

## Research Notes

# A Translation and Literary Analysis of Adébáyò Fálétí's Poem: "Ọjọ Ilayẹfun"

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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 "Ọjọ Ìláyẹfún." 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 (òré) 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:** Ojò Ìlàyèfún, 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 “Ojò Ìlàyèfún,” a poem written by Adebayo 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 “Ojò Ìlàyèfún” therefore, we shall categorize it as a prose-poetry. “Ojò Ìlàyèfún” 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 (*òrẹ̀ ikà*), opportunists (*òrẹ̀ dábè-n-yànkò*), and corrupt (*òrẹ̀ onibájé 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 Fálétí puts it, such friends do exist, if only we know where to find them. Fálétí's conclusion, therefore, guides us to the main theme of the poem – true friendship. We are introduced to Şàngódòkun, a groom who was about to wed, and Lààlà, his friend. The poem narrates Şàngódòkun's ordeal, resulting from a mental illness, because of being beaten and bound to calm his hysterics. Lààlà, however, made efforts to ensure his recovery. They soon visit Şàngódòkun'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, Şàngódòkun'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” (*ojó ìláyèfun*).

### **Aim and Objectives**

The aim and objectives of this study are to:

- (i) Translate the poem “Ojó Ìláyèfun” into English.
- (ii) Identify some Yorùbá metaphors and their meanings attributed to the Yorùbá word for ‘friend, friendship’ (òré) and mental imbalance (*wèrè*).
- (iii) Compare the metaphorical significance of ‘friend, friendship’ (òré) and mental imbalance (*wèrè*) as represented in Faleti's poem.
- (iv) Highlight the prominent roles of true ‘friend, friendship’ (òré) as a metaphorical symbol of being a shield on the waterfront of embarrassment.
- (v) Put the term ‘friend, friendship’ (òré) 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’ (òré) and mental imbalance (*wèrè*) from inter-personal relation among the Yorùbá.

### **A Translation of the Poem “Ojó Ìláyèfun”**

#### **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 Àsunnara,  
 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,  
 Şàngódòkun'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 Şàngódòkun'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 Şàngódòkun.  
 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 Şàngódòkun,  
 She looked towards the opposite room where the yam flour was set  
 That was where the bride's mother found Şàngódòkun  
 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."  
 Làlà 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 Làlà and Şàngódòkun  
 (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.  
 Làlà 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.  
 Làlà narrated all that happened when they got home.  
 Şàngódòkun'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 Şàngódòkun again  
 And bound his feet in cuffs.  
 They called upon a great physician capable of curing the illness  
 To help them cure it completely.

**("Ọjọ Ìláyẹfún")**

Onírúurú ọrẹ là ní ní:  
 Ọrẹ ire, ọrẹ Ìkà;  
 Ọtò lọrẹ dábẹ-n-yànkọ,  
 Ọtò lọrẹ oníbàjé èniyàn.  
 Kì í ẹ pọrẹẹ tòótó kò sí láyé  
 Ibi tí wọn wà la ò mò.

Sùgbón wón m̀ bẹ̀ láàrin kòòkan  
 Bí ọ̀lọ̀mọ̀síkàtà ti wà láàrin àgbàdo  
 Nígba kan, ìgbà kàn  
 Nílúú kan tí wón ǹ pè LÁsùnnara,  
 Àwọn méjì kan m̀ bẹ̀ níbè, wón ǹ ọ̀rẹ̀.  
 Èkíní ǹ jẹ̀ Sàngódòkun,  
 Èkejì sì ǹ jẹ̀ Lààlà;  
 Sàngódòkun ti níyàwó ọ̀nà,  
 Lààlà ẹ̀sẹ̀sẹ̀ m̀ bOlódùmarè ni  
 Ìgbà tí yó bù ẹ̀ gàdà, tí yó bù ẹ̀ gèdè  
 Ni Sàngódòkun bá kọ̀ lùgbóná ọ̀de  
 Sàngódòkun dalágànná èniyàn  
 Ó dẹnì tí ǹ sínwín kágbo ilé kiri.  
 Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni wón kò jẹ̀ kí ànà rẹ̀ ó gbó,  
 Kó má wàá dàbí láifí lẹ̀yìn ọ̀là.  
 Kó má dohun tí í dójú tini.  
 Ni wón bá tètè rọ̀ ẹ̀kẹ̀sẹ̀kẹ̀ méjì  
 Wón kó o sẹ̀sẹ̀ Sàngódòkun,  
 Nítòrí bó bá ǹ ẹ̀ wèrè,  
 Kó má dohun típá kò ni í lè ká mọ̀.  
 Wón kó ẹ̀kẹ̀sẹ̀kẹ̀ sẹ̀sẹ̀ tán  
 Wón tún ǹ fi patię ọ̀kọ̀ fún un.  
 Bẹ̀ẹ̀ iyàwó kù sí dèdèdè,  
 Ìyàwó rẹ̀ ẹ̀sẹ̀sẹ̀ tó gbé ni,  
 Kí jannaánná tó ó gbara.  
 Lààlà ọ̀rẹ̀ rẹ̀ ẹ̀ kísà níbè  
 Ìgbà tó yá gbogbo rẹ̀ rọ̀ pẹ̀sẹ̀  
 Aisàn-an wèrè náà sà̀n fún Sàngódòkun.  
 Gbogbo ará ilé rẹ̀ wá ǹ yò ẹ̀sẹ̀sẹ̀  
 Pé wèrè ọ̀ sí mọ̀ nínú iran àwon.  
 Ìgbà tálaáfíà ti dé fún Sàngódòkun,  
 Tó ǹ sọhun tó bá ti gbogbo ayé mu  
 Wón ní kó gbéwù wò kó wá relé ànà ẹ̀.  
 (Sé wón sọ̀ fún won pó ti rebi ni).  
 Ni Sàngódòkun bá gbéwù wò  
 Ni Lààlà bá múra, ó gbá tọ̀rẹ̀ ẹ̀ gẹ̀rẹ̀.  
 Ìgbà tí wón délé ànà rẹ̀ nkó?  
 Gbogbo èniyàn ǹ yò fẹ̀rẹ̀,  
 Inú wón dùn pé wón tún rọ̀kọ̀ àpé àwon---  
 Èrín gbèrẹ̀kẹ̀ alátọ̀nà, onígbòwọ̀ pèlú  
 Èrín gbẹ̀nu afẹ̀sọ̀nà Sàngódòkun.

Şé wọn kò mohun tó ti şeşè  
 Wọn dé láti èyin-odi ni  
 Wọn bá yára mádię òpìpì  
 Wọn yára lọ mádię ọşóró,  
 Wọn ti yára tami ápe.  
 Wọn sùré wònlùbò kalẹ̀ gègèrè,  
 Wọn gbé e sínú igbá níyàrá ọkánkán  
 Kò jinnà síbi wọn téní sí fún Şàngódòkun,  
 Tóun àti Lààlà fẹ̀yìn ti,  
 Tí wọn rògbòkù bí ọba kòtòńkan.  
 Omi ọkà şeşè n fẹ́ hó ní ilé idáná  
 Bàbá ọmọ, iyá àti ará ọdèdè  
 Ni wọn n rọ̀ kùkùkẹ̀kẹ̀  
 Kí wọn lè tètè gbóúnjẹ fálejò tó boḍalẹ̀  
 Àwọn méji pére ló wá kù lẹ̀dèdè  
 Lààlà pẹ̀lú Şàngódòkun ni.  
 Ìgbà ó yá, Lààlà lóun ó tọ̀ lẹ̀kùlẹ̀  
 Ó bá wọn níbi iná dídá, ó yanu.  
 Ìgbà tí Lààlà yóò fi tọ̀ tán, omi hó lóri iná.  
 Ìyáyawó kù fiiri wọlé láti bùyẹfun  
 Ìgbà tó wọlé kò rí Dòkun  
 Ó wo yàrá ọkánkán tí wọn gbélùbò sí  
 Ibẹ̀ niyá iyawó ti bá Şàngódòkun  
 Tí n jèlùbò èkúkù bí àgùntàn.  
 Tí n lá nu bí ewúré jewé ata.  
 Ìyẹfun tó ti pọ̀ nílẹ̀ kitikiti  
 Èyí tọkọ iyawó la kù, kò kúnwó!  
 Ìyá iyawó kàndi, kò mohun tó le şe;  
 Ó pẹ̀yìn dà, ó fẹ́ lọ sọ fáwọn tẹ̀kùlẹ̀  
 Lòhun Lààlà bá kora pèkí ní gbangba.  
 Ó ní, “Jòwó ọ̀rẹ̀ ọkọ iyawó,  
 O ọ̀ wá wohun tórẹ̀rẹ̀ rẹ̀ n şe:  
 Èlùbò tá à bá rò lámàlà  
 Lọkọ iyawó ti fẹ̀rẹ̀ jẹ̀ tán níyàrá.”  
 Ọlọgbón ni Lààlà, olóye ni,  
 O ti mò páágànná ló tún kọ̀ lẹ̀rẹ̀ ọ̀un.  
 Kò wòkè tó fi múdàáhùn wá,  
 Ó ní, “Àbí àwa lẹ̀ n dáná fún?  
 Bí ẹ̀ bá wí ni, à bá ti jẹ́ kí ẹ̀ dáná  
 Nítórí ọ̀nì lỌjọ̀ Ìláyẹfun nílẹ̀ wa.  
 A kò gbọ̀dọ̀ jẹ̀ àmàlà rárá,



Bí a bá ti láyèfun ka mumi sí i ni.”  
 Ni Lààlà bá bọ sibi tí Dòkun wà,  
 Ó bẹrẹ sí idí èlùbọ, òun pàápàá n láyèfun.  
 Niyá iyàwó bá n ọpẹ pé kí wọn dákun,  
 Òun ò tètè mò pónìí IỌjọ Ìlàyèfun nílẹ wọn.  
 Àtiyàwó ọnà, àti bàbá, àtará ilé,  
 Ni wọn jáde wá woun tí n ọlẹ lòdè wọn.  
 Wọn bá Lààlà, wọn bá Ọ̀ngódòkun  
 (Wọn ti jẹlùbọ èkúkù tán, igbá è ló kù)  
 Wọn n fenu lágba bí olórikunkun ẹran.  
 Niyá iyàwó bá wá kẹjọ kalẹ, ló ọ̀làyé  
 Pé lónìí IỌjọ Ìlàyèfun nílẹ wọn  
 Ni gbogbo ẹniyàn bá n ọ “Háà! A ò mò!  
 Ẹ má bínú, ẹ forí jì wá, ẹ dákun.”  
 Ni wọn bá n sùré bomi mímu fún wọn.  
 Lààlà jẹlùbọ tán, ó mumi, ikùn wú bànkù  
 Lái-jẹ-wèrè, láì-tilẹ-jásínwín  
 Ọ̀bí nítorí káṣìrì ọ̀rẹ ó lè bọ nílẹ àna ni.  
 Ọ̀sírì sí bọ títi wọn fi kúrò níbẹ:  
 Àwọn àna ọ̀bí ọ̀dún nílá IỌjọ Ìlàyèfun.  
 Àwọn méjéjì jẹlùbọ èkúkù tán  
 Wọn bá múra ó dàdúgbò wọn.  
 Wọn délé ni Lààlà wá kẹjọ kalẹ ló rọ̀yìn.  
 Ni wọn bá n dúpẹ, wọn n ọ̀dúà fún un  
 Fúntijú tó fi bá Ọ̀ngó láyèfun.  
 Wọn bá wá tún nawó gán Ọ̀ngódòkun  
 Wọn dè é ní ọ̀kẹ̀ọ̀kẹ̀ lẹ̀sẹ̀.  
 Wọn polóògùn nílá tó lè rárùn nàà wò  
 Kó bá wọn lé àrùn nàà lọ pátápátá.”

### Literary Appraisal of the Themes in the Poem “Ọjọ Ìlàyèfún”

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, “Ọjọ Ìlàyèfún,” is *true friendship*, emanating from the sincere affection between two people, in this case, Ọ̀ngódòkun and Lààlà. With the poem, Fálétí introduces his readers to the Yorùbá collective thought on the concept of friendship. We see Lààlà acts out the Yorùbá adage, *ọ̀rẹ̀ méjì bí ọ̀mọ̀ iyá* ‘two friends like siblings’ when he stood by Ọ̀ngódòkun 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 Làlà is one of the rare human beings in this world worthy of the title, *òrẹ̀ òtító* ‘true friend’, leading us to one of the minor themes in the poem – the test of true friendship.

Làlà’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

*Òwe l’ẹ̀sin ọ̀rọ̀, ọ̀rọ̀ l’ẹ̀sin ọ̀we; B’ọ̀rọ̀ bá sọ̀nù, ọ̀we la fi ñ 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 ipónjù là á m’òrẹ̀.*

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

(ii) *Òrẹ̀ là á yàn, a kì í yànbí.*

We choose friendships, not families.

(iii) *Dídùn ló dùn tí à ñ bọ̀rẹ̀ jẹ̀kọ̀, ’ilẹ̀ oge tógeé je.*

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, *ìgi kan ò lẹ̀ dàgbó 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 *Şàngódòkun* 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 *Şàngódòkun* in his trying moment; one so delicate, it would have become an eternal source of shame for *Şàngódòkun* 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 *Şàngódòkun*'s family.

In the poem, we see that the test of *Şàngódòkun* and *Lààlà*'s friendship is a challenging situation, that is, *Şàngódòkun*'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 *Şàngódòkun*'s household as his one true friend, so much so that it was his efforts that ensured *Şàngódòkun*'s initial healing from mental illness.
- b. **Trustworthiness in matters of great importance** – *Lààlà* is *Şàngódòkun*'s only company in his bride's home, which makes us assume that *Şàngódòkun* 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, Şàngódòkun. 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 Èşù, the trickster, Òrúnmìlà can rightly tell the qualities that make a friendship "true". For example, in Ejiogbe, Ifá asserts that:

*Òfófó ní í p'erú,  
Èpè ní í p'olè,  
Ilè didà ní í p'òré* Abimbola (2004:4)  
Treachery kills Slaves.  
Curses kill thieves  
Betrayal kills friend/ friendship ...

*Ení ş'ojú,  
Kò dàbí ení ş'èyìn;  
A díá fún Èwìrì tí í şe òré* Ògún Abimbola (2004:115)  
A friend in one's presence,  
Is not the same as a friend in one's absence;  
This divination is for Èwìrì, Ògún's friend ...

*Òré 'ò gb'elèta,*

*Elèjì lòré 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 *òré òdàlè* ‘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, Ifá 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, Òré Mèjì 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

*Àyè là á jogún òrẹ; b'órẹ́ bá kú tán, ogún 'ò tọ́ 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: *Owó ló n b'ojú òrẹ́ jẹ́.* (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) “*Bí ó san, bí ò san, kí Olórún má fi wèrè dán wa wò.*”

(Either curable or incurable, may God keep us away from mental illness.)

(ii) “*Wèrè dùn ún wò lójà, kò ẹ́ é bí lómọ.*”

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

(iii) “*Kì í tán lára wèrè kó má ku gán-án gán-án gán-án.*”

(Lunacy is never completely cured.)

(iv) “*Ó wu aṣiwèrè kí ó ru igbá rẹ wọ ojà, àwọn ará ilé rẹ̀ ni kì í jẹ.*”

(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 àsàsí* – a mental illness due to supernatural influence; *wèrè aágànná* – a mental illness due to infections (e.g., smallpox); *wèrè ànjónú* – a mental illness caused by the evil spirits.
- b. Inherited mental illnesses, e.g., *wèrè iran* – 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 àmùtòrunwá* (mental illness at birth), *wèrè iran* (hereditary mental illness) and *wèrè àfìṣe* (supernatural afflicted mental illness).

Another concept to note is *wèrè aláṣọ*. 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 “Ojò 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 “Ojò Ìlàyẹ̀fún”

### Style

The story of *Ẓàngódòkun* and *Lààlà* in the poem “Ojò Ìlàyẹ̀fún” is dramatically narrated, interesting, and witty tone filled with suspense. In respect of the earlier classification of “Ojò 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 enjambement to maintain density. The poet also employs the morphological process of clipping in his poem to shorten *Ẓàngódòkun*’s name to ‘*Dòkun*’ and ‘*Ẓàngó*’.



## Diction

Certain choice words are reminiscent of an archaic era in Yorùbá literature. Some of these words include: *dábè-n-yànkò*, *láìfí*, *patię*, *àpé*, *apẹ*, *bodálẹ̀*, *iyẹ̀-fun*, *kàndi*. 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 “Ọjọ Ẹ̀làyẹ̀fún” 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. *Ọ̀ré ire, ọ̀ré ikà;*

(Good friends, cruel friends ;)

- ii. *Ọ̀tò lòré dábè-n-yànkò,*

*Ọ̀tò lòré oníbàjẹ̀ èniyàn.*

(Some friends are opportunists,  
Some friends are corrupt.)

- iii. *Wón bá yára mádiẹ̀ ọ̀pìpì*

*Wón yára lọ mádiẹ̀ ọ̀sọ̀ró,*

*Wón ti yára tami sápe.*

(They promptly prepared chickens  
And set water on a pot to boil.)

- iv. *Kó má wàà dàbí láìfí lẹ̀yìn ọ̀la.*

*Kó má dohun tí í dọ̀jú tìni.*

(Lest it became a stigma in the future.  
And became a source of shame.)

- v. *Ni Sàngódokun bá kọ̀ lùgbóná ọ̀de*

*Sàngódokun dalágànná èniyàn*

*Ó d'eni tí ń sínwín kágbo ilé kiri.*

(Sàngódòkun ran mad

Şàngódòkun 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., *ìgbóná òde*, *àgànná*, and *sínwín* in place of *àrùn 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 ọlómọşikàtà ti wà láàrin àgbàdo*  
(But a few do exist,  
Like short corncobs are in a harvest.)

*Tóun àti Lààlà fẹyìn tí,*  
*Tí wón rògbòkù bí ọba kòtónkan.*  
(Where he was seated with Lààlà comfortably  
Like royalty.)

*Tí n jèlùbó èkúkù bí àgùntàn.*  
*Tí n lá nu bí ewùré 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 “Ojó Ìlàyẹ́fún”**

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), Fálétí only hints at the background of the marriage preparations in its final stages before Şàngódòkun’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 *Awòrẹ̀rìn-in* by Adébáyò Fálétí and factoring the story's non-fictional 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 Şàngódòkun in "Ojó 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 Şàngódòkun 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. "Ojó 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. "Ojó 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, "ìgbà ipónjú là á mọ̀rẹ̀"

(a friend in need is a friend indeed).

## 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. "Ọjọ̀ Ìlàyẹ̀fún" 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 "Ọjọ̀ Ìlàyẹ́fún". 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 Şàngódòkun 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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