

‘MARGINS CAN/DO SURVIVE WITHOUT THE METROPOLE’: THE POLITICS OF APPROPRIATION IN BOSEDE ADEMILUA-AFOLAYAN’S *LOOK BACK IN GRATITUDE*

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Abstract

Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. posits that concerns over the faithfulness of an adaptation to its hypotext which permeated the field of Adaptation Studies in its early beginnings in the late 1960s and early 70s has since been replaced by the far more important questions of the cultural and economic realities to which the new work responds. He writes that “a familiar text in *foreign clothing* is far more welcome than an entirely mysterious new *and original work*” (626; emphasis added). While Wetmore Jr.’s assertion relates to the now rested “fidelity criticism”, the same might not be said of adaptation by African writers of Greek and, lately, European authors, going by Christopher Anyokwu’s brilliant but also contentious examination of Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan’s *Look Back in Gratitude* (2013), in relation to its hypotext, John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* (1956). In his paper Anyokwu raises the ambiguous questions of “originality” vs “inferiority”, and “source” vs “inter-textuality” between the two texts which, in the final analysis, places the adaptation in a precarious, disadvantaged, position to its ancestor. Drawing from current adaptation scholarship, this essay “updates” Anyokwu’s submission, stresses the need to take cognizance of the registers that are appropriate to the task of literary interpretation in general and to the field of postcolonial adaptation studies in particular, the social relevance of adaptation, and, finally, the legitimacy of the adaptation practice.

Keywords: adaptation, epistemology, fidelity, local, social consciousness/reality, source-text.

Introduction

For this is what stories do: they compete to shape the world---to impose narrative order on disparate or uncertain events--- *all the while prompting fresh narrative possibilities in the imagination.*

(Bissoondath 15; emphasis mine)

Myth, ritual, history and contemporary realities have long been identified as sources of inspiration for African dramatists. Over the years, Greek classics have also proven to be valuable materials for African authors in their attempt to understand the oddities of life in their various societies especially in the postcolonial era. Such as using their adaptation as forms of “resistance to oppression...to power and its capricious display through unjust laws,” and to examine, indeed document “the...conflicts between the disfranchised and the ruling elite” (Wetmore 2002, 171). Although Wetmore Jr. was writing about *Antigone*’s appeal to African adapters, the statement captured the interest that they have for other Greek classics as well. According to Michael Etherton, Greek humanism contributes to their plays’ appeal to African dramatists (104). Greek plays, in Helene Foley’s opinion, offer African dramatists the opportunity to “confront current issues about national identity through dialogue with a fictional past” (26), even as the plays convey “the burden of debunking the claims and assumptions of ethical superiority of the colonialists” (Olaniyan 56). There are many examples of such works including the Theatre Council of Natal (TECON)’s *Antigone in 71* (itself an adaptation of Jean Anouhil’s *Antigone* based on Sophocles’ play of the same title), Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshoma’s *The Island*; Osofisan’s *Tegonni: An African Antigone*, both of which are also adaptations of *Antigone* by Sophocles; Ola Rotimi’s *The gods are not to blame*, adaptation of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*; Osofisan’s *Women of Owu* from Euripides *Trojan Women*; Efua Sutherland’s *Edufa* and Soyinka’s *Bacchae of Euripides*, based on Euripides’ *Alcestis* and *Bacchae* respectively, in which we read a relationship of “constant intertextuality” where the influence of the ancestor texts is overwritten with local flavours and concerns.

European texts, including Shakespeare’s canon often “re-work[ed] in African terms” (Banham et al 287), also appeal to African dramatists, as in the example of Soyinka’s *Opera Wonyosi* based on John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* and Bertolt Brecht’s *Three Penny Opera*; Bode Osanyin’s “Left in the Cold,” an adaptation of Brecht’s *The Good Woman of Setzuan*; Dapo Adelugba et al’s “That Scoundrel Suberu” based on Moliere’s *Les Fourberies de Scapin*; Biodun Jeyifo’s *Haba Director*, adaptation of Brecht’s *Herr Puntilla and His Man Matti*; Lekan Balogun’s *Emi, Caesar!* adaptation of *Julius Caesar*; Ahmed Yerima’s *Otaelo* based on *Othello*; Osofisan’s *Wesoo, Hamlet!* adaptation of *Hamlet*; Bin Kadi-so Theatre’s adaptation into French of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* as “En Attendant Godo Godo” and *Macbet*, based on Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, which also inspired Wale Ogunyemi’s Yoruba opera, *Aare Akogun*; the

Lusophone adaptation, *Orações de Mansata* (*The Prayers of Mansata*) set in Guinea-Bissau and by Abdulai Sila; Welcome Msomi's Zulu adaptation, *uMabatha*, and the multiple translation-adaptation of the same play by the Mauritian playwright, Dev Virahsawmy, as well as the Renegade Theatre/Tade Ipadeola's *Itan Oginintin*, based on *The Winter's Tale*, performed at the Shakespeare Globe, London, in 2012.

Despite the inherent value of these adaptation as new works which offer "insights into as well as help to establish cultural and political hegemonies" according to Katja Krebs (91), some of them are considered less ingenious to their supposed source by critics who approach the works with as diverse a sensibility as the motives of the adapters themselves. In the field of adaptation scholarship, this critical approach was termed the "fidelity criticism," the criterion of judgement that places the canonical/ancestor text over and above its derivative. Whereas Walter Benjamin insists that "storytelling is always the art of repeating stories" (92) while Linda Hutcheon asserts the ubiquity of adaptation: "[adaptations] are everywhere; stories are born of other stories" (2), "fidelity criticism" stresses instead the notion of originality and inferiority in the complex, ambivalent relationship between the ancestor text and its progeny. Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame* [hereafter *The gods*], one of the most successful rewrite of an acclaimed Greek text and clearly the most performed Nigerian play, readily comes to mind when we think of such an issue.

As the African adaptation of a classic that is most criticized by foreign and local critics, *The gods* is approached not so much with the notion of "slavish copying" of its hypotext but in terms of the logic of both the content and cultural/political correctness of its dramaturgy. Chris Dunton summarizes the "quarrel" of critics with the text: "its language; the viability of Rotimi's transference of a Greek model of tragedy to a Yoruba setting; the emphasis the play places on individual responsibility within a hierarchical system; and the relevance of the theme of ethnic distrust to the play's actual development" (14). In summary, while the problem of *The gods* is not so much a case of "fidelity criticism" in reverse, what James McKinnon calls "dumbing down the classic" (22), it is that of plausibility, "blandness of language" and the cultural correctness and representation of the Yoruba ethos of the play's universe (See: Adelugba 201-19; Etherton 123-28). Moving beyond *The gods* however, while the question of authenticity is not addressed to only the adaptation of Greek texts, the rewriting of European classics also encourages comparison between the "source" and its derivative. Christopher Anyokwu approaches with a similar perception his analysis of Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan's *Look Back in Gratitude* (2013), an

adaptation of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956). No doubt one of the most brilliant and critical analysts writing in the field of dramatic literature in Nigeria in recent time, Anyokwu's reading of the relationship between the two texts is however predicated on a relationship that is marked by his interpretive assumption of a certain original text and its inferior version, which leads him to make some curious claims that scholars of adaptation have devoted many years of research to debunking, an avoidable situation had it been that he had applied the appropriate registers from the field of research.

In this essay, then, we re-examine Anyokwu's paper with the aim to "update" its submissions. The essay is divided into two parts. In Part One by drawing from recent postcolonial adaptation scholarship and utilizing ideas from examples of recent and not-too-recent reworking of canonized texts from Greek authors and Shakespeare--- precisely because the Shakespeare canon is "the acknowledged masterpieces of English literature" (Adeoti 13), the canonical authority "in the annals of Western literature" (Sears 14), and, most importantly, because "Shakespeare himself was an adapter, taking existing materials from various sources and crafting them into 'new' artistic creations" (Fischlin and Fortier 1)---we present a general discussion of Anyokwu's paper in light of the literary, cultural, and political considerations that often, and always, inform adaptation. In Part Two by drawing attention to the features and specific aspects through a critical and evaluative analysis, we re-examine Ademilua-Afolayan's *Look Back in Gratitude* as a new work in its own right, in spite of its announced connection to John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, its parent text.

Contesting legitimacy: the problem of "source" and its adaptation

Christopher Anyokwu's "British Sun in An African Sky: Locating the Metropole in the Margins in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan's *Look Back in Gratitude*" published in *Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies* (2013), is certainly an interesting read. Anyokwu clearly highlights how class consciousness, subsumed in the twin problem of religious hypocrisy and political failure, informed Osborne's thematic concern and how observing similar realities in her own society, Ademilua-Afolayan finds it much too convenient to transfer the logic of Osborne's text into her own world. Generally speaking, Anyokwu brilliantly identifies the points of correspondence between *Look Back in Gratitude* [hereafter *Gratitude*] and its ancestor, *Look Back in Anger* [hereafter *Anger*], and emphasizes in the process how the former uses the latter thematically to respond to its own immediate realities. Specifically, he identifies the similarities

between the two texts' male protagonists who rail against the social imbalance and dystopia in their individual societies: Jagunlabi Fijabi's bellicosity in relation to Jimmy Porter's belligerence. Similarly, he notes how the female central character, Tokunbo Fijabi's meekness and docility, is modelled on Alison Porter's submissiveness; he also stresses how both characters commit class suicide by marrying men from the dregs of the society despite the men's acknowledged potentials-- Jagunlabi is a First-Class graduate of Theatre Arts and talented thespian, while Jimmy Porter is a brilliant unemployed graduate.

What comes out strongly from Anyokwu's analysis is how literature (and theatre not only in Africa but also elsewhere) function as "a locus of dialogic variation" to use Ato Quayson's term. According to Quayson this is possible through locating characters in "sharply recognizable scenarios that express the struggle for self-actualization and lived vagaries of experience that breed disillusionment, fear, joy, and terror" (46), irrespective of whether such scenarios are drawn from the past or present realities. The detailed perspective that Anyokwu presents on the two plays in question and *Gratitude* in particular, recalls "joint-authorship" as postulated by the Theatre theorist, Gerald Rabkin. Tracing the plural "authorship" of theatre performance from author to director and performers to audience and critics, Rabkin contends that "we have in theatre two sets of readers--- the theatre artists who traditionally 'read,' interpret, the written text, and the audience who read the new theatrical text" (159). This suggests that any work of art so to speak, and adaptation for that matter, has a multiple "source" to which it owes its existence. Anyokwu's reading, while it also recalls both the reader-response theorists' claim that texts, any text for that matter, are as much the product of the interpretive practice of the readers, and formalist criticism that ignores what it calls "any outside influence" on the text, that is, authorial intention, societal influence, cultural and political consideration etc, fails to take cognizance of the fact that the same considerations are crucial when analysing texts in the field of adaptation scholarship.

Responding to the claim by the authors of "The Intentional Fallacy," William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley that the author's intentions had nothing to do with literary criticism, that knowledge of the author's intentions was "neither available nor desirable" (3), Hutcheon contends that an author's objectives [stated in the Author's Note for example] are indeed crucial to the task of critical analysis in adaptation scholarship. Citing "notes of a coloured girl: 32 reasons why I write for the theatre" which accompanies *Harlem Duet*, Djanet Sears's highly successful and award-winning adaptation of *Othello*, and which appear as both the program notes of the play's

numerous theatrical productions and preface to the published text, Hutcheon draws attention to how authorial intentions “function as indicators of the adapter’s voice” while such “extra-textual statements of event and motives often do exist to round out our sense of the context of creation” (109), and guide both the audiences’ perception, and the critics’ reading, of the adaptation (See our reading of *Gratitude* below). Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier have also drawn attention to the socio-political contexts of adaptation. They contend that “any cultural work, including any theatrical adaptation, has to be studied in its specifics to see how political issues play out within, and are affected by, that work...any work of culture has a history in which its political import is repeatedly transformed” (5-6). One cannot say with confidence that Anyokwu considers these solid arguments, statements that ultimately underline the legitimacy of the adaptation practice, considering the premise upon which his analysis is based. He contends that *Gratitude* lacks suspense because “*it is not an original creation, a piece of work with a novel storyline* [and that] what we end up doing is trying to find out the various points of intersection and divergence between the source and the derivative work” (249; emphasis added). Such a premise certainly has its pitfalls, including “fall[ing] prey to insoluble contradictions” (Saadawi 524). Indeed, as we shall show in the following discussion, the task of separating the “Metropole” from the “Margins” is not really a difficult one, if one understands what is required: the specificity of *how* and *why* of an adaptation in relation to its supposed “source” text.

Scholars working in the broad field of adaptation studies including Hutcheon and Julie Sanders have drawn attention to the danger in privileging fidelity in the relationship between a new work and its supposed anterior text. They insist that a crucial point that is often overlooked is the motivation behind adaptation. Hutcheon explains that it is necessary to understand what informs the exercise in the first place, “adaptation teaches that if we cannot talk about the creative process, we cannot fully understand the urge to adapt and therefore perhaps the very process of adaptation. We need to know ‘why’” (107). Because the same word is used for both the product and the process of adaptation, Hutcheon proposes a twofold definition: as product and process, which she believes could be useful to replace “fidelity criticism”; hence, to her, “adaptation” involves two sub-categories: adaptation as “a creative and an interpretive act” by the adapter, involving “both re(interpretation) and then re(creation)” and, adaptation as “an extended intertextual engagement” of the audience with the adapted work (8). She concludes that “perhaps one way to think about unsuccessful adaptation is not in terms of fidelity to a prior text, but in

terms of a lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one's own and thus autonomous" (20-1), in its own right.

Similarly, Sanders stresses the "need to know why" by reiterating that the fixation on fidelity reflects a static view of the world, or what she calls a "linear epistemology," a reduction of the relationship of the source text and its adaptation to a path that is "linear and reductive [since the adaptation] is always in the secondary, belated position, *and the discussion will therefore always be, to a certain extent, about difference, lack, or loss*" (12; emphasis added). She insists that the fixation on fidelity will prevent the critic from identifying two important facts: 1) adaptation as a thriving and autonomous genre; and 2) the ever-changing and dynamic nature of adaptation practice, which, unfortunately, is not always considered while applying theoretical models to discuss the variety of works of this genre. After all, as Benjamin writes "adaptations have their own aura, their own presence in time, [their] unique existence at the place [they] happen to be" (Benjamin 1968:214), as is the specific experience that they relate to, and against the particular context that they must be examined and understood.

Based on their experience, then, scholars of postcolonial adaptation have proposed terms that would help critics (such as Anyokwu) to articulate clearly their position without the kind of ill-informed assumptions that this present essay addresses: while Thomas Cartelli views the relationship of a hypotext and its derivative in terms of the *critical* and *emulative*; Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia consider *opposition* and *emulation*; Reed Way Dasenbrock identifies *contestation* and *imitation* which, as Kenneth Graham argues, does not necessarily mean mimicry or simple copying, subservience or uncritical adoption, a notion that allows us to cast the adaptation in an inferior position to a certain original (39-40). Although as Anyokwu rightly points out, the plot and dramatic structure of *Gratitude* are almost identical to those of *Anger*, while those similarities suggest "primarily emulative" dramaturgy that falls into the category of Cartelli's notion of adaptation concerned with "merely adjusting or accommodating the original work to the tastes and expectations of their own audiences" (15), the knowledge of such similarities is itself limited to only those people that are familiar with *Anger*; hence, the question of faithfulness (fidelity) is problematic, and buried in what McKinnon terms the "paradoxical dramaturgy of finding similarities in difference" (95). Instead, the emphasis of such a relationship should contemplate the larger cultural and economic realities that the new work addresses (For the

discussion of the issue regarding audience familiarity with *Oedipus*, in relation to Rotimi's *The gods* and critics' reaction to the play, see; Wetmore Jr.2001:103-20).

Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* has neither been accused of primary emulation in Cartellian term nor of uncritical adoption of Euripides' idea. While the adaptation underlines the crucial point of "similarity and difference" which puts to the test any notion of fidelity, it is useful to discuss how the play also renders invalid the notion of source and originality. Considering the culturally-specific approach of Soyinka in the adaptation even as the ideological underpinning is not lost on him, Isidore Okpewho prefers to describe the work as "a translation of culture, not of text," a devoted task of "reconstructing the ethnos (no less than the ethos) of the play as to manipulating the language of it" (55). Although Soyinka adopts wholesale the original characters in Euripides' play, he uses his adaptation to address through the gross arrogance and intolerance of Pentheus the "habitual tyranny" of African leadership, the "post-independence governance [with] all sorts of criminal behaviour indulged in by the leadership" (60). As Soyinka himself says in the introduction to the published version of the play, *The Bacchae* "belongs to that sparse body of plays which evoke awareness of a particular moment in a people's history, yet imbue that moment with a hovering, eternal presence" (v-vi). In pursuance of his objectives, of both cultural self-apprehension and self-criticism, Soyinka strongly diverges from the classic author through the introduction of a group of slaves in the list of dramatic characters and the utilization of the Slave Leader part of whose unique gift is his language which he transforms to salute that is dedicated to Dionysus. But this particular character functions in the end, not so much as Dionysus's "praise singer" but as "the mouthpiece of Ogun". According to Okpewho, Soyinka demonstrates in the adaptation his "prime allegiance to the indigenous traditions [of the Yoruba] and the contingencies of time and place" (74). Soyinka earlier argued in his influential essay "The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy" of the similarities borne by Dionysus and Ogun including, "Dionysus's thyrsus [that] is physically and functionally paralleled by the *opa Ogun* borne by the male devotees of Ogun"; the dog that is "slaughtered in sacrifice" to Ogun and "literally torn limb from limb" in a "mock-struggle of the head priest and his acolytes" which recalls "the dismemberment of Zagreus, son of Zeus"; and "[m]ost significant of all is the brotherhood of the palm and the ivy" (Soyinka 1976: 158-9). Hence, to Okpewho, together with using the play as a response to the intellectual climate of his time, what James Gibbs calls the "Soyinka's 'Cambridge Period,' a period of dialogue with the Western intellectual and artistic

tradition, to which [belong] Myth, Literature and the African World, and, by sleight of hand, the adaptation of *The Bacchae of Euripides*” (63), Soyinka also uses this adaptation to task his artistic and creative Muse into exploring further the parallelism and similarities between Greek and Yoruba tradition in the development of tragic drama as represented by Dionysus and Ogun despite the obvious differences between the two cultural ethoi.

The example of Soyinka’s *Bacchae* necessarily requires that we draw a clear distinction by way of definition among appropriation, transposition and copying, and how each of the terms connects to the issue that we address in this essay. In the opinion of Fischlin and Fortier, appropriation suggests “a hostile takeover, a seizure of authority over the original in a way that appeals to contemporary sensibilities steeped in a politicized understanding of culture” (3), such as in Soyinka’s case. While appropriation is not the kind of relationship that exists between *Gratitude* and *Anger*, it is certainly what Anyokwu has done with Wetmore Jr.’s work *The Athenian Sun in an African Sky: African Adaptation of Greek Tragedy* (2001), which the title of his essay echoes. Moreover, Etherton’s typology of adaptation including changing character and place names, changing period or setting, adapting contexts, altering the story, and changing the theme or focus (102-3), works at many levels: while some adaptation adopt only one, some combine all, as in the case of *Gratitude*. Meanwhile, Cartelli, in his own influential taxonomy of appropriation, distinguishes five types: satiric, confrontational, transpositional, proprietary, and dialogic. Since we are dealing with authorial intention, a critical look at *Gratitude* also shows transpositional appropriation where the author “identifies and isolates a specific theme, plot, or argument in its appropriative objective and brings it into [her] own, arguably analogous, interpretive field to underwrite or enrich a presumably related thesis or argument” (17); using Gérard Genette’s “heterodiagetic transposition” model in which setting and characters are changed, and plot playfully shuffled, Dionne and Kapadia also identify appropriation in a work which redeploys, reworks the plot and resolution of a hypotext in a way consistent with it; that is, the “world outside the narrative framework [of the adaptation] re-creates elements internal to the narrative [of the hypotext]” (4), an approach that is also clear in *Gratitude*, that is concerned with its specific society.

On the other hand, transposition entails making a hypotext fit into a new context, a re-contextualization, which “alters the shape and significance of another work so as to invoke that work and yet be different from it” (Fischlin and Fortier 4); to also view the relationship that exists

between *Gratitude* and *Anger* in this light, in which the former “reimagines the [anterior] text whole-cloth, *abandoning in postmodern fashion any sense of an original*” (Dionne and Kapadia 4; emphasis added) is equally tenable. Moreover, Ademilua-Afolayan explicitly announces her debt to Osborne even with the title of her own play and in terms of the thematic relevance of her work, with “the themes of class and religion and generational conflict” (Anyokwu 246). Although she “borrows the theatrical idioms [of Osborne] to simultaneously read [her own] historical present and critically reread history---of theatre and of sociopolitics” (Conteh-Morgan and Olaniyan 3), *Gratitude* cannot, and should not, be classified as mere copying for “appropriation is not the one-way street some might like it to be” (Cartelli 17). As Conteh-Morgan and Olaniyan further write, “the impulse behind the extensive riffing on traditions far and wide, especially traditions of the West, goes beyond the imperative of ‘writing back’ to empire but is conceived as part and parcel of an expansive self-apprehension of one’s place in the world” (3). According to Gbemisola Adeoti this process of riffing on existing works, of “looking back on the ancients” (12), has its own concerns, and are very clear in *Gratitude*, which is similar to, yet different from, *Anger*. As a specific example of this similarity and difference, *Gratitude* employs the strategy of naming whereby its characters’ names have meanings in their spatial and temporal realities, even though what they share with *Anger*’s are equally obvious. While Anyokwu acknowledges this fact, “unlike in Osborne’s play, in Ademilua-Afolayan’s adaptation, the playwright *deliberately and brilliantly gives her characters meaningful theme-related names*” (247; emphasis added), it is baffling that a few pages afterwards he changes his position saying that Ademilua-Afolayan “*merely* replace[s] English names and settings with Nigerian (African) ones; substitutes rice for tea without any implied dietary implications or class ramifications of the substitution” (250; emphasis in the original). Whereas these names, to adopt Niyi Osundare’s term, are not just “fortuitous outgrowth of some irrational-inspirationalist anarchy but products of social complexes and mutation” (6), because they foreground *Gratitude* as well as its themes in the specificity of the experience that it captures even as this particular artistic choice makes it possible to view the play as an autonomous work in, and by, itself.

When we approach an adaptation on its own merit, examine the tools that it uses to engage its concerns and the way those concerns are highlighted for its target audience so that they are not in any doubt about its author’s intentions, the value of such a work to its spatial and temporal realities would be better appreciated. McKinnon argues that the adaptation and the adapted text

always coexist, “and must coexist in order for the adaptation to be read as adaptation” (50); after all, “it is the very survival and endurance of the source text that enables the ongoing process of juxtaposed readings that are crucial to the cultural operation of adaptation” (Sanders 25); and as we see even from Anyokwu’s analysis of *Gratitude*, “adaptation” reconstitute and reinforce the authority of their sources and the canon, wherein the canon also becomes “something different from what it was” (Fischlin and Fortier 6). The safest way, we think, should have been to approach both texts, *Gratitude* and *Anger*, as a relation of intertextual dialogue, one in which the two texts are envisioned as part of the same tradition of narrative or storytelling.

Intertextuality, Graham Allen contends, seems such “a useful term because it foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life” and stands “at the centre of such contemporary conceptions of art and cultural production generally” (5-6). Moreover, Roland Barthes reminds us that the word “text” is, essentially, “the figure of the web, the weave, the garment (text) woven from the threads of the ‘already written’ and the ‘already read’; every text has its meaning, therefore, in relation to other texts, hence, it is ‘a tissue, a woven fabric’” (159). Intertextuality, then, allows us to sidestep the question of source, since “source” is often accompanied by its own baggage of “trouble”. One important example will suffice: Michael O’Brien’s *Mad Boy Chronicle*, a fine retelling of *Hamlet*, which sets its plot in Denmark, circa 999 AD, challenges Shakespeare’s claim to *originality*, *authenticity* and, ultimately, “source” of the Hamlet story. *Mad Boy Chronicle* recasts Shakespeare’s characters as grotesque Vikings, and substitutes Shakespeare’s tragedy with parody and low comedy. In its adaptive approach, *Mad Boy Chronicle* exposes Shakespeare’s “infidelity” to the *original* Hamlet story, by being more faithful to Shakespeare’s ultimate “source,” an ancient Norse saga, than Shakespeare himself. Consequently, the play’s divergences from Shakespeare’s play arouse the audience’s curiosity. According to McKinnon, “the curious relationship between *Mad Boy Chronicle* and its antecedent texts is announced by numerous paratexts that the play uses to inform its audience that it is actually based [not] only on the hypotext (Shakespeare) they recognize, but on a third, even more antecedent original text” therefore calling to question, “the assumptions about Shakespeare’s antecedence and originality” (182-5). While Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* may be an adaptation of *Ur-Hamlet*, the latter is itself a French novelization of a Latin translation of an ancient Norse saga, whose author is unknown meaning that, the relationship between an “original” story, or “source”

and its adaptation (also have in mind appropriation and transposition) should rather be viewed as a process rather than a finished product, as intertextual relationship, as Hutcheon also argues.

(Re) contextualizing *Gratitude*, claiming autonomy

Having identified that *Gratitude* “suffers” from being “too close” to its source, Anyokwu proceeds to catalogue what is perceived to be the “weakness” in the play’s dramaturgy, namely: the introduction and utilization of “Prologue,” dream, storytelling and flashback as narrative technique which, though imaginative and commendable, were unable to rescue the play because it “is still unable to do fantastic by not pull[ing] off a Total Theatre for which African Drama and Theatre is universally renowned” (254); unconvincing character portrayal that robs the play of genuine characterization. For example, Jagunlabi should have been portrayed as a drunk, after all “men who drink alcoholic beverages usually brawl and, if married, beat up their wives in Nigeria in some cases”; and the failure to present adequate background information on the same characters to the extent that their actions are irrational and unconvincing, more so because the author “expects her readers to be already familiar with her source text” (251). In the final analysis, what is required is “a more original reworking of *Look Back in Anger* complete with ingeniously created scenarios, stage business, dialogic variation and a lot of local colour supplied mainly by language could have given this play a distinctly *Nigerian*, nay, *African* texture and tonality” (249; emphasis in the original). Whereas Anyokwu also hails *Gratitude* for “a bracing departure from the source text” (247), a point that he reiterates elsewhere (248), even as he insists that we should “giv[e] the Nigerian writer due credit” (250) for the brilliant way in which she fleshes out Osborne’s dramatization of “the British culture of sanctimony and pietism in her own play” (250) in light of Nigeria’s experience through Tokunbo’s religious posture that Jagunlabi finds irritating. While emphatically stating also that “the single most significant point of departure from *the original* is [*Gratitude*’s] ideological shift from the central thesis of *Look Back in Anger*” (252; emphasis added), his plethora of suggestions and conflicting claims makes it difficult to identify the crux of the argument, hence, one is forced to imagine whether the analysis is actually based on *Gratitude*, or a play that is yet to be written.

Moving beyond the conflicting claims however, we shall devote this second part and the rest of the essay to examining *Gratitude*, with close attention to the aesthetic choice that foregrounds the play in its new environment, and as a suggestion of how it might be considered a new work, with a new life, of its own. We shall start at the end of the play and move backward to

the beginning, a sort of retrospective analysis that necessarily requires examining Tokunbo's counsel to Jagunlabi to "stop thinking about the past, because it doesn't exist anymore" (63), in relation to the "Author's Note" where the author informs us of the personal experience that inspired the play. While the "past" that Tokunbo refers to is metaphoric and can be explained in many ways, we shall restrict the discussion to two of its meanings, one of which Anyokwu brilliantly points out: how *Gratitude* uses Tokunbo's pregnancy as a significant point of departure from *Anger*, "It is, indeed, salubrious to note that unlike in *Look Back in Anger* [Ademilua-Afolayan] in her own play uses Tokunbo at the play's end to execute a significant departure from the heavy-footed and unrelieved gloom, *ennui* and apocalyptic pessimism of the precursor play, as Tokunbo's child signals hope and optimism" (254; emphasis in the original). To re-affirm this particular point, and to underline the *how* and *why* of the play as Hutcheon, Sanders and other scholars working in the field of adaptation scholarship have emphasized, then, we shall show its explicit connection to the title of the play through the "Author's Note".

Ademilua-Afolayan, in the "Author's Note," clearly outlines the personal tragedy and academic rigour that informed the writing of the play along with the social condition that she uses the play to respond to, all of which are anchored in both her Christian faith regarding hope and traditional Yoruba consciousness about the continuity of existence. *Gratitude* thus becomes an exercise in catharsis of some sort, an emotional process that allows her to come to terms with the shock of the sudden death of Adebisi Ademola Ademilua, her younger brother, who ironically assumed the role of her father, who was one of the few people that supported her the most in her academic pursuit most especially her doctoral research, and whom she eventually dedicates the play to (5). As she writes, "Certain things happen in life that we, as humans, cannot comprehend--just as his death a month to his 32nd birthday, without a wife and a child, is incomprehensible. *But there is hope. I just hope that through this play, someone out there will find hope to live on even when bad things occur*" (6; emphasis added). We should draw attention to the fact that while in distress Tokunbo stresses a similar point "Looking back, there is so much sadness, but I am trusting God for a bright future. *I hope that in the midst of this sadness, there will be joy*" (43). Looking at *Gratitude* from this crucial perspective allows us to grasp how the author and fictional character become merged as "sisters in transition," and to recall Paul Ricoeur's concept of the "ethics of memory," of the relationship between narrative and memory. According to Ricoeur,

“narratives, therefore, are at the same time the occasion for manipulation through reading and directing narratives, but also the place where a certain healing of memory may begin” more so when we realise that the exercise of “memory is here an exercise in telling otherwise” (8-9); indeed, “telling otherwise” is, to say the least, one way of describing an adaptation.

As it must have become apparent by now, *Gratitude* represents Ademilua-Afolayan’s effort at self-healing after the personal tragedy that she suffered, an attempt to “exorcise the ghost of a troubling past that haunts her” including the dystopia in her country, similar to the conditions that forced Osborne to rail against his post-war British society in *Anger*, that she read and wrote her doctoral thesis on. But, instead of gloom that *Anger* ends with, Ademilua-Afolayan thinks of a play that gives hope. While she admits that “this reinterpretation affirms the fact that the human condition is the same everywhere” (6), she also deliberately alters the events she dramatizes in *Gratitude* by giving the “angry” and embittered Jagunlabi hope, in spite of his economic failures which was by no fault of his own. Thus, while Alison in *Anger* loses her own pregnancy, Tokunbo’s in *Gratitude* is alive (and we should note the “Africanness/Yorubanness” in this dramatic choice which we dwell on shortly). Going by the contention that tragic characters choose their fate, that they have a choice in how they respond to a situation, and that tragedy *only* occurs when they choose wrongly (Wetmore Jr. 45; emphasis added), we can understand why, in response to Jagunlabi’s lamentation, “I...I never prayed for this kind of life. All I ever wanted is to succeed, to be somebody useful in life,” Tokunbo insists, “Then stop blaming others and move on. *Stop thinking about the past, because it doesn’t exist anymore*. Stop allowing your shameful past tie you down” (63; emphasis added), as both an expression of her own awareness and dramatic change in her character trait.

Although Anyokwu also points out this fact, “this might well succinctly signify a kind of paradigm shift: a shift of spiritual and epistemic power and a source of universal hope for a dystopic post-industrial world thirsting for light and desperate for meaning” (254), his reading same in light of feminist criticism undermines the credibility of such a fine observation. For *Gratitude*’s dramatization of Tokunbo’s ordeal has both a socially-relevant endorsement in adaptation scholarship as we have discussed so far, instead of the way he reads it as the author’s own personal unconvincing “feminist posturing” that lacks “proper theoretical or ideological grounding either in contemporary western-derived feminist movement or its localized African

variants, or, better yet, a kind of indigenous proto-feminist consciousness” (253). Whereas if the goal was to psychoanalyse the author, it ought to have been done with caution, for as Guerin et al warn, “To see a great work of fiction or a great poem primarily as a psychological case study... is often to miss its wider significance and perhaps even the essential aesthetic experience it should provide” (qtd in Balogun 89); indeed, we are not unaware of psychoanalytical criticism’s emphasis that the author’s biography including both the conscious and unconscious state (of mind) often contributes immensely to the formation of the text, intent that the “Author’s Note” has adequately, we dare say, provided.

Concomitantly, through changes in character, place, setting, contextual and thematic consideration (recall Etherton) Ademilua-Afolayan uses *ìtàn* that necessarily results to a “shift of spiritual and epistemic power” and her “Africanness” or, more specifically, Yoruba consciousness to distinguish *Gratitude* from *Anger* and underline the originality of her own craft at the same time. According to Babalola Yai, *ìtàn* is coined from “*tàn*”, that is, “to spread”; “to open”; “to illuminate”; and “to shine” which are phrases detailing its reach, scope and dialectical imperatives beyond the Yoruba frontiers (Yai 30). *Gratitude* as *ìtàn*, from this perspective, underscores how Osborne’s story of 1950s England in *Anger*, is transferred by Ademilua-Afolayan to Nigeria of the present moment, and how both the logic and thematic value of the Osborne years are relevant in the present. The cultural and/or creative potential of *ìtàn* that is emphasized includes its dialectical significance as derived from its polysemic nature which integrates three fundamental dimensions, namely: the chronological aspect that deals with people and places; the territorial/geographical dimensions emphasizing links between people across and beyond their cradles; and the discursive and/or reflexive dimensions that underline its intellectual import (Yai 31). Therefore, as determined by the context of usage: *ìtàn* (story), *ìtàn* (narrative), and *ìtàn* (history) explain both the correspondence between Ademilua-Afolayan and Osborne at the superficial level through the process and product of adaptation (recall Hutcheon’s contention); at the deeply conscious level however, we refer to the ideological shift that she brings to bear upon that same story, a glimpse of which the “Author’s Note” as *ìtàn* (experience), underlines. Thus, when we approach *Gratitude* on its own terms and not as an appendage, an inferior version of *Anger*, we shall realize that the play is both a tragedy and epic narrative at the same time--- genres that are central to the African Total Theatre of which it has been accused of lacking.

Furthermore, *Gratitude* uses ìtàn (as both language of communication and narrative along with characterization) in a way that allows the audience to view the play's explication of the tripartite structure of the Yoruba universe: the world of the dead; the world of the living; and the world of the unborn, without leaving out the most crucial point that connects all, that is, "transition" (See; Soyinka "The Fourth Stage"). While Soyinka describes the fourth stage as "the immeasurable gulf of transition" (148), he considers transition as "the metaphysical abyss both of god and man" (149), a passage that is similar to the immaterial reality that is created in *Gratitude* through dream (29-30). In the dream, the symbolic tripartite world is deftly created through characterization: Old Woman who comes into Tokunbo's consciousness while she sleeps represents the ancestors'; Tokunbo and Jagunlabi represent the living; while Tokunbo's pregnancy represents the unborn, even as the totality of that unique experience stands for the transition.

Put differently in order to clarify the argument, the three characters (and the unborn child) represent "the community of Yoruba cosmology in which are coeval the three historical, actual and prospective planes of entity...the comprehensive union of religious and secular intuition in the traditional Yoruba" psyche (Osofisan 153). In the first instance, the Old Woman symbolizes that historical past, as is the ìtàn that she tells which "houses the ultimate expression of cosmic will" (Soyinka 149); Jagunlabi and Tokunbo stand for the actual (and "lived" experience) closer to our own; while their unborn child represents the prospective plane of entity upon which Tokunbo casts a future glance as a compensation for her travails and the anticipation of marital bliss with Jagunlabi, hence, her insistence that he should forget his sordid, shameful past.

Language as metaphor and proverb becomes a vehicle of communication and narrative that is deployed in *Gratitude*. Karin Barber avers that although relegated to the background by both commonwealth criticism and postcolonial criticism and mainly identified as "oral traditions," indigenous languages function as "a pool of linguistic and thematic resources from which the Anglophone writer can draw in order to refashion the English (language) that s/he is in the process of appropriating" (674). Barber contends that it is not just in the area of language use, however, but also in capturing the totality of experience that the adapter finds these traditional heritage useful "to express African experience in alien tongue". She explains that the process starts from the known, recognizable "western" form of the work [consider *Anger*] and then deviates to "something not well known, something *outside* or *beneath* the contemporary literary tradition, the oral heritage..." (675; emphasis in the original) that guarantees, in Eileen Julien's terms, "the

authenticity of the experience conveyed by the text” (qtd in Barber 678), in relation to real-life occurrences.

On this last point, we have in operation another deeply conscious Yoruba perception that can be read into the relationships that the play dramatizes, that is, the “physical” one between Jagunlabi and Tokunbo and the “spiritual” one in the surreal world of the dream, both of which are conveyed in the language of proverb. As the Yoruba will say: “T’ómodé bá subú áwo ‘wájú, b’ágbàlagbà subú a w’èhìn wò” which, freely translated, means, “Daunted by life’s challenges, a child looks forward with hope and for inspiration; the elderly one looks back in retrospect”. Two of these assumptions are clear: while the happy ending of the embittered couple’s incessant altercation in Old Woman’s *itàn* (dream) gives Tokunbo the reason to look forward and towards the future in hope and anticipation of the renewal of life, so to speak, the Old Woman’s turning of her own gaze into the past which her *itàn* clearly represents, underscores the value of seeking wisdom from past experience, which is also an essential import of the proverb, even as it underscores the essential value of adaptation as an exercise predicated on using the past to learn about the present.

Therefore, the Old Woman’s *itàn* in the dream represents a metaphor for the experience of the “mystical” in a realm of existence that links reality to illusion, the present with the past, and the point of “transition” that Soyinka also calls a “continuum” where “the inter-transmutation of essence-ideal and materiality occurs” (26), with the real-world of the text. While the encounter that Tokunbo witnesses in her dream state is a religious experience that is clearly different from what she passes through in real life and in the church where she goes to pray regularly (25-8), we should also not overlook the significance of that spiritual experience to her “transition” in the play. In fact, there is a complete change in Tokunbo’s character as underscored by her sense of maturity and response to Jagunlabi after the dream encounter (49-51;59-63), meaning that the dream scene is important to both the shift in thematic focus and medium of narration, similar to Sanders’s notion that “adaptation can be a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode” (19), or of Hutcheon’s “intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images)” (16), depending on the context of usage. By the same token, Old Woman’s *itàn* allows us to elaborate further on the fact that everything about the adaptation is woven around *itàn*, at its multi-dimensional levels., which is the import of “*T’ómodé bá subú áwo ‘wájú,*” that we quoted earlier and Tokunbo’s (whose initial expectations about love

and marriage to Jagunlabi were dashed), way of saying it is not tragic to be born poor, but determined by how one responds to poverty.

Jagunlabi is obviously sufficiently troubled to the extent that he becomes irascible. His maltreatment of his wife, traceable to his seeming “existential predicament, his ontologic disorientation” (Anyokwu 245), is after all not motiveless villainy like Shakespeare’s Iago (whereas Iago’s isn’t motiveless after all!). Indeed, we would understand this point if the *itàn* (the trajectory) of Jagunlabi’s own life is carefully studied: one who becomes an orphan at a young age and is consequently saddled with the responsibility of caring for his eleven siblings, a responsibility that he was ill-equipped for; one who has to struggle to survive on violence in the street among touts; one whose hope of securing a good job with university degree is dashed; and whose marriage to Tokunbo doesn’t help either, not with a hostile mother-in-law, who seizes every opportunity to remind him that “poverty is a tradition in [his] family” (51). For someone whose life “has been one long disaster” as he admits (46), Jagunlabi deserves our sympathy. He not only admits that he is “frustrated and angry” (48) towards his wife, but even in his other inter-personal relationships, as demonstrated in the way he badly handles his performing troupe’s rehearsal (53-4). He also admits that “he feels like an animal” (48), a crucial revelation that underscores the relevance of Tokunbo’s experience of the mystical that we mentioned earlier and how it serves as the turning point in their turbulent marriage. Hence, the encounter with the Old Woman and her *itàn*, become some sort of “ethics”; as Thompson writes, a critical artistic prescription is that “force or animal vitality must be balanced by ethics, *the moral wisdom of the elders*. Ethics (being) the peculiarly human gift of finding the tolerable means between the good and the bad, the hot and the cold, the living and the dead, to safeguard (hu)man existence” (59; emphasis added). We should remember how Jagunlabi’s “animal instinct” forces him to disrupt the rehearsal for a show that he has been paid in advance, by finding fault with everybody and every dance steps presented by his troupe of dancers.

At the rehearsal, all the elements associated with African Total Theatre: music, role play, choreography, dance etc are effectively utilized. As we are informed in the stage direction, dance and choreography are drawn from several cultures: Akwa-Ibom, Obitun, Ondo dance etc that foreground the ensemble in its Nigerian multicultural context. Besides, the scene is essentially a play-within-a play, a meta-theatrical device that allows a dramatist to superimpose layers of experience on another as a self-reflective device and to emphasize the central thematic concern of

the play. In *Gratitude* the aesthetic device is used twice but in this particular scene, it shows that Jagunlabi is not just angry with Tokunbo but psychologically disoriented by his condition to the extent that he is bitter towards everybody and everything around him; while role-play is used in the Prologue scene involving an obviously troubled Younger Woman who comes to seek counsel from an elderly one, Landlady, who tells her instead her own story and why her marriage collapsed. This scene is briefly and neatly dramatized through a flashback (11-14), and we should also note the similarity and difference in this scene with the Old Woman's *itàn*, and how attention is drawn to the essence of gender complementarity that sustains marriage.

Ademilua-Afolayan uses this particular scene to emphasize that, unlike *Anger*, the actions in *Gratitude* begin *in medias res* (in the middle of things), which is an epic device in narrative that relies on flashback, storytelling (where Jagunlabi and Tokunbo recount their past), and role-play through which sub-plots relevant to the main plot are introduced, and the missing links in the main plot of a story are provided by the author. Significantly also, even though some of these events unfold way into the narration, through the flashbacks and storytelling device the connection between the scenes are dramatized without leaving the audience in any doubt as to the direction of the narrative. By also locating these stories and flashbacks in recognizable scenarios and historical/political contexts, *Gratitude* shows that the meaning of a text, as Wendell Harris contends, could be sought by reconstructing the historical context in which it appears---contexts that the author could also assume to be familiar to her/his audience (9). Similarly, Marvin Carlson explains that theatrical performances are often uniquely structured events dedicated for a specific audience because of the way they convey realities that the audience are familiar with (10). Hence, instead of considering this narrative approach as a weakness in *Gratitude*'s dramaturgy, we argue that it moves the event forward, creates room for dramatic tension and suspense since the audience will be made to "seek" answers to situations that they have previously encountered or missed as the events unfold.

Again a form of *itàn* that is subsumed in another one, what the Yoruba refer to as *itàn-nín-itàn*, is the *oríkì* that the Old Woman uses to usher Tokunbo into her surreal world; "Agbeke, *omo owa, omo ekunlaafin*. You the daughter of the lion, Agbeke the one to carry, pet and pamper. The child of the great daughter of Eshinmo" (29; emphasis in the original). Whether rendered as a short (as this example) or extended prose/narrative detailing specific incidents at some point in the past, or the mythological and /or the historical contents of an individual's personal or lineage's line of

descent, oríkì is a unique form of language and verbal aesthetic that also relies on ìtàn. As Barber contends “itan are told to explain obscure lines of oriki, while oriki in turn provide the mnemonic pegs onto which extended narratives [itan] are hung”(Barber 2004:361). Indeed, as the Old Woman demonstrates, it is on Tokunbo’s oríkì that she weaves her own “extended narrative,” her ìtàn, which she uses to not only educate the young woman but also help her come to terms with her ordeal and to see beyond tragedy, as her maker, Ademilua-Afolayan, is able to see beyond her own personal loss.

Essentially, we will emphasize that going by the perspective of authorial intention, the social complexity and conditions that the work addresses, *Gratitude*, in the final analysis, embodies a trinity in the nature of the adaptation genre: the source of new creation, the process of the new creation and the creation itself, which tallies with the tripartite structure of the Yoruba universe as we earlier argued. But, as Harris mentions, in this age of the “pretensions of theory” and “terminological promiscuity” (132,156), it is imperative that analysts and critical analyses of any work of adaptation should be mindful of the registers applicable to the field of knowledge in which they are writing, in order not to confuse the audience while the intention is to educate them.

Conclusion

In this essay, we have analysed the implication of privileging fidelity and the notion of originality and inferiority in the relationship between a hypotext and its derivative. This parameter of analysis forms the basis of analysis in Christopher Anyokwu’s “British Sun in An African Sky: Locating the Metropole in the Margins in John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* and Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan’s *Look Back in Gratitude*”. Guided by Maud Ellman’s assertion that “the act of reading is a process of mutual seduction, whereby the reader and the read arouse each other’s fantasies, expose each other’s dreams. *It is when we think we penetrate the text’s disguises that we are usually most deluded and most ignorant, for what we see is nothing but our own unknown selves*” (10; emphasis added), we have worked to understand and interpret *Look Back in Gratitude* and taking into consideration the authorial intention along with other conditions of creation, without saying that ours are the final words on the text. Moreover, much of what adaptation theory emphasizes as we have demonstrated so far is that adaptation is a legitimate practice through which authors continue to contribute to the ongoing, lively discourse of politics and power in their immediate milieu of experience; after all, as Hutcheon submits, “in the workings of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception”.

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