captured in thirteen short, remarkable early childhood anecdotes encapsulated in various chapters.

Quite unlike many characters in the subgenre of the village child narrative, the author seems to come from a relatively enlightened family, apparently not too foreign to Western education and its attendant culture. For example, Delodun, the literary character, writes that during the holiday when he and

his bosom buddy, Iyiola, planned to implement a major project, "I quickly brushed my teeth when I returned to my parents' cabin" (39). Unless something else is lost in translation, the statement would seem to indicate a "modern" family with familiarities with the western culture, for otherwise a typical village child would talk of "run *orin*," or "run *pákò*" (chewing the stick), rather than brushing the teeth. Similarly, in the kidnapping saga of Delodun's beloved sister, Ayoka, our protagonist did not waste time, and like the ancient Greek Pheidippides, credited for initiating the marathon race, Delodun ran to his beloved aunt in another village to report the kidnapping incident. The aunt, a popular cocoa produce trader, hurriedly jumped on her bicycle and mobilized two police officers to jail the culprit. This does not read like a typical village experience of the colonial days, but rather indicates the experience of a family close to Western culture. A woman able to wield such power was a rarity; and to mobilize cops with such alacrity was unheard of, and riding a bike of her own would have been abnormal in the typical village narrative.

The golden rule for judging any consequential semantic outcome and useful end product of textual translation must be the proximity of the heart of the originator of the text to that of the one who must translate it. This is because translations involve an appreciation of the complex interlocking between skilful cultural understanding, interpretation, and mental imagination of the language/s involved. The famous Italian dictum, *traduttore traditore*, "a translator is a traitor," has always been true when the rule of proximity of the heart is not observed. In the case of Akinwumi Isola's memoir and the rendition of the same by Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith, a translator here is not a traitor but a loyal collaborator, a metaphoric painter who brings out the beauty of the intellectual art of an architect, or, so to speak, the beautiful color that showcases the organic skills of the mason (master builder).

I would be remiss if I did not praise the superior skill of the translator, Professor Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith. Clearly, hearing the voice of an author through a translated version of his or her work is uncommon in the difficult task of translation. Yet this was not an issue with *Treasury of Childhood Memories*. Smith's skill took Isola's work across the Atlantic without any major loss of literary merit and its gem of cultural solidity. This is no doubt an immeasurable credit to the acumen of this translator. The ability to convey with succinctness the rich repertoire of Isola's life experience and capture with ease in the English language much of the oral traditions embedded into the memoir is a literary achievement that could be attained only by a skillful translator. In fact, this translation itself is a dream document for stylisticians and language analysts, and indeed should be a subject of stylistic and syntactic analyses. I am convinced the work would make a field day for a competent language analyst.

A componential analysis of the two texts — the original and the translated version — would be in order; the use of contemporary Western surface language and common clichés (American, for the most part) to convey an ancient, deeply rooted, and culture-laced narrative is of great interest in this document. As the blurb writers have indicated in many different ways, I am myself simply in awe of the skill of the translator — the ability to skillfully weave together English words that produce a crisp, tight, and neat equivalent of the Yoruba intent is *nonpareil!*

In their blurb entries for the book, notable scholars and/or users of the Yoruba language expressed admiration for the quality of the work both in its original and translated forms. They spoke to the quality of Akinwumi Isola in this memoir and noted the excellence with which the translation of Professor Smith conveys the memoir to the skillful readers of the memoir. Tejumola Olaniyan, the Louise Durham Reed Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, describes the author as “a master storyteller,” and the memoir as “filled to the brim and overflowing with gems!” Dotun Ogundeji, professor of linguistics at the University of Ibadan, seconds Olaniyan’s sentiment when he quips that the memoir “is the product of a Yoruba master story-teller in the hands of a professional literary translator.” Or, as Duro Adeleke, professor of linguistics and African languages at the University of Ibadan, puts it, “the translator’s skill is forcefully demonstrated in Pamela Olubunmi Smith’s ability to capture and retrieve the Yoruba cultural nuances in her translation.” Adeleke Adeeko, Humanities Distinguished Professor at the Ohio State University, noted how much we learn through Isola’s work and Pamela Smith’s translation, and further noted that “if the loving parents, quirky teachers, peculiar school inspectors, cranky older neighbors play their parts well, traveling into future decades is less fearsome.” Akintunde Akinyemi, the University of Florida’s professor of Yoruba, describes the book as “an excellent translation in which nothing of recognized import in the original has been consciously excluded.” Reflecting on the translation, the committed public intellectual, Ikhida R. Ikheloa, describes the reproduction of “Akinwumi Isola’s work as bringing to light the genius of the author, and “proves herself an enthusiastic, passionate and deep spiritual story teller.” Akinloye Ojo, professor at the University of Georgia notes that “the enjoyable narration of Isola’s juvenile stories is kept in Smith’s translation.” Independent scholar Olayinka Agbetuyi is right on the money when the critic notes that the Smith’s “mastery of English narrative structures coupled with her astute understanding of Yoruba culture brings out a unique flavor in this translation[. . .].” The scholar-poet Amatoritsero Ede sheds a socio-spiritual insight into the strength of this translation when he writes that the Smith “retains the romantic mood of the original — that of a serene, if tumultuous, carefree world of innocence that is

forever lost." Finally, Sola Akande, publisher of Yew Books, Ibadan, Nigeria, knowing the original Yoruba version of the memoir, evokes the typological nature of this memoir to the Yoruba child's experience as the critic confesses, "Remembering my tender and school age pranks, Smith's translation made me 'jack-laugh' and tear up at the very same points I did when I was editing the original manuscript those many years ago." In a nutshell, this translator, Smith, demonstrates a unique mastery of the English language, an apparent sociolinguistic competence and a notable extent of sophistication in her ability to utilize the American English language and its loose flow in the contexts of daily usage.

Finally, appeal and lucidity are the bedrocks of a good work of art. They bring meaning to the showcased piece. There is a natural correspondence among art, epistemology, and cognitive skill. What we see invokes knowledge as much as what we read or what we hear; and together, they enhance the process of knowing. Clearly, complementing this epistemological attribute in the memoir are the ten illustrations of Gbenga Olawuyi, which graphically capture with visual intensity what the author and translator may have projected in words but with limited impact. In reality, the work of the *gbenagbena* (the artist, creator of the piece of art) is as salient as that of the *gbenugbenu* (the critic, annotator, or illustrator). The ten illustrations in this memoir deliver the story effectively and fill in when words can no longer express tangible experiences. Let's briefly look at the truth of this assertion.

The cover page illustration captures the essence of the memoir. There, we see the four characters isolated from several other characters noted in the memoir. These are no extras; they are the story of the stories. If by virtue of a lack of annotation we may not identify each character on the front page, we can guess, and most likely rightly so, that the youngster with the slingshot is Delodun, since we know sling shooting is his pastime. The hyperactive stance of the lads lends an undaunted authenticity to the title of the memoir, *Treasury of Childhood Memories*. If anyone were oblivious of the notion of the jungle gym, or of the swish-swirling patriarch projected in the memoir, no words would capture those concepts better than the image on page 34. The village theater under the bright moonlight with the lead narrator at the helm performing to the highly disciplined underage audiences is well showcased in the image on page 51. On page 57, the reader is presented with the rare view of the girlish theater of Sansalubo, which words could struggle to describe but only images can capture in its rustic and graphic simplicity. Pa Lafia's story is laughable to the reader but it becomes a bloodcurdling, empirical reality when Olawuyi's graphic image on page 92 comes staring the reader in the face. The melodrama of the two men in the foreground and the commonplace activities of the unsuspecting village workers in the background provide

the morbid reality of the saga. The image puts humanity into the letter. Ordinarily, the entertaining “tuppence English” phenomenon between Olu and Atoke would leave anyone rolling on the ground, but it would be with greater intensity after one sees the image on page 123 where the barefooted lad is peck-reading from an elementary handbook, the outcome of which a grown woman is beating her chest in exasperation while the audience stands fully entertained in the village square. The masquerade squad on page 136 provides a closer view of the traditional entertainment-cum-culture-inducing annual event. Although the “Fine Medicine” man with the cure-all could disappear, never to be seen again, following the overdose of Baba Ode on the former’s concoction, the image on page 156 destroys any alibi in denial of the action of the medicine man with the jungle boots. The mean school superintendent and the frozen teacher are well captured on page 165; and what words could tangibly express the saying that “twenty children don’t play together for twenty years?” Not many words, but the image of a truck hauling a friend away in tears says it all. While the left-behinds are waving and staring at the inscription, “*Tire Ni Oluwa*” (It’s yours, Lord), we observe a moment not of rapture but of the rupture and pain which had lasted almost a lifetime but suddenly being taken away!

Isola’s *Treasury of Childhood Memories* is our collective story, our tale of growing, our pain of maturing. Growing often terminates rudely the anticlimactic chapter of the joy of childhood and opens a new page to the nuisance of separation, growth, adulthood, responsibility, accountability, and everything antithetic to the carefree aura of childhood. It echoes the inevitability and pain of change. The music stops during the peak moments of jubilation and hilarity. But life must go on.

Treasury of Childhood Memories is no doubt a work that exhibits the heartbeat of a genius with inexhaustible versatility.