A Translation and Literary Analysis of Adébáyò Fálétí’s Poem: “Ọjọ́ Ilayèfún”

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Abstract

The concept of friendship in the Yorùbá cultural milieu is very germane to their communal life. Suffice to say that there seems to be no human being without, at least, a friend, the major issue usually is how well-grounded such friendship is, especially in times of need. Friendship development among the Yorùbá usually begins during the formative years via social interaction. However, sustaining such friendship through inter-personal relationship, which requires great sacrifices, is the most difficult aspect of it. This essay examines the Yorùbá concept of a mutual acquaintance, as depicted in one of Faleti’s poems titled “Ọjọ́ Ìláyèfún.” The essay employs the hermeneutics model to undertake a literary analysis of the poem, which serves as the primary data for the study. By analyzing the representational meanings that are attributed to the concept of friend (ọ̀rẹ́) in Yorùbá, the study shows that the term friendship has many metaphorical meanings in the traditional Yoruba worldview. The study also foregrounds the cultural, metaphorical, and metaphysical meanings of the Yoruba concept of mental imbalance (wèrè) beyond the conventional meaning or common knowledge about it in the Yorùbá socio-cultural milieu. The essay concludes that the Yoruba indigenous system, through several notions and metaphorical expressions about mental malady socially stigmatizes people suffering from such ailment. Mental pictures/images of incurability being rammed the native sub-consciousness, orthodox medicine has proved that it could be managed, suggesting that a lunatic could eventually be reformed, rehabilitated, and re-absorbed into the functionality of society.
Keywords: Ojọ ̀Ilàyẹ̀fún, Fálétí, Communal Living, Friendship, Lunacy, (In) curability

Introduction

The issue of translation from the Yorùbá language to English has always been challenging to both students and scholars/researchers. Aside from being a rigorous academic activity, translation provides the opportunity for a wider readership of publications. This study attempts a translation of “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀fún,” a poem written by Adebayọ Faleti, one of the renowned Yoruba poets. We also attempted a literary appraisal of the poem to expound the frontiers of knowledge on what the concepts of friendship and mental ailment represent in the Yorùbá culture. The article also engages a comparative analysis of what inter-personal bonding entails in premodern Yorùbá society and now. Hence, using the hermeneutics model and background information embedded in the poem, the study seeks to interpret the metaphorical concepts entrenched in some Yorùbá words attached to mental imbalance (wèrè) within the context of their usages in the Yorùbá cultural milieu.

Historical Background of the Concept of Friendship

The cultural classification, based on what was obtained in the premodern Yorùbá society, is formed on the principle of live and let live. However, most people lean on their respective negative experiences, vehemently questioning the truism in friendship. As Olátúndé O. Olátúnjí remarks in Ewì Adébáyò Fálétí, A Study of His Poems,

One can rightly assume that the poet must have lived an eventful life, even more so as he was alive during the writing of the chronicles to shed more light on the stories inhibiting his poems. By the nature of “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀fún” therefore, we shall categorize it as a prose-poetry. “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀fún” opens with the poet’s outlook on the nature of human friendship in existence during his time; and since humans haven’t changed much in behavioral patterns following the 1950s, we can project the poet’s inference into present times.

Likewise in today’s world, true friendship is scarce. It is one thing to choose a friend, but another to choose a friend who chooses one, reciprocally, in return. In lines 2-4 of the poem, we are drawn to question the true meaning of friendship as some “friends” can still be classified as cruel (ọ̀rẹ́ ̀ikà), opportunists (ọ̀rẹ́ dábè-n-yànkọ), and corrupt (ọ̀rẹ́ onibàjé èniyàn). The question is who is a friend? Suggesting that there are different types of friendship, and
true friendship can only be attained when a “friend” passes up every opportunity to be cruel or deceitful in favor of love. As Fáléti puts it, such friends do exist, if only we know where to find them. Fáléti’s conclusion, therefore, guides us to the main theme of the poem – true friendship. We are introduced to Ṣàngódòkun, a groom who was about to wed, and Lààlà, his friend. The poem narrates Ṣàngódòkun’s ordeal, resulting from a mental illness, because of being beaten and bound to calm his hystericis. Lààlà, however, made efforts to ensure his recovery. They soon visit Ṣàngódòkun’s bride after a long while; his family told his in-laws that he traveled while he was ill to save him (and the family, by extension) from embarrassment and stigmatization. Unfortunately, Ṣàngódòkun’s mental illness re-occurs at his in-law’s place, much to their surprise, since they knew nothing of his mental health history. Lààlà, his true friend, stepped in on time to avert the impending disaster by coming up with an ingenious story of the the “yam-flour-eating-day” (ọjó ìláyèfùn).

Aim and Objectives

The aim and objectives of this study are to:

(i) Translate the poem “Ọjọ Ìláyèfùn” into English.

(ii) Identify some Yorùbá metaphors and their meanings attributed to the Yorùbá word for ‘friend, friendship’ (ọ̀rẹ́) and mental imbalance (wèrè).

(iii) Compare the metaphorical significance of ‘friend, friendship’ (ọ̀rẹ́) and mental imbalance (wèrè) as represented in Faleti’s poem.

(iv) Highlight the prominent roles of true ‘friend, friendship’ (ọ̀rẹ́) as a metaphorical symbol of being a shield on the waterfront of embarrassment.

(v) Put the term ‘friend, friendship’ (ọ̀rẹ́) and mental imbalance (wèrè), as metaphors in the right perspectives beyond the common knowledge for a clearer understanding.

(vi) Employ a constructive understanding of ‘friend, friendship’ (ọ̀rẹ́) and mental imbalance (wèrè) from inter-personal relation among the Yorùbá.

A Translation of the Poem “Ọjọ Ìláyèfùn”

Yam-flour-Eating Day

There are different types of friends:

Good friends, cruel friends;
Some friends are opportunists,
Some friends are corrupt.
It’s not that true friends don’t exist,
Where to find them is what we don’t know.
But they do exist as scattered few,
Like short corncobs are in a harvest.
Once upon a time,
In a land called Àsùnnara,
There were two certain fellows, who are friends
The first was called Şàngódòkun,
And the second, Lààlà;
Şàngódòkun was betrothed,
Lààlà was still searching.
After a while,
Şàngódòkun ran mad,
Şàngódòkun became mentally unstable
He became deranged.
His family kept it from his in-laws,
Lest it becomes a future backlash
And a source of shame.
They then quickly crafted two cuffs
And bound Şàngódòkun’s feet,
To keep his hysterics under control.
After binding his feet,
They also caned him regularly
Moreover, the wedding was close,
His wedding was just ripe for consummation
Before the mental illness took hold of him.
Lààlà, his friend, did his best
Soon, the situation improved
Şàngódòkun regained his senses.
His entire household then began to rejoice,
That mental instability no longer exists in their lineage.
When Şàngódòkun became well,
And began to act intelligently
He was asked to go visit his in-laws.
(His family had told them he traveled).
Then Şàngódòkun dressed up,
So did Lààlà, he accompanied his friend.
And when they got to his in-laws”?
Everyone rejoiced,
They were happy to see their damsel’s betrothed –
The matchmaker was filled with laughter, so was the chaperone,
Ṣàngódòkun’s bride-to-be was full of smile
Since they knew not what had happened
Their understanding was that they just returned from a journey.
They promptly took chickens
And set the water to boil.
They hastily set aside yam flour,
They set it in a basin in an opposite room
It wasn’t far from Ṣàngódòkun’s designated seat,
Where he was seated with Lààlà comfortably
Like royalty.
The water for the amala was about to reach the boiling point in the kitchen
The father, mother, and the household of the bride
Were busy going up and down
That they might quickly entertain their esteemed guests.
Until it remained just the two of them in the room,
Lààlà with Ṣàngódòkun.
After a while, Lààlà said he wants to go and ease himself in the backyard,
He met the people cooking, he was surprised
By the time Lààlà finished urinating, the water put to boil was ready.
The bride’s mother rushed inside to take some yam-flour
Not seeing Ṣàngódòkun,
She looked towards the opposite room where the yam flour was set
That was where the bride’s mother found Ṣàngódòkun
Eating sieved yam flour like a sheep
Smacking his lips like a goat that’s eaten pepper leaf
Of the abundant yam flour set aside
The left-over of the groom is not up to a handful!
The bride’s mother was rooted to the spot, confused;
She turned to alert those in the backyard
when she bumps into Lààlà in the open.
She said, “Please, groomsman,
Come and see what your friend is doing:
The yam flour set aside to prepare amala,
The groom has almost finished eating it up in the room.”
Lààlà was a wise man, he had understanding,
He figured out that his friend had gone mad again.
He didn’t hesitate before replying,
He said, “are we the ones you are cooking for?
If you had informed us, we wouldn’t have allowed you to cook
Because today is Yam-flour-eating Day in our household.
We mustn’t eat *amala* at all,
We just eat yam flour and drink water.”
Lààlà then went to join ‘Dòkun his friend,
He knelt by the yam flour and began to eat it, too.
The bride’s mother then began to plead,
She was unaware it was Yam-flour-eating Day in their household.
And the bride, and her father, and their household,
All came out to learn of what was happening in their courtyard.
They met Lààlà and Sàngódòkun
(They had eaten all the yam flour, the basin was empty)
Both were licking the basin clean like a stubborn animals.
Then the bride’s mother explained
That it was Yam-flour-eating Day in their household
Everyone then began to entreat the guests, “Pardon us, please! We did not know!
Don’t be angry, forgive us, please.”
They quickly provided them with drinking water.
Lààlà finished eating yam flour, drank water, and his stomach became protruded.
He was not a lunatic, neither was he a deranged fellow
All was to cover up his friend’s shame at his in-laws’ house.
And the secret remained intact until they left:
The in-laws thought Yam-flour-eating Day was an important festival.
Both of them finished eating the yam flour
And set out for their neighborhood.
Lààlà narrated all that happened when they got home.
Sàngódòkun’s relatives began to thank and pray for him
For the shame, he endured by eating yam flour with his friend.
They then got hold of Sàngódòkun again
And bound his feet in cuffs.
They called upon a great physician capable of curing the illness
To help them cure it completely.

(“Ọjọ̀ Ìláyéfún”
Onirúurú ọrẹ̀ là ń ni:
Ọrẹ̀ ire, ọrẹ̀ Ìkà;
Ọtọ̀ lọrẹ̀ dábẹ̀-n-yànkọ̀,
Ọtọ̀ lọrẹ̀ oníbàjé éniyàn.
Kì í ṣe pọ́rẹ́ẹ́ tòótọ́ kò sí láyé
Ibi tí wón wà la ó mọ́.

Oyewale
Ṣùgbón wón m bẹ láàrin kọòkan
Bí olómọṣikàtà ti wá láàrin ìgbàdò
Nígbà kan, ọgbà kàn
Nilú kan tí wón ń pè lÁsùnnara,
Àwọn méji kan m bẹ nibè, wón ń ọ̀rè.
Ékínlí ń jẹ Ọnà ìyẹnde, Òbádá.
Èkéjí sì ń jẹ Láàlà;
Ñàgbó ìyé yìí ń pè Láàlà;
Láàlà ìyé ìyé yìí ń gbogbogbó ìyé yìí.
Ọyewale 126

Ṣé won kò mohun tó ti ṣe lè
Wón dé láti eyin-odi ní
Wón bá yára mádẹ̀ ọpìpi
Wón yára lọ mádẹ̀ ọsọ́rọ́,
Wón ti yára tami aṣẹ.
Wón sûré wónlúbó kalè gègèrè,
Wón gbè e sinú igità niyára ọkánkán
Kò jinná sìbi wón tẹní sí fún Ọjọ́dókun,
Tóún áti Láalá féyin ti,
Tí wón rógbókù bì ọba kótónká.
Omi ọkà sèṣe ń fẹ̀ hó ní ílè idáná
Bábá ọmọ, iyà áti ará òdèdè
Ni wón ń ró kùkùkèkè
Kí wón lè tētē gbóunjé fǎlejó tó bọdálè
Àwon méjì pèrè ló wá kù lọdèdè
Láalá pèlú Ọjọ́dókun ní.
Ịgbà ọ yá, Láalá lóun ó tó lèèkúlè
Ó bá wón nibí iná idá, ó yanu.
Ịgbà tí Láalá yóò fí tó tăn, omi hó lóri iná.
Ịyáyáwó kú fíi rí wólè láti bùyèfùn
Ịgbà tó wólè kò rí Dókun
Ó wo yára ọkánkán tí wón gbélúbó sì
Ibè niyá iyáwó tí bá Ọjọ́dókun
Tí ń jélúbó èkúkù bì ọgúntánn.
Tí ń lá nu bì ewúrè jewé ata.
Ịyèfùn tó tí pò níle kitikiti
Èyí tókò iyáwó la kù, kò kúnwó!
Ịyá iyáwó kánde, kò mohun tó le ńse;
Ó pèyin dà, ó fẹ̀ lọ sọ fàwọn têèkúlè
Lòhun Láalá bá kòra pèkí ní gbangba.
Ó ní, “Jówó ọrè ọkò iyáwó,
O o wà wohun tórèrè rẹ́ n ńse:
Èlúbó tá à bá rò lámállà
Lo kò iyáwó tí fèrè je tàn niyára.”
Ọlógbón ní Láalá, olóye ní,
O tì mó pàágànmá ló tún kò ló rè óun.
Kò wòkè tó fí múdááhùn wá,
Ó ní, “Abí àwa lè ń dáná fún?
Bí e bá wí ní, à bá tí jé ki è dáná
Nítorí óní lọ́jọ́ Òlúyèfùn nílè wa.
A kò gbòdò je àmállà rárá,
Bí a bá ti láyérfun ka mumi sí i ni.”
Ni Lààlà bá bọ́ síbí tí Dòkun wá,
Ó bẹ́rè sí idi èlùbọ́, oun páàpáà ń láyérfun.
Ni yá iyawó bá ń sípẹ̀ pé kí wón dákun,
Ènìyá iyawó ònà, àti bábá, àtārá ìlè,
Ni wón jáde wá woun tí ń ìjéè̩́ ìdí èlùbọ́.
Wón bá Lààlà, wón bá Şàngódòkun
(Wón ti jẹ́lùbọ́ èkúkù tān, ẹgbá ẹ ló kù)
Wón ń ìnṣe lágbá bá ó lọ́ ní ìlẹ̀lẹ̀ ọ̀rọ̀ àti pàápàá ń láyérfun.
Ni gbogbo ènìyáán bá ń òṣè “Háà! A ó mọ́!
È má biínú, è forí ji wá, è dákun.’
Ni wón bá ń sûré bomi mímú fún wón.
Lààlà jèlùbọ́ tān, ó mumi, ikùn wú báànkù
Lái-jé-wèrè, lái-tilè-jásínwín
Ṣèbí nítorí kàṣìírí órẹ́ ó lè bò nílé àna tí ni.
Aṣírí sì bò títí wón fí kúró níbè:
Àwọn ènìyá àwọn ńlé òdún ńlá IỌjó Ìlàyérfun.
Àwọn mejéè́jí jèlùbọ́ èkúkù tān
Wón bá múrá ó dáágbọ́ wón.
Wón délè ní Lààlà wá kéjó kalè ló rōyín.
Ni wón bá ń dúpẹ́, wón ń sàdúà fún un
Fúntijú tó fi bá Şàngó láyérfun.
Wón bá wá tún nawó gán Şàngódòkun
Wón dè è ní ńṣẹ́kẹ́ṣẹ́kẹ̀ lèṣè.
Wón pódóògùn ńlá tò lè rärùn náà wò
Kó bá wón lè àrùn náà lọ pàtàpátá.”

**Literary Appraisal of the Themes in the Poem “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyérfun”**

The poem, a terrifying narrative, ends with a comic relief due to the timely intervention of a good friend that uses his ingenuity to rescue his friend. As earlier stated, the main theme in the poem, “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyérfun,” is *true friendship*, emanating from the sincere affection between two people, in this case, Şàngódòkun and Lààlà. With the poem, Fáléti introduces his readers to the Yorùbá collective thought on the concept of friendship. We see Lààlà acts out the Yorùbá adage, *ọrẹ méjì bí ọmọ iyá* ‘two friends like siblings’ when he stood by Şàngódòkun in his trying time and in such an unexpected way that is
capable of inspiring others to aspire to the kind of love and the selfless sacrifice he exhibited. Our only explanation after reading through this poetic narrative is that Lààlà is one of the rare human beings in this world worthy of the title, òrẹ òtitó ‘true friend’, leading us to one of the minor themes in the poem – the test of true friendship.

Lààlà’s display of true friendship in the poem is further highlighted when we examine the status of friendship in Yorùbá society as exemplified in two main forms of Yorùbá oral tradition – namely proverbs and Ifa Literary Corpus,

**Proverbs**

Ọwe l’ẹsin ọrọ, ọrọ l’ẹsin òwe; B’ọrọ bá sọnù, òwe la fi ń wa.

‘Proverbs facilitate words, and vice versa; when words fail to convey intention, proverbs suffices.’

As the above popular proverb hints, conversations are mostly incomplete in Yorùbá society without the addition of some proverbs to underscore them. Several proverbs reveal the ethical standards by which the Yorùbá regard friendship within a community. Examples:

(i)  Ìgbà ìpónjú là á m’ọrẹ́.

We recognize good and reliable friends in trying times / A friend in need is a friend indeed.

(ii)  Òrẹ là á yàn, a kì i yànbi.

We choose friendships, not families.

(iii)  Dídùn ló dùn tí à ń bórẹ̀ jèkọ, ̀tilé oge tógeé jẹ.

We dine with friends out of love for them, not because of lack of food in one’s house.

As these proverbs reveal, friendship is an integral and important part of human relationships in every society and is one of the most important concepts to the Yorùbá people. It is the belief that some friends are worth more than a sibling, which accentuates the second proverb – we do not choose the family to which we are born, but we can do better (if the case applies) and choose good friends. The Yorùbá adage, ẹgi kan ọ lè dágbó ẹ̀ (a tree does not
make a forest) express our individual needs as humans for companionship at every stage of our lives. Various scientific studies have proven the importance of play in the cognitive development of children. In adulthood, marriage is also believed to stand upon the core purpose of companionship, i.e. friendship. It is no surprise then, that friendship is an important tool for survival, even amongst animals (mammals in stable, bonded social groups). After all, dogs are said to be man’s best friend.

Among the Yoruba people, marriage is considered to be very crucial and desirable (Bolarinwa, 2014:208). “In Yoruba society, it is inconceivable for a man or woman who has reached a marriage age to remain single” (Gbadege-sin, 2017: 772). It is against this background that Ṣàngódòkun along with his friend, Lààlà, visited the former’s in-law despite his state of health.

In the poem “Ọjọ Ìlàyẹ̀fún,” Lààlà, proves himself to be a true friend to Ṣàngódòkun in his trying moment; one so delicate, it would have become an eternal source of shame for Ṣàngódòkun and his entire family if he was not smart enough to come up with a clever idea of the ‘tenable explanation’ for his friend’s ‘abnormal behavior’ in the context of the in-law’s perspective but ‘normal behavior’ to Lààlà who understands his friend’s state of health right on the spot. A wise friend also proves to be an advantage in this kind of scenario as we cannot help but imagine the outcome if Lààlà, a loyal friend, was not being quick enough to come up with the “Yam-flour-eating Day” family event as an explanation for his friend’s dietary choice. Who eats yam flour? Lààlà’s quick solution to the challenge deserves an ovation, and he received it back home after he narrated the event to Ṣàngódòkun’s family.

In the poem, we see that the test of Ṣàngódòkun and Lààlà’s friendship is a challenging situation, that is, Ṣàngódòkun’s display of lunacy at his in-law’s house; and if we do say so, Lààlà’s display of true friendship tells of a deep kind of love that one would only expect from blood relations, i.e., siblings, parents, children, etc. That the poem narrates an event from the poet’s real-life experience also hints at the nature of true friendship in the Yorùbá value system, as enumerated below:

a. **Familiarity between the families of both friends** – Lààlà is well-known to Ṣàngódòkun’s household as his one true friend, so much so that it was his efforts that ensured Ṣàngódòkun’s initial healing from mental illness.

b. **Trustworthiness in matters of great importance** – Lààlà is Ṣàngódòkun’s only company in his bride’s home, which makes us assume that Ṣàngódòkun trusts him with his life.
c. **Selflessness** – Lààlà exemplifies this by taking on his friend’s shame when he joins him in eating yam flour at his in-laws’ home, a place where they should be honored as esteemed special guests and not yam-flour-eating brutes!

d. **Sincere love** – All of Lààlà’s actions are driven by his sincere love towards his friend, Ṣàngódòkun. Lààlà stands by his friend when he was sound and even when he was not, ensuring his well-being in all circumstances.

We are moved to wonder how many so-called friends in today’s world would have the mind to display Lààlà’s level of sincerity toward their friends when they need it most. Not everybody will have mentally ill friends, but a pertinent question is: How many people are true friends in action beyond verbal expressions in critical times to the people they claim to be friends with? Therefore, while commending Lààlà’s valiant efforts, there is a need to ask ourselves if we would be willing to do the same.

**Ifá Literary Corpus**

It is believed that Ifá is the source of all oral tradition, and as the custodian of all knowledge in Yorùbá traditional religion, Ifá knows what it means to have and to be a true friend. Judging from his unconventional friendship with Èṣù, the trickster, Òrùnmìlà can rightly tell the qualities that make a friendship “true”. For example, in Ejiogbe, Ifá asserts that:

\[ \begin{align*}
Òfọfọ \ ní \ i \ p’ërù, \\
Èpè \ ní \ i \ p’olè, \\
Ilẹ̀ \ dídà \ ní \ i \ p’òrẹ́
\end{align*} \]

*Treacherous kills Slaves.*

\[ \begin{align*}
Ènì \ s’ọjú, \\
Kò \ dàbí \ ènì \ s’èyìn;
\end{align*} \]

*A friend in one’s presence,*

\[ \begin{align*}
A \ diá \ fún \ Èwìrì \ tí \ i \ sè \ ọrẹ́ \ Ògún
\end{align*} \]

*Is not the same as a friend in one’s absence; This divination is for Èwìrì, Ògún’s friend...*
Elèjì lọ́rẹ́ gbà;
A threesome friendship is tricky
Friendship is best in pairs; (Abimbola, 2014:14)

The excerpts above point to a few instances where Ifá admonishes the practice of friendship in Yoruba society. The first tells us the result of any friendship that involves deceit – it dies an upsetting death. These kinds of friends are called ọ̀rẹ̀ ọ̀dàlẹ̀ ‘disloyal friends’ because they take advantage of the trust placed in them to sell out their friends’ secrets, weaknesses, and plans, among others, to the enemy. In the second excerpt, Ifá strictly warns us to be careful of the people we choose as friends because friends are not who we seemingly think they are until they prove their loyalty, especially in one’s absence. A friend can support and spur you on in your presence but despise you in their heart; their true intention will reveal itself in your absence when they do not have to pretend to like you. The third Ifá corpus advises that the best kind of friendship to have is that which exists between only two people, as it is easy to manage and sustain. Logically, formidable interdependence marks the structure of human life between two human beings. Hence, Ifa states that a triad friendship is a tricky relationship.

Quoting Leah Mandel (2017) in her report article, “Why We Need Friends,” Dr. Laurent Brent sheds light on “why” the need for friendship is inherent in human nature generally. He affirms that:

Friends are important. So important that it’s been proven that friendship can extend life expectancy and lower chances of heart disease. Friendship helps us survive. Part of why that is has to do with what happens in our brains when we interact with other humans: a 2011 study detailed the role of the neurobiological endogenous opioid system (the stuff in our brains that make us feel good) in positive social relationships; in 2016, researchers found evidence of the release of oxytocin in primate brains during social interactions; and later that year, psychologists conducted a study that suggested levels of pain tolerance can predict how many friends someone has.

Friendship is a crucial aspect of human relationships. Evidence of this abound in different aspects of the Yorùbá society. In Ìbàdàn, Òyó State, Òṣẹ Méji area was named after the identical houses of two close friends built next to each other, a common occurrence in the olden days among the Yoruba. The compound style reflects the communal living in existence at the time. It also allowed for a more integrated domestic life between both families, which may even extend to marriage arrangements. For example, it was customary for a man to court his friend’s daughter for his son (or himself), usually from
infanthood, gifting the young bride-to-be personal gifts till she became old enough to accept or decline the arrangement. While the sincere friendliness between two friends may cause them to share many aspects of their lives without fear or prejudice, friends may not always share everything. Inheritance details are one particular element that was not shared, even among the tribes that sexually use their wives to entertain visiting friends. To explain this, a Yorùbá proverb says

\[
\text{Ààyè là á jogún ọ̀rẹ́; b’ọ́rẹ́ẹ́ bá kú tán, ogún ‘ò tó sí’ni.}
\]

We only partake in a friend’s wealth when they are alive; we are not entitled to their inheritance; after their demise.

This proverb tells us that the death of a friend usually creates artificial boundaries and limitations between the living friend and the deceased friend’s family. In some cases, a man would make a vow that his friend is to inherit some of his possessions before he dies, and having integrated both families to become one. The deceased’s family is tasked with fulfilling the wishes of the deceased in the event of death subject to their discretion. This is however not always the case. Another proverb also expresses that money (and monetary issues) is one, if not the main cause of bitterness that may ensue between good friends: \(\text{Owó ló n b’ojú ọ̀rẹ́ jé.}\) (Money issues destroy friendships).

This proverb is apt if we place the nature of friendship in today’s world under critical analysis. We hear of and see people employing diabolical means to cheat their supposed friends in business, corporate careers, political post contests, contract bidding, and so on. Some go as far as murdering their friends to achieve ulterior motives of coveting their friends’ share of some inheritance or profit. Unsurprisingly, nowadays, many prefer to do business with strangers, attesting to the fact that people who do not know you from Adam appear to treat you better than your so-called friends. One cannot help but wonder what friendship stands for if trust is thrown overboard. Weird stories of lovers, who murder their partners for the sake of money are no longer news. Similarly, many children nowadays hasten the steps of their parents to the grave in callous bids to inherit their possessions.

The Concept of Lunacy as a Disease in the Yorùbá Society

Culturally, lunacy is one of the most dreaded diseases in Yorùbá society. Some examples of proverbs that express this belief are:

(i) “\(\text{Bí ó san, bí ó san, ki Òlórun má fi wèrè dán wa wò.}\)”
Either curable or uncurable, may God keep us away from mental illness.

(ii) “Wèrè dùn ńũ wò lójá, kò ńše é bí lómọ.”

(It is easy to watch the lunatic at the market square, but he/she is undesirable as a child.)

(iii) “Ki i tàn lára wèrè kó mā ku gán-án gán-án gán-án.”

(Lunacy is never completely cured.)

(iv) “Ó wu аşiwèrè kì ó ru ịgbá rẹ̀ wọ ọjá, àwọn ará ilé rẹ̀ ni kí i jé.”

(The lunatic wishes to display at the market, his relatives just wouldn’t let him.)

These proverbs point to one fact – lunacy is undesirable in any form. It might be entertaining to watch a lunatic at the market, but no one wishes to be related to him or her. One might even be cured of lunacy or related mental illness, but the stigma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) will always remain painful, considering the highly stigmatized status of mental illness in the Yorùbá society. Even in the Yorùbá marriage custom, investigating the medical history of prospective families (on both sides) was and is still a standard precaution of which peculiar mental illness and infertility stand as paramount areas of interest.

Primn.org reports that traditional healers rely on two main factors in their diagnostic classification – The Etiological (source from an external factor) and the Symptom logical (source from an internal factor). The major mental illnesses identified by the traditional healers are further divided into eight broad groups according to the traditional healers’ conception of causation or presentation.

a. Mental illnesses caused by supernatural powers, e.g., wèrè àsàsì – a mental illness due to supernatural influence; wèrè aágànná – a mental illness due to infections (e.g., smallpox); wèrè àǹjọ̀nú – a mental illness caused by the evil spirits.

b. Inherited mental illnesses, e.g., wèrè ịran – a mental illness that runs in the family (hereditary); wèrè àbátòrunwá – mental illness at birth; wèrè gidi – the true insanity.

c. Neurotic illnesses, e.g., ọdẹ orí – Heat in the head; – Fearful feelings, palpitations, insomnia.
Jegede (2005) in his article, “The Notion of ‘Were’ in Yoruba Conception of Mental Illness”, exposes another classification of mental illness in three categories, as expounded by Yorùbá traditional healers – wèrè ̀ámútòrunwá (mental illness at birth), wèrè ̀iran (hereditary mental illness) and wèrè ̀afíṣe (supernatural afflicted mental illness).

Another concept to note is wèrè álàṣọ. Although this is used to describe a mentally ill person preoccupied with collecting rags and junk, it is also used to refer to a seemingly sane person who occasionally reacts to situations in an exaggerated/deranged manner. Before modern medicine, the Yorùbá had traditional ways of curing virtually all ailments/diseases known to them, including mental illness. As an innovation in the Yoruba indigenous healthcare delivery system, discussions shared by Badru (2017:664) affirm “some of the indigenous medications have been transformed and modernized as some can be seen as tablets and packaged in special attractive disease-free bottles.” The Poem “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀fún” exposes us to the traditional treatment for lunacy in the poet’s time – bondage and beatings (and most likely, the administration of herbs and traditional medicine from an herbalist). Nonetheless, we shall examine the applicability of these practices/treatment methods in today’s world. The vast majority of Yoruba people do resort to traditional ways of curing mental illness in the olden days but orthodox medicine has overtaken this. However, some people still believe in consulting either the traditional healers or religious spiritualists due to the notion that every mental derangement is metaphysical.

**Language and Style in “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀fún”**

**Style**

The story of Ṣàngódókun and Lààlà in the poem “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀fún” is dramatically narrated, interesting, and witty tone filled with suspense. In respect of the earlier classification of “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀fún” as a prose-poetry, Fálétí somehow succeeds in narrating a poem in conversational Yorùbá, a feat worthy of commendation. A reader can perceive the storytelling prowess of the poet in this prose-poetry as he employs both poetic (imagery) and narrative techniques (third-person omniscient narrative, foreshadowing, and dialogue) that paint a clear picture of the major scenes in the story. As a prose-poetry, the poem is written in free form and numbered in lines, with the significant use of enjambment to maintain density. The poet also employs the morphological process of clipping in his poem to shorten Ṣàngódókun’s name to ‘Dòkun’ and ‘Ṣàngó’.
Diction

Certain choice words are reminiscent of an archaic era in Yorùbá literature. Some of these words include: dábẹ̀-n-ỳàńkọ, láìfí, patié, ̀àpẹ̀, ̀aẹ̀, bọdálẹ̀, iyé-fun, kàndì. Effectively, the author of this collection of Adébáyò Fálétí’s poems, Ọlátúndé Ọlátúnjí, makes extra efforts to provide brief background information or explanation in the appendices on such difficult words.

Literary Devices

Fálétí, as always, flexes his artistic dexterity in his delivery of “Ọjọ̀ Ìlàyèfùn” with the clever use of several literary devices. They include:

A. Parallelism – this is the repetition of a word or phrase within a sentence or group of sentences. For example:

i. Ọ̀rẹ̀ ire, ọ̀rẹ̀ ìkà;
   (Good friends, cruel friends ;)

ii. Ọ̀tò lòrè dábẹ̀-n-ỳàńkọ.
    Ọ̀tò lòrè oniба́jé èniyàn.
    (Some friends are opportunists, Some friends are corrupt.)

iii. Wón bá yára mádié ọ́pìpì
    Wón yára ọ̀ mádié ọ́sọ́rọ,  Wón ti yára tami sàpẹ.
    (They promptly prepared chickens And set water on a pot to boil.)

iv. Kó má wàá dábí láìfí léyìn òlā.
    Kó má dohun tí i dójú tíni.
    (Lest it became a stigma in the future. And became a source of shame.)

v.  Ni Ṣàngódókùn bá kọ lùgbọ́nà ôdè
    Ṣàngódókùn dalágànná èniyàn
    Ò d’ẹni tí ń sinwín kágbo ilé kiri.
    (Ṣàngódòkun ran mad
Oyewale

Şângódökùn became lunatic
He became deranged.

The last example shows a repetition of meaning with the use of different euphemisms for the same illness, i.e., ịàgò̀nà ọ̀de, àgànà, and șínwín in place of ărùn wèrè (madness/insanity).

B. Simile – a figure of speech involving a direct comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid. For example:

Şùgbón wón m bẹ láàrin kòòkan
Bí ọlọmọṣìkàtà tì wà láàrin àgbàdo
(But a few do exist,
Like short corncobs are in a harvest.)

Tóun àti Lààlà fèyin tì,
Tí wón rògbòkù bì oba kòtòńkan.
(Where he was seated with Lààlà comfortably
Like royalty.)

Tí ń jèlùbọ èkúkù bí ăgùntàn.
Tí ń lá nu bí ewúrẹ jewé ata.
(Eating sieved yam flour-like sheep.
Smacking the lips like a goat eating pepper leaf.)

The poet has succeeded in painting imagery of the main event in his poem with the use of these major literary elements in Yorùbá literature.

**The Yorùbá Cultural Norms and Values in “Ọjọ̀ Ịlàyèfùn”**

Every work of art is a reflection of its society. The poet in this poem features a few cultural practices that are norms in the Yorùbá value system. They include the following

**Marriage Custom**

While the entire marriage custom is an elaborate affair that could take years in the making or more than a couple of months (as it is in contemporary times), Fáléti only hints at the background of the marriage preparations in its final stages before Şângódökùn’s mental illness, perhaps due to space
constraints. After his recovery, however, we see him going to pay a visit to his bride-to-be and her family before the wedding day.

We must point out here that the traditional pre-wedding norm in the Yorùbá society is for the parents of the bride and groom to handle all meetings and preparations; no ceremonious visits by the betrothed to each other’s family houses are encouraged. In cases where they wish to meet, they are chaperoned in a neutral location. However, considering that this poem was originally written in 1958 in Awòrèrìn-in by Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí and factoring the story’s non-fiction status, one may conclude that marriage customs in many settlements within the Yorùbá society has already begun to experience some changes at the time, due to colonial influence and the importation of Western practices. Hence, the groom’s visit to his in-laws.

Traditional Medical Practice

Fálétí also gives insights into the Yorùbá traditional medical practices before the modern civilization and innovative technology, as exemplified in the treatment of mental illness administered on Ṣàngódòkun in “Ojọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀fún”. We believe that the poet here tries to draw attention to a facet of the Yorùbá culture and its lapses, one that had not yet begun to receive much attention at the time.

The Status of Visitors in Yorùbáland

The reception of Ṣàngódòkun by his in-laws tells us a great deal about the hospitable nature of the Yorùbá people. Visitors are revered even more than relatives. We see this being displayed in the flurry of activities in the household when they received visitors. Expected or impromptu, Yorùbá people usually entertain visitors to the best of their abilities. “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀fún” represents this societal norm excellently.

Moral Lessons

At one point or the other in this literary analysis, we have endeavored to point out salient societal issues that may serve as lessons to the reader. Succinctly:

i. “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀fún” is an exhortation on the true nature of friendship that encourages us to examine the status of the various friendships in our lives, and aspire to become better friends ourselves.

ii. The poem teaches that we all need help to get out of difficult situations, and a true friend will come through when we need them most. As the Yorùbá proverb says, “igbà ipónjú là á mòrè”
Appraisal, Critique, and Recommendations

A good poem is a symptom of the author’s effort to make sense of the world. And often, ideas that can’t be expressed in prose can sometimes be expressed through strong images. A good poem often uses clear, memorable, concrete images to make a point. (Writersrelief.com)

As earlier expressed, and in our sincere opinion, Adébáyò Fálétí remains a gem of a storyteller who has created timeless pieces of art in poetry form. “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀” is not an exception. Little wonder this analysis is undertaken from an ethical point of view, the poem becomes even more meaningful now as the standards by which the present generation holds moral values suffer a steep decline in the context of friendship and its principles. We have just one criticism for this insightful poem by the eminent Adébáyò Fálétí: The traditional methods of the treatment of lunacy as demonstrated in the poem are obsolete in the light of today’s advanced medical practices. Presently not just considered outdated, but also an inhumane treatment infringing on the fundamental human rights of a lunatic patient. Dr. Michael B. First, MD Columbia University prescribes modern treatment methods for mental health disorders categorized as either: Somatic (treatments that include drugs, electroconvulsive therapy, and other therapies that stimulate the brain) or Psychotherapeutic (treatments that include psychotherapy (individual, group, or family and marital), behavior therapy techniques (such as relaxation training or exposure therapy), and hypnotherapy). Most studies do also suggest that for major mental health disorders, a treatment approach involving both drugs and psychotherapy is more effective than either of the treatment methods used alone.

For Jégédé (2005), the therapeutic measure is determined by the perception of the cause or causes of mental illness among the Yoruba.

It has been found among the Yorubas that six biological factors can result in illness: aisun (sleeplessness), aiwo (restlessness), aije (inability to eat), aimu (inability to drink), aito (inability to urinate), and als (inability to defecate) (Jegede 1994, 1996) ... It was argued that certain types of mental illnesses cannot be healed. Such mental illnesses include those considered to be hereditary.

He however posits that the Yoruba view wèrè as a pathological problem and a derogatory term of abuse, stating that “there is a need for appropriate
mental health education as regards mental health-related problems, diagnosis, and prevention to avoid the terminal stage of wèrè.

To show that this stigma on mental illness is not peculiar to the Yorùbá society or Africa, the UK Mental Health Foundation reports that nearly nine out of ten people with mental health problems say that stigma and discrimination hurt their lives. What makes these statistics interesting to note (albeit, alarming) is a corroborative report from the American Psychological Association that says an estimated one in four adults has a diagnosable mental illness, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. More shocking statistics reveal that:

i. Psychiatrists working in the mental health sector per 100,000 population in Africa are less than 1. (Global Health Observatory, 2017)

ii. One in four Nigerians – some 50 million people – are suffering from some sort of mental illness. (WHO, 2019)

iii. 50% of Nigerians have negative feelings towards the mentally ill. Also, the most common cause of the mental illness was substance abuse and alcohol, then supernatural powers and magic; with 46% preferring orthodox methods of treatment. (Okpalauwaekwe et al., 2017).

Judging by these figures, it is safe to say that everyone should actively seek help for mental health. More contributing factors would include the economic meltdown of nations across the world, political unrest, and food scarcity leading to a downward spiral from the acceptable standard of living.

We propose that the Yorùbá society should be made more welcoming to mental health and its practices. The government has a role to play in educating the people on the benefits of maintaining mental health and encouraging youths to choose promising career paths in mental health with sound academic infrastructure. To do this, we truly believe that the first course of action in promoting mental health, particularly in the Yorùbá society, should be sensitization. People need to know that sound health involves sound mental health. The well-being of the body is dependent on the perfect cognitive function. When society learns to cultivate a positive attitude and behavior towards mental health, the government (both traditional and constitutional) can then take impactful steps towards ensuring lasting solutions that will inadvertently help to de-stigmatize people suffering from any form of mental
illness. Non-governmental organizations like Mental Health Foundation Nigeria, Neem Foundation, Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative (MANI), She Writes Woman, and Love, Peace and Mental Health Foundation (LPM) are already taking long strides in advocating for mental health awareness in Nigeria. However, in a nation of over 200 million people, more is required.

**Conclusion**

This article has carried out a detailed analysis of Adébáyò Fálétí’s poem “Ọjọ́ Ìlàyẹ̀fún”. It has examined the main and minor themes in the poem and provided an exposé on the socio-cultural factors that dictate their practice in Yorùbá society in different epochs. It also constructively criticized the Yorùbá traditional treatment methods of mental illness as illustrated in the poem, providing supporting evidence from modern medical practices to propose better alternatives, for the society to yield better positive results. The study identified the aesthetics of the literary devices employed by the poet in the prose poem telling the story of Ṣàngódòkun and Lààlà’s friendship. Besides, it equally highlighted some important moral lessons to hold on to and emulate within the context of the inter-personal relationship called friendship. Although the story is set in the poet’s time, it is undoubtedly evergreen, just as Ifa corpus and other Yoruba oral literature that are being preserved in writing could never go out of tune for relevant ethical applications. No doubt, the poem and the moral lessons it teaches will continue to be relevant in human society in general.

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