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#### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines the current state of affairs in the world with particular reference to the degradation of human life, and the fact that it is the future that is destroyed in killing (in its various forms) the youths. It also decries the level of lack of love among the human race, be it inter- or intra- racial and/or tribal, and states that this and the utter hatred among humans are the key factors responsible for the destruction of the future. The paper however opines that the future could be reconstructed through literature by presenting such materials as could engender love and/or expose the ills of war in all its facets or, at least, reduce 'the bickering and wrangling among mankind to the barest minimum. The paper concludes that it is only when these are done that there can be hope for the future as we would have started on the tortuous road to the reconstruction of the future.*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

A look at the title of this paper will at once set the mind amok. First because the future is not yet, and so the question, how can one possibly reconstruct it? Secondly, because there seem to have been an overwhelming assumption, and that is that the future is damaged and so needs to be rebuilt. To The simple minded, the future is not yet lived and so cannot be said to have been destroyed, but this is not always the case. The future has been eaten up by the past and digested by the present and the future is no more. Therefore, there is a great need to reconstruct that future which we all look forward to. This is our only hope (The hope for our children).

Talking about children reminds me of a particular interaction that took place between me and my little daughter (eight years old) who, haven watched Press TV and Al Jazeera Television Stations for a period, asked me, "Daddy, why are they fighting?" I was dumbfounded, I could not reply. I had no ready answer and I still do not have a good one. But I realised that the world is depraved and doomed.

The assertion that the past and present have consumed the future might sound pessimistic to some people. There is no element of pessimism in the statement as the events in the world in recent times will validate. Today, mankind invest more in weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, phosphorus, etc bombs; missiles (short, long and intercontinental ranges); supersonic and devastating war planes; insensitive computer controlled fabrications that spray bombs; and other highly destructive gadgets and highly efficient helicopters of war. Also, there are the jets, bombers and even drones. The question is "what or who do we use these incinerators and grinders for?"

A panoramic view of the world scene in recent years will reveal a vast canvass of woe and bloodshed and hard talks of human degradation and treachery, even when linguistic elements of peace, friendship and love pervade the atmosphere. To put it succinctly, today men are vaporised. Consider America versus the Middle East especially the Arab world, Europe versus the Middle East, Israel versus Palestine, Israel versus Gaza, Israel versus Lebanon, the entire former Soviet Union, India versus China, Tibet versus China and African countries and their internal wrangling and massacre. A few minutes at Press TV, Al Jazeera and BBC Television stations will rouse a wave of revulsion at the direction and rate of progress in the world in someone. Ours has turned a misguided generation and the future has been aborted. Therefore, there is a dire need for us to reconstruct the future.

Literary artist over the years have persistently tried to rebuild and/or redirect the mind of man towards making him appreciate better the need to crave for peace. They have also attempted to restore man to what he should be. Some have done this in a somewhat global manner. Others have striven in a microscopic way. But the fact is that whichever way we look at it, they have attended to what mankind generally needs to protect the present generation and propagate the future.

Christopher Okigbo, Femi Osofisan, J. P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe are writers from Africa who have attended to this theme. From other regions, there are such writers as William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Thomas Hardy, Wilfred Owen and W.H. Auden. Among the themes examined in their works are war (including terrorism), oppression, tyranny and a vast range of corruption and corrupting tendencies.

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### Literature and the Rebuilding of the Future

Femi Osofisan in The Album of the Midnight Blackout through the exploration of intricate web of infidelity in the home of Professor Juokwu haps on the concept of SAP which, to all intents and purposes, was designed and put in place by the ruling class to exploit and impoverish the masses. Such is it that deception, lack of trust, cheating, outright lies and corruption generally pervade the atmosphere of the play. So we see Akubundu who for the sake of a vote fails to take the proper action against infidelity and adultery in his home. He tells Juokwu, "then I can count on your vote" (57). Also, he sells a bottle of wine and hopes to supply food to Juokwu. He sees these as compensations enough for Prof. Juokwu to make love to his wife. A society as degenerate as this of course can do no more than produce a generation that has no future, a generation without conscience and no will and no focus. Here we see "love for sale".

A World without future is presented to us by Arthur Miller in his Death of a Salesman. In the play, Miller presents us with America without conscience, a world which Ben strongly advises to "Never fight fair with a stranger" (33). The only important thing as far as the people are concerned is business. We see Willy Loman serve the company for thirty-six years and when, at sixty, he could no longer bring in sales (profit) as expected and as he used to do in his younger days, he is dumped. Here we see the height of insensitivity displayed by his boss, young Howard. Of course, Howard is representative of the American capitalistic society specifically, and the world spirit of today. His (Willy Loman's) general attitude and how he bears the situation rubs off on his family especially Biff and Happy, his only children, the hope of the future. Ultimately we observe an outright lack of focus, indecision, insensitivity and a general trend toward a mental state that is sure to produce suicide victims. The impression that comes to mind therefore is that there is no future for mankind. Such an atmosphere that dealt such a deadly blow on Willy Loman generated or trained a generation of liars and lies and so a debauched society, a society or generation without a future. In fact, out of the psychological breakdown and after a deep consideration of human existence in the modern times, Biff observes "... it's a measly manner of existence" (10) and so there is an utter sense of disillusionment and futility.

The derangement introduced by Arthur Miller is furthered by Obiora Udegbonam who beautifully presents the situation of an insane future when in his novel Hearing Voices he presents youths who have lost their sanity marginally or totally. Society destroyed them, some by not providing them means of sustenance, others by dispossessing them, and yet others by both. So we see Moneytrii, Last Don, Oke and virtually all the youths losing their sanity and either landing on the "psychiatric couch"(34) as Taban Lo Liyong would say in "Normalcy, Normalcy, I Detest Thee", or in the spiritualist's den where, more often than not, further exploitation is perpetuated or murder accomplished.

The rot and decadence in the world is what a young playwright Diebele Nwa Osamor examined in his play Upside Down. Although riddled with linguistic blemish, the play presents us with a society where everything is out of tune with what it should be: The lecturer must sleep with his female student or collect other gratifications from the male to pass them; the police, army, navy and other forces and paramilitary organisations maim or kill innocent citizens at will, and also loot their property and wares at no consequence to them; the police must collect gratification to perform their legitimate duty for which they are paid salaries, and the police hires out fire-arms to armed robbers for them to go on their robbery operations. The height of all these corrupt practices could be seen in the situation where a son (Chima) organises an armed robbery attack on his own mother (Madam London). It is really a world turned upside down. And for all these, Ezeoji blames the leadership: "...if the head of a man is sick, why should you be surprised if, suddenly his hands or the rest parts, start doing obscene things?" (sic) (19).

Although Nimmo Basse set his poems in Nigeria, he is actually commenting on the human condition in the world as a whole. The titles of his collections Patriots and Cockroaches and Poems on the Run underscore his intentions in the poems. He decries the high level of poverty oppression and deprivation of the less privileged in the society. He expresses bitterness at the high level of insensitivity among humanity. For example, the title "They took our today" from Poems on the Run goes a long way to show to what extent the future needs reconstructing. The content speaks volumes about human relations. The first stanza of the poem reads:

Bullets from hell  
Do not fly in straight lines  
Like cruise missiles They  
smell out our sad tears  
And zero-spiral to nib our smiles  
Before we find strength to part our leaden lips. (49)

The second stanza haps on weapons of war and the devastation they cause among humans. Suffice it to say that the poem was concluded on a stanza of two lines, the first of which is: "For their future they took our today (49). Let it be noted that they (the oppressive and murderous forces) have a fundamental mistake: that of assuming that they have a "future." Neither they nor we have a future. A look at some of the titles in Poems on the Run ("Days of Rage," "Tombstones Count for Naught," "Goliath's Brow," "Evil Reign," "Private Prison." "Flamethrowers," "Desolation" and "Burnt River" (11-12)) will serve to expose the level of hatred felt by Bassey towards the oppressive and tyrannical rulers as a result of the level of human destruction and degradation perpetuated by them.

The destruction of the future is a major and recurrent theme in the poetry of Wilfred Owen, a war poet who died in World War I. The light was extinguished so soon and the future was thrown into darkness just as it happened in the case of Christopher Okigbo. Two very important poems in which Owen carefully ..examined this theme are "Dulce et Decorum Est" (2051) and "Strange Meeting" (2052). In "Dulce..." the poet gives a very graphic description of a band of soldiers in a battle field. We see how a young soldier is brutally murdered using "Five-Nines." One cannot help but feel a wave of revulsion and a puking sensation at the thought of the "froth corrupted lungs" and "the white eyes writhing in his [dying soldier's] face". Most unfortunately more youths, by means of false propaganda and a diabolic design of mobilising "children ardent for some desperate glory" (L 26) are imbued with a sense of patriotism unto death in a cause that is as false and destructive as the outcome. Worse still, the youths (the soldiers) do not know what they are fighting for as we are made to realise by Wole Soyinka in "Civilian and Soldier" and more so as the so called enemies are friends as Owen says in "Strange Meeting": "I am the enemy you killed, my friend"(L 40).

According to Davis Dunbar McElroy, W. H. Auden gave the warning in his long dramatic poem that begins in a New York City bar "The Age of Anxiety," that "many have perished: more will"(24). This is the fate of the world, the fate of the future, and so there is the strong need to reconstruct it now. The underlying factor responsible for this state of affair is the utter lack of love among humanity. This thought, according to McElroy, is very well captured by William Faulkner in his Wild Palm where, through his character, he posits: "Love if you will because it can't last. There is no place for it in the world today, we have eliminated it; it took us a long time, but man is resourceful and limitless in inventing too..." (25). So we live in a world bereft of love and that is why man continues to invent military hardware as well as conscience killing propaganda. A world devoid of love and full of deceit, hypocrisy, selfishness and hatred is what this researcher has presented in his collections of poetry, Birdsongs I and Birdsongs II, as F. A. Anene-Boyle observes: "in dialoguing with his society, his lines [poems] reek of painful memories of poverty, deprivation. loss of cultural values, deceit, selfishness, love, hypocrisy and hate" (iv).

Literature should and must be used in performing the great and noble task of reconstructing the future. And if we agree with Late Dame Edith SitweJI as quoted by Mezu Okechukwu that, "poetry is the light of the Great Morning wherein the beings whom we see passing in the street are transformed for us into the epitome of all beauty, or of all joy, or of all sorrow" (91) then literary artist generally must continue to present the world as it ought to be rather than as it is or, if it is to be presented as it is, it must be done in such a way that the world seeing it in its ugliness must refrain from similar actions and/or inactions with a view to instilling a sense of love for all mankind in mind. According to Ogungbesan, Soyinka also declares that,

it is about time that the African writer stopped being a mere chronicler and understood also that part of his essential purpose is to write a very definite vision ... he must at least begin by exposing the future in a clear and truthful exposition of the present (2).

This statement although directed at African writers must be applied to writers, the world over. Also, Achebe's declaration that the writer's duty is "to explore in depth the human condition" (Ogungbesan, 2) must also be taken seriously universally if the battered future is to be patched once again.

The present occurrences most certainly must remind us of our history as a world race from creation and these must serve as pointers to where we are heading: doomsday. But according to R.N. Egudu, "to reorder her society, Africa needs ideas from all over the world" (60). In the same way, the rest of the world must learn from the African tenets of the family and family love and they must learn from the virtues of African history and apply same to be able to step off this precipice unto solid and level ground of safety and sure future. It is only in this state that Lenrie Peters' projection, according to Egudu' that there will be time

"... to take a fellow by the shoulder saying 'we two are common citizens without tribe, caste, nation, race without the mischievous cloak of fiscal shrouds.' Time to dip clean fingers in the bowls together Unity

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of God (69)" will be possible. This is the future that can be guaranteed, the future that should be and is desired.

### CONCLUSION

In this paper, efforts have been made to x-ray the problems in the world, especially those having to do with the degradation of the human race. The problems are of different shades. But in all, they constitute the fate of the world today. These problems are seen to have emanated from mankind themselves as a result of lack of love and the high level of hatred, bickering, hypocrisy, deceit, etc that human beings exhibit. These are all pointers to one great gloomy phenomenon awaiting humanity: human disaster.

However, there is a route out of this tragedy. This course could be charted by literature. Since the special duty of literature, in the words of G. D. Killam, is "... to interpret and educate society" (xii), a view with which this paper clearly identifies, it becomes necessary therefore, to posit that literature could and should be put to use to redirect humanity towards and through the inevitable tortuous route to the rebuilding of the future. The overall implication of this is that literary artist, although have been discharging this duty of educating the human race in their poems, fictions, plays and dramas, must continue to do that to a greater extent, since there shall be no justification until the restoration of faith and dignity to humanity is achieved, and I dare say, this must begin with the full enlightenment of the rulers and leaders of the different nations of the world.

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