

Literary Imaginations and Medical Practices in Selected Modern African Poetry

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Abstract

This study examines literary engagements of medical practices in selected modern African poetry. Four poems that explore medical thematic preoccupations were purposively selected and analyzed qualitatively. Apart from the poems, scholarly materials that are relevant to corroborate the discourse in the study are gathered from the Internet. Oral interviews were also conducted by the researchers to obtain in-depth knowledge of medical practices in relation to the aims and objectives of this research. The respondents include physicians, nurses, and security experts who are familiar with the research focus. Postcolonial theory was adopted since the literary texts were produced by poets from formerly colonized nations. The findings show that African poets can portray imaginatively and comparatively the methods of detecting pregnancy by traditional midwives and orthodox physicians. When there is controversy over test results, the lives of the patients and their fetuses are in danger. So, there should be synergy between the traditional and the orthodox physicians in healthcare service deliveries. The research also reveals that postmortem examinations, whether hospital or medicolegal (forensic) autopsy, provide medical data that will be useful in prevention of crimes, accidental cases, academic research and treatment of diseases. The study further shows the ineffectiveness of the traditional treatments for *Abiku*-patients, and the effects of poetry and music on humans are also explored in this study.

Keywords: Biomedical, poetry, health, ailments, psychology.

Introduction

Literary writers generally are conscious of the utilitarian functions of poetry in society and so they write imaginatively and psychologically reflecting various aspects of human life. With their experiences gathered on daily basis, they create aesthetically literary works that are meant to deconstruct ideologies, policies and misconceptions that they feel are against wellbeing of people in society. Such works cover subjects such as orthodox healthcare system, legal issues, politics, religion, anthropology, socio-cultural and economic challenges. A handful of literary productions also explore ethnomusicology, herbal medical practices, medicine, psychiatry, and so on. All these are repressed into the unconscious mind that contains experiences, images and symbols. Since the health and psychological wellness of people is paramount to writers, they often employ literary writings to alleviate their own psychic and emotional burdens. By implication, their writings serve as cathartic strategy to address psychological challenges in society. It is evident that some literary works help in educating individuals about healthcare issues. Charon, *et al* (1995:599) observe that "along with other disciplines in the humanities and along with the social and behavioural sciences, literature and literary studies contribute to this educational effort." The scholars through their findings reveal that, "literary representations of the physician's work, written by nonphysicians as well as physicians clarify the many roles and expectations of medicine and thereby help readers to understand not only the responsibilities of physicians" but also "the position of medicine within a culture" (300).

African writers have undoubtedly demonstrated their profound knowledge of medical practices through their artistic works. This is revealed in the genres of literature such as the prose, dramatic works and poetry. They explore medical conditions in their works, employing certain appropriate medical terminologies to convey their subject matter to reader with a view to educating them about certain diseases, methods of diagnosis, treatments and management of physical and psychological problems in society. Some African writers always interrogate subjects of healthcare services in their works. For instance, Chinua Achebe in *Arrow of God*, *Things Fall Apart*, *Madman*, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O in *The River Between*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*, among others have explored indigenous medical practices in their works; Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*, Efua Sutherland's *Edufa*, John Pepper Clark's *Song of a Goat*, and Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*, and so on, also contain issues of traditional healthcare system. In poetry, there are works that also centre on medical practices of various kinds whether indigenous or orthodox treatments and management. They include Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo's "Pomegranate", Kobena Eyi Acquah's "In the Naval of the Soul", Wole Soyinka's "Post Mortem", Ben Okri's "To an English Friend in Africa", Hyginus Ekwuazi's poetry collections, *The Monkey's Eyes* and John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo's "Agbor Dancer", and a host of others. In this study, our discourse shall be on Literary Imagination and Medical Practices in Modern African Poetry. Poetry as a genre of literature is employed to express repressed memories, events, feelings and actions to public domain. The thematic preoccupations encapsulated in poems, in consonance with the objectives of this work shall therefore be unfolded with a view to activating the mental consciousness of readers about medical practices.

Medical Science in African Societies

The primary goal of literary writers who produce poetry on the subject of medical practices is to activate the conscious awareness of readers about the African rich cultural heritage, preserve and promote healthcare services in society. Scholarly works abound on treatment and management of diseases in African communities. For instance, the research carried out by Abdullahi (2011:115) reveals that "in many of these communities, traditional healers often act, in part, as an intermediary between the visible and invisible worlds; between the living and the dead or ancestors, sometimes to determine which spirits are at work and how to bring the sick person back into harmony with the ancestors." In both orthodox and traditional healthcare systems, the practice of diagnosis is common in order to ascertain the actual underlying causality of an ailment, afflictions or pandemic conditions in society. In traditional settings, diviners render diagnostic services to patients in order to know the actual cause of their ailments or afflictions. In the opinion of Shizha and Charema (2011:168), diviners "are responsible for determining the cause of illness, which in some cases is believed to stem from spirits and other evil influences." Apart from the trado-medical specialists like diviners, some herbalists, soothsayers, folk midwives, and so on, may also carry out diagnosis in form of divinations. In some societies, the people use certain phyto-materials to carry out their diagnosis and investigation.

Before the advent of pharmaceutical drugs, there were medicines that traditional physicians recommended for individuals who had health challenges. Today, the treatments that are given to patients in African societies are based on their physical and psychological conditions. There are medicines that are meant for drinking, chewing, rubbing, bathing, inhaling, and those applied as eye drops, to mention a few. By implication, there are specialists in various aspects of medical practice such as gynecology, midwifery, optometry, orthopedic, nursing, pharmacy, pediatric, medical laboratory, and so on. The study carried out by Iddrisu (2017:53) reveals that in several communities in Africa, "sick people go to acknowledged diviners and healers;

they are often called witch doctors in the West. In order to discover the nature of their illness in almost every instance, the explanation involves a deity or an ancestral spirit." However, it is worthy of note that other categories of patients including expectant mothers also visit diviners in order to prevent miscarriage, mothers' mortality or morbidity rates.

In corroborating the above, Ekeopara and Ugoha (2017:35) state that there are "practitioners of therapeutic spiritism. These practitioners include diviners or fortune tellers, who may be seers, alfas and priests, and use supernatural or mysterious forces, incantations, may prescribe rituals associated with the community's religious worship and adopt all sorts of inexplicable things to treat various diseases." In relation to the foregoing, Downie (1991:93) observes that "many writers, including some important writers, have themselves been doctors." The scholar also notes that "literature is enriched by the insights of those who are on the inside of medical situations, and the medical profession must surely be grateful that some of their members have the literary skills to convey these special insights to the general public." In this study, effort will be made to explore both the orthodox and traditional methods of diagnosing early pregnancy among women in society. According to Whitworth, et al (2015), Ultrasound can be used for fetal assessment in early pregnancy. The scholars describe diagnostic ultrasound as a sophisticated electronic technology, which utilizes pulses of high frequency sound to produce an image. Diagnostic ultrasound examination may be employed in a variety of specific circumstances during pregnancy such as after clinical complications or where there are concerns about fetal growth. Whitworth and Bricker in their research note that diagnostic ultrasound examination can be done after clinical complications like bleeding in early pregnancies, perceived risk of malformation of the fetus and fetal growth, among others. The foregoing is captured in literary works of some African poets and they are worthy of being investigated by scholars. In this study, attempt will be made to examine the literary discourse of medical practices as portrayed in some selected modern African poetry.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

There are several cases of physical and psychological health problems in every society today. Some of these health issues are chronic resulting in deformity of patients, cardiac arrest, sexual dysfunction, infertility and untimely death, among others. While some African writers interrogate the issues of ailments and deaths in their societies, others through their literary productions focus on the causality of certain health challenges and the methods of treatments or management. There are also treatments for *Abiku*-patients, and the therapeutic effects of poetry and music on the poet and reader. All these are captured in the poetry of some modern African poets based on their personal observation, imagination and creativity. The aim of this study therefore is to examine literary engagements of medical practices in selected modern African poetry.

The subjects of the chosen poems shall form the underlying basis for our discourse in this research. Although we shall not explore medical practices in details, an attempt will be made to activate the conscious awareness of reader about the issues contained in the poems such as pregnancy tests, death and medical diagnosis through autopsy, traditional medical treatments for infant *Abiku*-patients and the effects of poetry and music on human health.

Methodology

This study is aimed at investigating medical practices as imaginatively captured in some modern African poetry. Four poems that contain medical thematic preoccupations were purposively selected and analyzed qualitatively. Apart from the primary texts, secondary

materials that are relevant to corroborate the discourse in the study are gathered from the Internet. Oral interviews were also conducted to acquire in-depth knowledge of medical practices in relation to the aims and objectives of this research. The respondents include medical physicians, nurses, and security experts who are familiar with the research focus. These selected modern poems are logically presented and analysed in a manner to achieve free flow of thoughts and the objectives of this study.

The Poets and their Works

The two modern African poets whose poetic works have been chosen for this research are Kobena Eyi Acquah and Wole Soyinka. Acquah is a poet and lawyer from Ghana who has published some poems including *The Man Who Died* (1984) and *No Time for a Masterpiece: Poem* (1994-19792). Kobena's poems selected for this study are "In the Naval of the Soul" and "The Keyboard Minuet." The second African poet whose work is also carefully considered for this research is Wole Soyinka who was the first Sub-Sahara African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986. He is among the early Nigerian literary writers whose works cover the three genres of literature. Most of his works present themes of cultural beliefs, death, ritual practices, political imbalance, religious hypocrisy, political and social problems, and so on which characterized Nigeria from colonial to post-independence era. His popular poetry collections include *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967), *A Big Airplane Crashed into the Earth* (1969), *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972), *Ogun Abibiman* (1976), *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1990), *Early Poems* (1997), *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known* (2002).

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial Theory is adopted for this study as it explores literary productions that emerge from formerly colonized countries of the world. In the viewpoint of Imran (2015:7), "Colonialism was the imperialist expansion of western countries, especially Britain and France, into the rest of the world to dominate other countries as their colonies and influence the local people educationally as well as, culturally." Imran's view is affirmed by Channells (1999:110) who observed that there are "effects of colonization" which are often; felt from the moment of the first colonial impact and Post-colonialism constitutes as its subject the way colonized societies adjusted and continue to adjust to the colonial presence: sometimes that presence was regarded as genuinely enriching; more often it was seen as demeaning and impoverishing.

The above study will illuminate the present research which also presents societal problems in postcolonial nations. The study of Kehinde (2006:94) reveals that "the ugly period of colonialism in Africa has affected the people's language, education, religion, artistic sensibilities and popular culture." This implies that literary works including the "African Postcolonial novels have therefore become veritable weapons for dismantling the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power, based on binary oppositions." Such texts in the view of Tyson (2006:427), "can resist colonialist ideology by depicting the misdeeds of the colonizers, the suffering of the colonized, or the detrimental effects of colonialism on the colonized." In advancing the foregoing argument, Tyson (2006:427) affirms that, "most postcolonial critics analyze the ways in which a literary text, whatever its topic, is colonialist or anticolonialist, that is, the ways in which the text reinforces or resists Colonialism's oppressive ideology. For example, in the simplest terms, a text can reinforce colonialist ideology through positive portrayals of the colonizers, negative portrayals of the colonized." The above knowledge will add value to the current study as it dwells on issues facing Nigerians in post-independence society.

According to NOUN (2014:272), "Postcolonial Theory is attempt, not only to expose the oddities of colonialism but to reveal and discuss what the independent nations make of themselves even after the demise of colonialism." In the opinion of Shela (2012:12), this critical theory is employed "to research issues dealing with the nature of cultural identity, gender, race, social class, ethnicity, and nationality in postcolonial societies" while Young (2003:4) explores the relevance of the theory for "politics and philosophy of activism that contests the disparity (between western and non-western cultures/people), and so continues in a way the anti-colonial struggles of the past." There are politics in all aspects of human existence before and after colonization, and so those related to healthcare system will be explored in this study. Channells (1999:110) notes that "Postcolonialism is concerned with the worlds which colonialism in its multiple manifestations, confused, disfigured and distorted, reconfigured and finally transformed." Apart from the foregoing, there are other works including that of NOUN (2014:271) that view Postcolonial Theory as a critical evaluation of "literature produced by cultures that developed in response to colonial domination, from the first point of colonial contact to the present". It is also regarded "as an avenue to probe into the history of society by recreating its past experience with the mind of forestalling the repetition of history. The ultimate for the postcolonial critic is to develop a kind of nostalgia about his historical moment that produces a new dawn in his society" (NOUN, 2014:272). The work will enrich the current research by bringing to the fore some medical challenges and practices in order to improve health and psychological wellbeing of people in modern society. Bhabha (1994:171) asserts that;

postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geographical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the even development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities, peoples.

In corroborating the above submission, Rukundwa and Aarde (2007:1171) state that post-colonialism has been "subjected to thorough and extensive criticism from the perspectives of literary, political and religious studies." In this study, attempt shall be made to examine poetic works of writers carefully selected from Nigeria and Ghana which are among the formerly colonized nations of the world. We intend to analyzed the poems that centre on pregnancy tests from both traditional and orthodox perspectives and the conduct of autopsy examinations and prevention of untimely death in society.

Imaginations and Medical Practices in Modern African Poetry

The discourse of medical practices, whether traditional or orthodox, shall be done by focusing on the conduct of pregnancy tests both by western medical experts and traditional medical practitioners, and the issue of postmortem, which involves the diagnostic procedures for determining the cause and nature of death of people in society. The subjects are imaginatively and creatively presented through poetry. Our focus will also be on the trado-medical treatments for *Abiku-child* who in this study has been regarded as a patient, and the therapeutic effects of poetry and music performance on both the poet and reader.

Pregnancy Tests in Society

African poets have shown their intuitive knowledge of medical practices in their societies before the advent of orthodox medicine especially in the areas of pregnancy diagnosis, infant death control measures and causes of death of patients, among others. Although these practices are

common in fiction and dramatic works, a good number of the writers also explore health issues through poetry. In the poem, "In the Naval of the Soul", Kobena Eyi Acquah interrogates a controversy over the result of a pregnancy test conducted by both traditional midwives and orthodox medical laboratory experts. In modern society, pregnancy test is conducted in the medical laboratory by taking urine or blood sample of a woman by a pathologist in the hospital or health centre. Obrowski, *et al* (2016:0015) state that "Pregnancy, also known as gravidity or gestation, is the time during which one or more babies develop inside a woman. A multiple pregnancy involves more than one child, such as twins. Pregnancy can occur by sexual intercourse or assisted reproductive technology." Similarly, Anderson and Gaffarian (2022) define pregnancy as the state of carrying a developing embryo of fetus. The human gestational period is 39 weeks and is divided into trimesters, the first spanning from week zero to week twelve. During this time frame, numerous significant developmental milestones occur as the fetus develops. Additionally, as the fetus grows, it becomes visible via untrasonography, and laboratory testing can be performed to track progression.

Studies have revealed that pregnancy diagnosis actually requires diverse methods using diagnostic tools such as the history and physical examination, laboratory tests or evaluation and the use of ultrasound device known as the Ultrasonography. These tools are jointly utilized by medical doctors to diagnose appropriately early pregnancy or gestation and prevent the risk of malformation or growth of the fetus caused by pathologists. The findings of the study by Mothiba, *et al* (2015:82) reveal that "the traditional health practitioners refer women to the hospital for confirmation of positive pregnancy before they can commence with herbal treatment." However, in this poem, the speaker makes readers to understand that there are traditional midwives who specialize in diagnosis of women pregnancy status through listening to heart-throb, palpation and by massaging to mention a few.

The poem reveals the traditional method of diagnosing the gestation of women in society which is by listening to the heart-throb of the patient being examined. Among those trado-medical gynecologists who carryout this examination include the physiotherapists, diviners, trado-midwives, and so on. According to the poet-persona: "In the naval of the soul/The midwives of the spirit say/They can hear a heart-throb." The trado-midwives report that the patient under examination is pregnant based on their own method of diagnosis. On the other hand, the medical experts like the obstetricians and gynecologists found out through their own laboratory test results that the woman did not conceive. There is therefore a conflicting outcome of the pregnancy tests conducted by the traditional midwives and the medical doctors with each side claiming superiority and specialty over the other. In African societies, there are various ways of detecting pregnancy, and protecting it until the delivery of the child by the trado-midwives in a traditional health centre. Like the physicians in western healthcare system, these midwives have experience in detecting pregnancy status but the result of the former contradicts that of the medical experts. The poet-persona, reports that;

The experts, of course
Disagree
The urine test they ordered
Said, Negative
Confirming their palpation results
Our fundal height is at an
All time low
Our breasts bear no
Tell-tale tints upon their tits

The traditional method of diagnosing the pregnancy status of fertile women is by feeling the "foetal throb" by placing hand on the navel of patients. This is captured in the poem also; "Yet in their finger upon/Our naval/The midwives of the spirit say/They feel a foetal throb." On the subject of gestation which is the major focus of this poem, Ekeopara and Ugoha (2017:40) state that; "diagnosis may also be achieved by visual, examination of eyes, skin, urine, faeces; taste, for example, of urine for sugar, in the diabetic, use of ants to detect sugar in the diabetic, palpation that is through the sense of touch using palms, fingers or the analysis of a patient's dreams." The findings of the researchers also show that, "orthodox doctors have been known to refer medical cases beyond their comprehension to the traditional practitioners, especially when such medical cases could not be scientifically diagnosed. The research carried out by Mothiba, *et al* (2015:83) reveal that, "The traditional healers indicated that most women present with signs and symptoms of pregnancy such as dizziness in the morning, menstrual periods which has stopped for more than a month, vomiting always in the morning and tingling sensations, enlargement and tenderness of the breasts". It is worthy of note that "traditional medicine is holistic, in the sense that it heals both physically and spiritually that is, it heals both body and soul" (Ekeopara and Ugoha, 2017:40).

In the poem, the poet laments over misinterpretation of test results or wrong information which some medical laboratory experts or physicians provide in our contemporary society. This could probably be due to their incompetence, corruption or quest for material wealth. They exhibit these unethical behaviours to the detriment of their patients who they swore the Hippocratic Oath to treat and care for during their profession. Medical experts globally are expected to adhere strictly to the Oath of the profession which entails the ethical standards or principles that physicians and other medical practitioners often swear to uphold. The poet wonders why such medical experts cannot help mankind honestly, keep the sanctity of the profession and desist from actions that are capable of bringing the profession into disrepute. The poet reacts with bewilderment;

God
The things that are done
In Your name-
I mean, the things that are undone
Behind
The flimsy façade of Your name

The speaker wonders why the medical experts could provide wrong pregnancy result despite their Hippocratic Oath. It is worthy of note that every discipline has certain ethics or code of conduct which members must be allegiant to as long as they remain in that profession. The poet observes that the medical experts have violated this Oath by declaring wrong result about the pregnancy test conducted in the health centre. The poem reads; "If our own eyes/had not seen in broad daylight/the things they have here/disclaimed on oath/we would be believing we/dreamt it all." The medical experts at this point appear confused hence the poetic-persona states:

indeed, even now
under the heat of their
quizzical glare
the benign indulgence of
their smile
we are not sure-
No. we are sure

In reacting strongly against the outcome of the gestational test, the traditional midwives are assumed to be having psychiatric problems that require medical attention. Often times, there is disharmony between traditional medical practitioners and their western counterparts over diagnosis, prognosis and treatments of patients suffering from certain ailments or psychological problems in African societies. The Africans are quite familiar with the traditional medicine which they inherited from their forefathers before the emergence of modern medicine. Even where patients are receiving treatments in modern hospitals and other health centres, a large number of them still depend on the traditional medicines because they strongly believe in their efficacies and the trado-medical practitioners. In this poem presented in a dramatic form, the traditional midwives states that; "They say we have gone/All out of our mind." However, they accept their insanity as importance to the health and wellbeing of the society: "If madness nurtures such lucidity/God, make us mad-/Make us even more mad." The poet also reveals the traditional way Africans conduct pregnancy tests before the emergence of Western health system. According to the poet, like the medical practitioners, traditional midwives also employed the method of feeling and listening to heart-throb of women patients who come for pregnancy examination. The poet declares;

For in the naval
of the soul
we, too, have felt, at times
the throb
of a straining heart,
a spirit refusing to be drowned
in its own waters
before birth

The poet utilised several medical terminologies in conveying his message to the reader and they include "heart-throb", "urine test", "Negative", "Palpation results", "fundal height", "foetal throb", "heart" and "oath." The midwives also have knowledge of the meaning of these concepts even though the terms are foreign and often used by western medical experts. With these words, it is obvious that traditional physicians who specialized in obstetrics and gynecology also have their own methods and procedures for conducting pregnancy test before the advent of western medicine. There should be a synergy between the western physicians and the traditional midwives. This view is corroborated by Mothiba, *et al* (2015:82) acknowledged the findings of the World Health Organisation (2008:82) which show that "the current existing initiative is to combine the efforts of doctors and traditional midwives in hospitals and clinics which will result in minimal utilisation of modern delivery techniques such as caesarean section, while acknowledging indigenous practice in midwifery." The study further reveals that "Mexico's health ministry has started encouraging doctors to work closely together with traditional midwives" (82). The complementary role of the traditional medical practitioners in modern society will help in promoting healthcare and improve psychological wellbeing of patients and society in general.

Autopsy in Modern Society

Soyinka's "Post Mortem" examines the subject matter of autopsy which is cadaver examination that is carried out to know the possible cause of the death of a patient or health failure. The poem shall be critically explored and its subject matter extensively discussed to enlighten reader about the importance of post mortem examinations in modern society. In this study, the concepts of "Post mortem" and "Autopsy" shall be used interchangeably as they convey the similar meaning. According to Baumgartner and Anthony (2016:36), the term, "Autopsy has its roots

as far back as 5000 years ago in ancient Greece, Babylonia, and Egypt. In fact, the word autopsy comes from the Greek roots *autos* (meaning self) and *optos* (meaning sight).” In advancing their submission, McPhee and Bottles (1985:37) note that “The modern autopsy originated when Renaissance physicians such as Vesalius and Morgnani began to more reliably correlate autopsy findings with clinical disease processes, and it is Virchow who is credited with integrating the use of the microscope into common autopsy practice.” Soyinka through this artistic work inform reader of the need to carryout post mortem in order to know the causality of a patient’s untimely death in society. In most societies, family members never care to investigate the nature of death of their relations and this could be due to ignorance, financial involvement or lack of interest. Sometimes people may also avoid autopsy in order to prevent stigmatization from the public.

Postmortem examination is conducted in the medical laboratory by pathologists and medical doctors first for academic and research purposes. This is necessary when medical practitioners want to know the actual cause of the untimely death of a particular patient in the hospital, the disease responsible for the demise of the patient, the health damage caused to various organs of the body and methods of treatment for patients who might experience similar health problem in society. In view of the above, research has revealed that the “systematic post-mortem examination remains an important tool to acquire reliable information on causes of death” (Janneke, 2011:1015). The knowledge obtained from such medical examinations will help to prevent crimes and also prolong health condition of individuals within a family unit, in organisations and society in general. Baumgartner and Anthony (2016:36) further state that, “Forensic autopsies are performed in cases of intoxication, or unexpected natural death. They are often more focused in nature, and include detailed documentation of injuries, quantification of substances within the body, determination of the ultimate cause of death, or other investigations as required by the criminal justice system.” The purposes of autopsy examinations are for teaching in medical schools, presentation at conferences, preservation for future trainings and academic research.

Malami and Mohammed (2002) note that, “Autopsies are classified into clinical or hospital autopsies and medicolegal autopsies that are done for the purposes of the law.” Villiers and Ruhaya (2005:47) acknowledge the view of Nemetz, Ludwig and Kurland (1987) that, “The autopsy is not just used for the determination of the cause of death and its contributing factors. As a mechanism of medical quality control, the autopsy has a multifaceted role, including the confirmation, clarification and correction of ante-mortem clinical diagnosis.” In the poem, Soyinka captures the clinical importance of the “freezing plant” which is a product of science and technology but he intimates reader that this invention performs more functions than just chilling of drinks such as the beer. He compares the content of this freezing plant otherwise known as the mortuaries to drinks, “beer” meant for consumption. The poem reads, thus; “there are more functions to a freezing plant/than stocking beer; cold biers of mortuaries/submit their dues, harnessed-glory be!” the poet artistically personified death as possessing “cold hand” by snatching away the patient whose post mortem examination the medical doctors in the hospital want to carry out. He describes certain vital parts or organs of the dead that are usually transformed: “in the cold hand of death.../his mouth was cotton filled, his man-pike/shrunk to a subsoil grub.” All these changes occurred because of the effect of the coldness of mortuaries and by implication, medical doctors specifically the pathologists can transformed the dead into something that is strange, horrible and scaring, hence;
his head was hollowed and his brain
on scales – was this trick to prove

fore-knowledge after death?
His flesh confesses what has stilled
To learn, how not to die.

Soyinka through this poem has shown that although it is necessary to investigate the real causality of a patient's death, people should also bear in mind that everyone is expected to die and so death is inevitable in society. Moreso, people should be conscious of the fact that death can come in any form, therefore; "Let us love all things of grey; grey slabs/Grey scalpel, one grey sleep and form,/Grey images." Baumgartner and Anthony (2016:36) found out that, "the full autopsy includes a detailed external examination, as well as full dissection and investigation of the cranial, thoracic, abdominal, and pelvic cavities. Medical, or hospital, autopsies are usually performed at the request of a physician or family member of the deceased in order to answer a specific clinical question or as part of a research effort to investigate new diagnostic or therapeutic interventions."

Soyinka's poem, "Post mortem" whose title is synonymous with autopsy contains medical terms such as "post mortem", "mortuaries", "death", "cotton", "brain", "scalpel", and so on. The utilization of these concepts is meant to bring the conduct of autopsies, whether hospital or medicolegal (forensic) autopsies, to consciousness of the public. Though autopsies may be conducted in several hospitals and forensic laboratories, this medical practice appears not to be promoted through literary productions. It is probably against this background that Wole Soyinka artistically and creatively presents this subject matter in a poetic form.

In "Abiku", Soyinka presents a spirit-child that reincarnates as could be found in some African traditional societies. *Abiku* is a Yoruba name for a spiritual-wanderer and hybrid-character that shuttles between the spiritual and the physical worlds, inflicting psychological pains on his or her parents. Among the Ibo of Eastern Nigeria, such a child is known as *Ogbanje*. In this poem, the *Abiku*-child shall be regarded as a *patient* who requires medical treatment for improved health condition and prevention from untimely death. From the trado-medical perspective, Africans particularly the Yoruba employ various methods of treatment for *Abiku*-patients whose health problems create psychic and emotional pains to their parents especially the mother and society in general. Every cultural society has its peculiar methods of treatment for health problems whether physical, psychological or spiritual.

Ogunleye (2020:9) acknowledged Ogunleye (2019) who reveals that; When any child is suspected to be an *Abiku* among the Yoruba, the parents of such a child would consult *Ifa*; a prominent divination system among them, through a diviner known as *Babalawo* (*Ifa* Priest). It is the responsibility of the *Babalawo* to determine the sacrifice that will go along with the pronouncement of the divination. A common treatment after the diagnosis of *Abiku*-patient's health problem is to wear him bangles in order to wade spirit-children away. This is done to enable his parents identify such problematic *Abiku*-patient when he reincarnates. In the poem, the *Abiku* confesses, thus; "In vain your bangles cast/Charmed circles at my feet;/I am *Abiku*, calling for the first/And the repeated time." The infant-patient personally reveals the ineffectiveness of the traditional healing practices carried out by the indigenous physician. He describes the effort of the healer and his parents as fruitless, hence, he died and returns to this physical world for the repeated time. According to the research carried out by Ogunleye (2020:5), the first and foremost traditional intervention for the treatment of *Abiku*-patients is the employment of the services of medicine man known as the *Onisegun*, herbalist known as *Amoju ewe* and diviner known as the *Babalawo*. These are special people that have the working

knowledge of the use of plants, animal substance as well as supernatural forces to prevent or cure disease (Olanisebe, 2005).

Another preventive measure adopted by thetrado-medical practitioners to cure the patient of his (spiritual) sickness is to offer certain ritual sacrifices to the kindred spirits who often live on sacred trees. Such ritual rites are meant to restore the health of the child and enable him survive. However, the patient boastfully and arrogantly declares the intervention as ineffective, thus; "Must I weep for goats and cowries/For palm oil and the sprinkled ash?/Yams do not sprout in amulets/To earth *Abiku's* limbs." He confidently asserts that no spiritual intervention can prevent him from death because "yams" do not germinate from "amulets" but from earth (soil). Unlike the modern instruments used in medical operations, the poet reveals the crude tools for trado-medical treatments in the poems through the confessional statement of the *Abiku*-patient, thus; "So when the snail is burnt in his shell/Whet the heated fragments, brand me/Deeply on the breast. You must know him/When *Abiku* calls again." Africans particularly the Yoruba people strongly believe in branding of *Abiku*-children in order to prevent them from untimely death and peradventure they reincarnate to this world, they can easily be identified and treated appropriately. While commenting on the powers of diviners and trado-medical experts in Yoruba society, Ogunleye (2020:6) states that the diviners possess esoteric knowledge through which they can appeal to the spiritual world and supernatural forces to discover causes and solution to a particular situation. These service men in order to prove their worth, would prepare spiritual iron bangles (*sekeseke*), sacrifice of various kinds, application of cowry shells, palm oil and other indigenous preparations to retain the *Abikú*.

The findings of Ogunleye (2020:11) further show that "Among the measures are: oracular consultation, employment of the services of medicine men, herbalist and diviners. Others include: giving of appealing and derogatory names, ritual observation and mutilation of *Abikú's* bodies." Despite the foregoing, the *Abiku*-patient in this poem appears to have resistant spirit to the traditional medical intervention administered on him in the previous life and so he requires more powerful treatments to prevent him from infant mortality. He addresses the healer by intimating him of the supernatural powers he possesses; "I am the squirrel teeth, cracked/The riddle of the palm. Remember/This, and dig me deeper still into/The god's swollen foot." Also to show the ineffectiveness of the healings administered on the patient to prevent him from untimely death, the speaker (*Abiku*) disclosed his true identity thereby once again showing the futile effort of the traditional healer: "Once and the repeated time, ageless/Though I puke. And when you pour/Libations, each finger points me near/The way I came, where". Though *Abiku* appears as an infant, he is older than his parents and grandparents. And the regular ritual of pouring libations to ancestors points towards the exit from life. The foregoing affirms the fact that in prescientific society, the cause of *Abiku's* sickness is never attributed to biological condition but spiritual problem and so they focus more on the latter as the only possible therapeutic measure to provide cure to the health challenge of the patient.

In African traditional societies, the untimely death of people is sometimes traceable to spiritual attacks even though such belief has no scientific proof. So, in this poem, the death of the child brings sorrow which is conveyed through the line, "The ground is wet with mourning" and the cause is traced to psychopathic manipulations of witches and wizards who inflict pains on innocent and helpless people in society. Such antisocial characters are captured in the poem, thus; "White dew suckles flesh-birds/Evening befriends the spider, trapping/Flies in wind-froth." Another way the *Abiku*-child can die is by mysteriously transforming himself into dreadful and dangerous creatures such as snakes and the killing of the reptile depicts the

murder of the infant. The poet further reveals that: "Night, and Abiku sucks the oil/From lamps. Mother! I'll be the/Suppliant snake coiled on the doorstep/Yours the killing cry." The poet asserts that the death of Abiku is associated with a remarkable event in his life, hence, "The ripest fruit was saddest" as presented in the poem. In traditional societies, it has been observed that Abiku-children die untimely especially during events such as cultural festivals, marriage ceremony, birthday anniversary, and so on. Despite of the effort made by traditional medical doctors to prevent Abiku-patients from death in their early stage of life, the rituals, sacrifices and trado-medical treatments appear ineffective hence the continuous mortality cases in society. The foregoing therefore implies certain treatments may be ineffective when applied to tackle health problems of some patients as could be observed in traditional healthcare system. Kobena Eyi Acquah's "Keyboard Minuet" presents the subject of death employing several terminologies of medical sciences and those of music. Some of the terms include; "conceived", "arteries", "cells", "birth", "hearts", and so on. The poem contains images that can activate mixed reactions, thoughts and feelings of reader. It conveys themes which regulates thought process as the poet nostalgically reflects on the overwhelming musical composition of the minuet; "The andante and presto-rondo/a life-long collaboration between us/waits yet to be conceived." The poet recollects both the moderate low and rather quick tempos of the musical performance which he describes as connectivity that is not developed.

Acquah makes reader to understand that poetry and music echoes themes and images that foretell hidden facts and uncovers their effects which penetrate into the human psyche through the "arteries" and occupies the "cells." This is contained in the poem, thus; "But if you chance to catch in these lines/echoes of some primordial themes/premonitions of forthcoming expositions/tripping down the tributaries of your arteries." The poet describes the effect of the themes of the music composed from the lines as having the ability, "to swell secret symphonic streams in your cells." Whatever the subject of the musical performance may be, it has the potency to stimulate emotions and activate the souls of listeners in society, thus; "could it be life's mysterious melodies/being scored afresh in the soul's recesses/composed anew in contrapuntal chords/upon the piano-forte of just our hearts?" The poet and keyboard minuet are complementary in their expressive arts as one would compose lines while the other practically brings the composition to life. The poet asserts that he is either "the white keys" or "the black" which are often grouped in twos or threes, among the eighty-eight (88) keys contained in the piano keyboard:

You be the white keys and I will be the black
or be black and I will be white
Only let such harmonies pour forth
God hearing will miss Calvary

The poet agitates for continuous harmonious co-existence in the production of melodies that will be pleasant to hear and affirms his willingness to work in agreement with the music minstrel, "For at such a trysting place I stand/waiting to die and live for you." Musical performance like poetry has immeasurable therapeutic effects on both the artist and the listeners. It helps in alleviating psychic and emotional pains, provides coping mechanism, purgation of emotions and as a way of diverting negative energy to something pleasant, acceptable and productive in society.

Conclusion

The study has shown that African poets are vast in various disciplines even though they were not trained in such academic fields. Through the poems examined in this research, they have demonstrated their creative ingenuity by imaginatively and artistically portraying both the traditional and scientific methods of conducting pregnancy tests, the subject of post mortem and the procedures to follow, the traditional treatments for *Abiku*-patients, the therapeutic effects of poetry and music on reader and the poet, among other issues contained in the poetic works. The poets employed various medical terminologies to convey their subjects to reader and this reveals their profound knowledge of the thrust of their poems.

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