

From Knowledge to Wisdom



# US-China **Foreign Language**

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(Special Issue 3)

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## Preface from the Convener



Olu Obafemi, Ph.D.  
Professor of English and Drama  
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

When the Professor Olu Obafemi International Conference on African Literature and Theatre, christened **ObafConfab**, was announced in May 2009 to celebrate the 60th Birthday of Professor Obafemi, it was with deep and firm conviction that the subject of the conference has made immense contributions to literary studies and theatre practice in Nigeria and deserves a gathering of eggheads, in his honour, to discuss his passion on literature and theatre. The positive reception the idea to celebrate this Bunu-born scholar received across the globe is a product of this journal, which is the third in three volume editions arrangement from the stable of David Publishing Company in the United States of America on the platforms of their journals: *US-China Foreign Language* and *Sino-US English Teaching*.

The theme of "Cultural Construction and Re-invention for Global Peace Agenda" for the Conference was conceived to interrogate the intricate nexus of culture and peace through literature and theatre. These are two artistic enterprises that have positive bearing on societal transformation. From orature to literature and theatrical elocution, the values of virtues, justice, equity, liberty and fairness are extant in the African worldview. It is the subversion of any of these values that threatens peace and thus becomes a crisis worthy of literary and theatrical explorations. For what is literature or theatre without a crisis to resolve? This is why real and imaginative scenarios are created to address human issues within plausible contexts. Literary and theatrical elements are then deployed to construct a resolution for the prevailing crisis. In Africa today and indeed the entire globe, there is socio-economic and political instability as a result of the erosion of social security, justice, equity, fair play and liberty. Prevalent everywhere, even in unsuspecting guises, are cultures of oppression, exploitation, corruption, agony and the tyranny of exclusion—marginalization. All of these conditions are inimical to peace. It is against this background that the ObafConfab was convened not only to celebrate a distinguished national of world literature and theatre, a humanist and profound social thinker who personifies and embodies peace, but to also use our critical and creative proficiency to construct new cultural pathways and reinvent existing ones to get out of the labyrinths of social dislocation and to engender peace globally. In order to encourage varied and multidisciplinary contributions, sub-themes were introduced to cover range of discourses in literature and theatre. All of these are reflected in the contributions that make up this volume of the journal and the subsequent volumes.

For us, this set of journals is an enduring legacy of ObafConfab which is envisioned to live and grow addressing cultural, peace and strategic matters through literature, theatre and allied disciplines. This journal is also a fulfilment of our commitment for participants to have a post-conference peer-reviewed publication to reflect the texture and concreteness of the scholarly contributions of the ObafConfab. To arrive at this point, unfortunately not all the papers presented passed through the peer-reviewed process successfully; quite a number were rejected. For those who scaled through, we say congratulations! And for those who could not, we appreciate your enthusiastic participations.

Let us seize this medium to express our profound gratitude to all the members of the Local and National Organising Committees headed by Prof. Charles Bodunde and Prof. Duro Oni respectively; all the friends, associates and colleagues of the subject for their varying degrees of support; the keynote presenter, Prof. Tanure Ojaide, whose sense of friendship and scholarly commitment was impeccable; Prof. Martin Banham who at very short notice insisted to make a contribution in honour of his former student at Theatre Workshop in Leeds; Prof. Kurt Eisen, Associate Dean at Tennessee Tech University and a friend of the subject who got personal sponsorship to come and present a lead paper and also be a part of the experience. We appreciate all the corporate institutions and individuals that identified with ObafConfab; my dear wife, Mrs. Monica Sunnie-Ododo, who found time to leave the domestic frontiers to join us on the field to play a role; Prince Dayo Akanmode who committed time and resources for grassroots/funds mobilization; the mama of the house, Mrs. Grace Dupe Obafemi who sat at the background with the LOC to ensure that all went well; and importantly Prof. Is'haq Olanrewaju Oloyede, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, my Alma Mata, for his goodwill and practical involvement to assist us host the world conference. We are immensely grateful to David Publishing Company and their editorial team for the remarkable interest shown in publishing the conference papers and the smooth working relationship we had to get this volume out. Peace!

Prof. Sunday Enessi-Ododo,  
ObafConfab Convener and Editorial Resource,  
Department of Creative Arts,  
University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, Nigeria.  
5th December, 2010



## Man, a fly in a spider's web: A study of Olu Obafemi's *Wheels*

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**Abstract:** This paper is an attempt to show Olu Obafemi's exploration of "the vagaries of human life" as Idegwu (2009) would put it. Obafemi's thrust is the meaninglessness of life, a world where Nigerian children are faced with avoidable social injustice. Olu Obafemi presents Nigerian children "as a people in search of social harmony and transformation in a world torn apart by inequality and social injustice". Like Thomas Hardy, Olu Obafemi presents man as a fly trapped in a spider's web projecting the absurdist or existentialist posture of life where a man's earthly journey remains an exercise in futility.

**Key words:** man; fly; spider's web

### 1. Introduction

Existentialism as a literary concept has been greatly explored by literary artists, the world over in their attempts to find the meaning of man's earthly journey. Writers like Jasper Alphonse, Sartre, Idegwu, Hardy, Simone De Beauvoir, Wole Soyinka, Achebe and Olu Obafemi have tried to navigate the literary world explaining the seemingly nothingness of all human struggles. The exploration of this concept and the essence of all human journeys became a major thematic construct since 1919 when the term gained currency in Europe.

Right from creation, man has been in a web. The Christians contend that: "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom he had formed" (Thomas, 1982, p. 2). And the Lord God commended the man, saying, of every tree of the Garden you may freely eat; "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you shall eat of it you shall surely die" (Thomas, 1982, p. 2).

From this extract from the Christian Creed, it has become obvious that man from creation is a fly in a spider's web, which makes him an incapacitated creature right from creation. The New King James Version of the *Holy Bible* in Genesis Chapter two verses sixteen and seventeen stress that God commanded man to eat of every tree of the garden of Eden except one—"the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (p. 2). It is a command to be religiously adhered to. God knew Adam and Eve from their genesis and was out to punish any offender, and man by nature is inquisitive.

A critical view of a house fly trapped in a spider's web, flapping its wings in its struggle to make a mark, free itself or impress it on the web, or the spider who perhaps in its ingenuity forms the web, so that it is capable of doing something meaningful ends in the weakening of its wings and its eventual death. The fly ends up dying, but more significantly is the fact that it dies still trapped in the web and unable to force itself out from the claws of death. This is the reason why Idegwu (2009) explained the paradox as follows:

Efe and Chinyere sat under the umbrella tree. It was shady enough to give them the peace they needed in a world fraught with trouble...

---

Clement Chukwuka Idegwu, senior lecturer of Department of English, School of Languages, College of Education; research fields: prose and drama.

"Chinyere, the breeze under this umbrella tree feels refreshing. I mean, after the merciless beatings we had from the sun. You look happy, Chinyere. Your face is brightened up now", Efe said encouragingly.

"Happy for a moment. Yes I am. For happiness is a breeze. Before you feel it, it's gone. How I wish life is like sitting down under this umbrella tree. If it were or something near it, I won't be complaining", Chinyere replied, looking into space. Her fingers beat another world, a novel on her lap, thoughtfully (p. 17).

Idegwu sees man's life as something "fraught with trouble" where happiness is but a passing breeze. In other words, life is full of difficulties, problems or very confusing issues or things. This is the reason why man is trapped for no confused mind yields anything good.

Onagoruwa (2007) corroborated the views above-mentioned saying:

Time has been defined as a non-spacial continuum in which events occur in apparently irreversible succession from the past through the present to the future. It is in this continuum of time that I have been privileged to know howbeit intimately, three or four great personalities that have in more than one way shaped my life and who sadly have all passed on in a rather unfulfilled manner. All of them with exception of one played a direct fatherly role in my life, for which I would be eternally grateful. They were all giants in their own rights (p. 67).

Onagoruwa, in *The Guardian*, Tuesday October 13, 2009, consciously or unconsciously talked about those who influenced him in this rats alley called our world, apology to Elliot. To Onagoruwa (2009), "they were all giants in their own rights" (p. 67), yet three of these great personalities, whom he called "these giants", sadly "passed on in a rather unfulfilled manner" (p. 67). Critically examined the ratio 3:1 of the four, three were sadly unfulfilled. That he called them "giants" and "unfulfilled" could be likened to how we praised a fly trapped in a spider's web trying to extricate itself from the icy-hands of death. As it flaps its wings, we sing praise in its attempt to be free. At the end, the fly dies. We knew it would die without being liberated. So, when we say, it died like a giant because it lasted for some minutes before giving up, we make mockery of life. This greatly supports Olu Obafemi's thematic construct in *Wheels* (2000) where Sonja (Musa) and his likes, and even those society may term big, are all eternally trapped, greatly unfulfilled. Obafemi opened his *Wheels* as follows:

When this story opens, I shall be just about a year old. The entire tale has been narrated to me by Sonja, my dear old dad, in one of his most unusual patient moods. I plan to claim responsibility for those aspects of the tale that I consciously experienced... I was there at the beginning, but too tiny, too young to call it a personal experience. So, over to dear old Pop, retired Sergeant Musa, alias Sonja, by popular acclaim in our village. I shall be willing of course to inherit the liability of any mis-narration, under-narration and over-narration as may be occasioned by his failing memory of his wounded emotion. Remember, I, Ebaje Kofo, sole inheritor of his lineage assets and liabilities including four generations of unburied ancestors, with unclaimed overgrown hectares of Two-Eye family land (p. 11).

Right from the first page, and chapter one of *Wheels*, Olu Obafemi presents man as a helpless and hopeless being clamped in prison. His choice of words and his syntactic structure "occasioned by his failing memory of his wounded emotion", "The sole inheritor of liabilities of four generations of unburied ancestors" (Obafemi, 2000, p. 1), are good indications that he feels human beings are in chains. In Africa, a family is useless and cursed if they are unable to bury their ancestors. That there are four generations of such unburied ancestors and that the sole inheritor of such a plague is a small child burdened with a load of care are evil. It is on this premise, therefore, that the author explored Olu Obafemi's *Wheels*, articulating the fact that man from creation remains a fly trapped in a spider's web.



## 2. Olu Obafemi and the concept of man trapped in a spider's web

Edjeren (2002) opined that:

Man's perennial attempt to redefine his existence and participate in the formation of his destiny appears to be consistently frustrated by a cast-iron determinism. The determinism is two-faceted. On the one hand, tragedy is imposed by motivelessly malign existential or supernatural agencies, but on the other hand, man's nature is partly responsible for misfortune (p. 98).

The truth of Edjeren's postulation of Olu Obafemi seemed to demonstrate in *Wheels*, for in life, every attempt man makes to define his existence is like a down-turn journey into the abyss. A fly, in a spider's web, flaps its wings hoping to escape the icy-hands of death, only to get more trapped. Death traps are attractively-structured so that men can walk into them thinking they will be blissful. This is the reason why Olu Obafemi (2000) could characterize Musa as follows:

I, Musa, I went to war. I fight well. I was even rewarded with field promotion to the rank of field officer, second lieutenant and decorated with medals, like those old soldiers who went to fight the white man's war in Burma and Germany, and the black man's war in Congo. Well, at the end of the war, the officer's rank was removed. They said I had no certificate. They said I was not trained, not commissioned. Hmm. I, Musa who took all the daring risk expected only from lions. Yes, I was demoted to a mere corporal and retired with a small pension, because I had only primary Three (p. 25).

While Musa and his likes could be unjustly treated, even the generals who perpetrated such great injustices are still trapped in their spider's webs, a web of irresistible emotion that ends in death in its entire ramification. This is the reason why Musa could remember the "Colonels and the Generals who gave all the big big orders" (Obafemi, 2000, p. 26). To him:

They stayed away in their homes while we went to face the enemy's fire. Generals must not die. If they die, the war ends. As we protect them with our skins, they stayed in their furnished hotels, sometimes fighting the war on the maps in the midst of red wines and the company of fat-arsed girls. They drank all the brandies and whiskies and the champagnes available in the hotels. As we die in our hundreds and thousands, they increased their own salaries with the money saved from our deaths. As we perished under the bridges and in trenches, they got all the elevations, all the promotions, all the praises from the cities where the battle was all rumour and folk-story (p. 26).

That is the contrast between humans. But even as the contrast may be there, there is a common ground as all men are trapped in one way or another. This is the reason why Gbenga's mother, in spite of their living in great influence and affluence, could be so troubled as to call the Ifa Priest "a haggard-looking old man in thready agbada", into their palace to divine the state of her husband. "What is it Baba? Is my husband in any trouble? Please God, bring him back. Let him come back to us, my only son and I. Let him return and retire. God he has had enough" (Obafemi, 2000, p. 144).

A critical look at this woman's lamentation "my only son and I", "he has had enough" shows her sorry situation in the midst of plenty. "Has had enough" depicts enough wealth and enough troubles. The ambiguity created by Olu Obafemi's choice of words seemed deliberate on his part. Olu Obafemi deliberately wants to show that man is inescapably trapped, a bird locked-up in a cage. Its freedom and beauty are regulated by the person who holds the key to the cage. This accounts for Olu Obafemi's showing that the rich, even the very rich in society are greatly troubled in life as their wealth merely serve as a piece of clothing covering a rashes ravaged body. Olu Obafemi moves further to describe man's dilemma: "A cloud in front, a desert in front, which divined for Giro hunter who left his powder behind on a rainy outing" (p. 145), and quickly adds, "None mama, None".



This is another phase of the on-going history of exploitation—the mythic side of exploitation (p. 146).

Edjeren (2002) corroborated the above by saying that literary works are “infused with a sense of the futility of human actions...” and that such works dramatize “mankind’s circle of failure in the bid for moral evolution. Not only do they suggest the existence of supernatural conspiracy against mankind, they portray man himself as genetically prone to evil” (p. 97), thereby ensuring the nothingness of life. This is what Idegwu (2000) captured beautifully well in *Broken Dreams* thus:

The world is harsh. I've been made to chew more than I can swallow. I am sure I have wronged none. Why do I have to pass through life without a moment of joy? Why walk into unattractive claws of death like a fly in a spider's web? Am I paying the price of having to exist in an insane world? There has never been smoke without fire. We will all pay the price of existence, of committing ourselves ignorantly... life, you are a lily that fluster. You make men have broken dreams (p. 112).

This is what Olu Obafemi tries to say thus “Na who I offend? Or na ma wife wey use her beauty offend my rivals?” (p. 17). Musa could not understand why man is placed in such a precarious circumstance in life. Olu Obafemi sums this ugly state of man’s life thus: “Your light garment will be drenched before you get to the shelter.” That’s life. Even when nature pretends to provide a shelter, solution for man, it ensures that he gets drenched before he gets there—the mirage. Man is incapacitated from birth. Obafemi in furtherance of his thematic construct in *Wheels* posit that:

Anguish, heaviness of hearts and gripping silence dominate the rest of the journey home. Musa was anguished. For him, it is a short walk from hopelessness and surrender. What is the meaning of existence? What are we living for in this world; with it worries, its troubles, its cares, it crises its cries and failures. These formed the fulcrum of Musa’s thoughts (p. 25).

Whether the journey is from one’s duty (place of work) to ones home or from ones birth to one’s grave, what dominate the rest of the journey has been great anguish, heaviness of heart and unimaginable gripping silence which are indications of a failed pilgrimage.

### 3. Yearning for freedom

Truth is like bitter kola. If we survive its initial bite, we will savour the sweetness in our glass of water (p. 154).

That is Obafemi’s way of telling the truth in his exploration of the absurdity of life in *Wheels*. Each of the characters in *Wheels* yearns for one kind of freedom or the other. Gbenga’s mother though married to a wealthy and an influential man called the Ifa Priest to seek solutions to their kind of imprisonment. And the Ifa Priest addresses her thus: “there is a cloud, a huge cloud ahead... There is a massive desert” (p. 145). This is an indication of the realities of our time.

Beatrice, one of Achebe’s (1987) major characters in *Anthills of the Savannah* helps us to address our troubled minds on this vexed quest for freedom thus:

The first death I witness was my father and then Chris. Without Chris I could not have known that it was possible to die with dignity.

‘Your father didn’t die with dignity?’ asked Abdul quizzically.

‘No, he didn’t. Though he was old compared to Chris, he had not learnt how to die. He snapped at people, he even cried... But look at Chris, a young man with all his life still in front of him and yet he was able to look death in the eyes and smile and make a joke...’ (p. 231).

Achebe above mocks men’s sense of fulfillment and greatness. Beatrices’ (Achebe, 1987) statement is that



"it was too wonderful" (p. 231) the way Chris died reminds us of Onagoruwa's perception of greatness as discussed earlier on in this discourse. Chris whether died wonderfully, or could look death in the eyes and smiled and make a joke (p. 231) died very young unfilled, not even married.

This greatly supports Olu Obafemi's thematic construct in *Wheels* where Sonja (Musa) and his likes, in spite of what they put into life remain unfulfilled even to their grave and giving birth to generations who through divine conspiracy will also remain unfulfilled.

Musa cast a deep and thoughtful glance into her background and all the chances that he had thought he was offering her came tumbling before him... He symbolically removed the cloak of empty conceit which had veiled from his sight his wife's... He turned and remarked the sun, which was beginning to curdle back into the embrace of the sky; that reddish glow; that yellowish red glow, Tombohoko, which used to deceive young boys in the farm and made them feel it was broad daylight, when in fact it was nearly night fall (p. 15).

Olu Obafemi talks about the deceptive nature of nature. He sees man as an amputated, packaged being, tossed (cast) into a world too inhuman to be friendly. Nature makes his road very rough and his ambitions even in their minute state highly unachievable. Camus (1942) in his novel *The Stranger* depicted the worthlessness of a man's earthly journey. This is in support of Obafemi's feeling in *Wheels*. Monsieur Meursault in his entire struggle in life could only say:

I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. To feel it so like myself, indeed, so brotherly, made me realize that I'd been happy, and that I was happy still. For all to be accomplished, for me to feel lonely, all that remained to hope was that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators and that they should greet me with howls of execration (p. 154).

Here, we find Camus's major character in *The Stranger* being excited that on the day of his execution, the kind of loneliness he had experienced all through life will not be there. And the crowd he expects to grace his death, will greet him with "the howls of excretion" (p. 154). What a life; what a people; what a journey. The excitement? And the fact that Monsieur Meusault talks about being graced with "howls of excretion" (p. 154) explains of the narrator's high degree of loneliness in the crowd. This is why the futility of this forced pilgrimage encapsulated in pains remains an accursed.

A critical look at the seeming similarity between Camus opening of *The Stranger* and Obafemi's first paragraph of *Wheels* explains their acceptance of the meaninglessness of man on earth. Camus 1942 begins thus "Mother died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure. The telegram from Home says: YOUR MOTHER PASSED AWAY, FUNERAL TOMORROW, DEEP SYMPATHY. Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could yesterday" (p. 1).

While Obafemi, 55 years later, for *Wheels* was first published in 1997, has his first paragraph thus:

When the story opens... I shall be just about a year old. The entire tale had been narrated by Sonja, my dear old dad, in one of his most unusual patient moods... (I) shall be willing of course to inherit the liability of any mis-narration under-narration, and over-narration as may be occasioned by his failing memory or his wounded emotions (p. 11).

Here, we find Ebaije Kofu "inheritor of his lineage assets and liabilities" not only claiming responsibility for what he know next to nothing but being alone, and lonely. He, Ebaije Kofu the narrator in *Wheels* says "In the midst of these groupings, I am lost, I am alone, unable to find my position; unable to locate myself in the scheme of things..." (p. 102). Each of these major characters, and incidentally the narrators in *The Stranger* and *Wheels*, and the mass of humanity are not only lonely but are searching for, and in dare need of freedom. Hence, Monsceu



Meursault in Camus (1942). The stranger was quick to add "with death so near, mother must have felt like someone on the brink of freedom..." (p. 54).

Musa took one cast look at the deep, frightful cliff that lay in the great silent below, reviewed the serrated edge of the untarred road which, along with the deep, sandwiched his family in this trap, long, dusty dangerous road. Below, to the left lay death in waiting. To the right, there is danger, all he needed do was to lose grip of the motor-bike, even for a second (Obafemi, 2000, pp. 15-16).

And man does "lose grip of the motor-bike" called life, because he has been destined to do so. Herbert (1984), in his poem "The Pulley" put it vividly thus "so both should losers be/yet let him keep the rest, but keep them with ripening restlessness" (p. 136). This is to ensure that he is "tossed" to nature whether he likes it or not. Whatever man gets in life, he keeps with ripening restlessness like a fowl "resting" on a close-line.

And his resting like a fowl on a close-line makes him yearn endlessly for freedom which has remained elusive since the genesis of life. Ebaje Kofo, Obafemi's narrator in *Wheels* comments further on man's neck-breaking burden, and the desire to be free, thus: "I am getting bored and uneasy... I am in a state of near—suffocation... and the yearning in my heart can only be satisfied by... I try to... settle the tumult in my abdomen. I stretch my hand in an effort to catch the elusive image..." (p. 104).

The above is an explicit explanation of man, a fly in a spider's web searching and fighting for freedom. That he stretched out his hands in a deliberate effort to "catch the elusive image" (p. 104), freedom, which is his utmost desire, that he knew quite well that the image (freedom) is an elusive article, an exercise in futility, and begun his quest complicate his yearnings.

Lola, the bespectacled, girl who comes from Kemi's corroborates the above thus: "Look at the way our fortune is being drained by reptiles who expand the cracks on our walls and reap our wealth and leave us poorer than before. I have finished" (p. 164).

"I have finished", she says with an air of finality stressing the evasive and elusive nature of man, quest for liberation.

Ebaje Kofo, Musa's (Sonja's) son compliments his father's feeling about life in the following words, "My eyes wander across, giving expression to the confusion in my mind. In the midst of these groupings, I am lost, I am alone, unable to find my position; unable to locate myself in the scheme of things..." (p. 102).

We are all confused because of our inability—a fault not our making—to locate ourselves in the stormy scheme of things. Hence, we ask every day like Ebaje Kofo did: "I wonder where I should go now" (p. 102). We have all been wandering. We are still wandering, and will wander eternally because "when the wall cracks, all sort of things enter the house, through the crevices" (p. 164). And the ancient cracks have been there for Apostle Paul, the most learned and versatile of all the Apostles of Jesus Christ said in Romans 7 verse 18b-20. "For even though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it. I don't do the good I want to do; instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do. If I do what I don't want to do, this means that I am no longer the one who does it; instead, it is the sin that lives in me" (Good News, p. 196).

The Christian creed still moves further to show the complexities in which man has been placed divinely in the following Scriptural verses Matthew 10 verse 16: "I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. But beware! For you will be arrested and tried, and whipped..." (KNT Charitable Trust The Living Bible, 1971, p. 754). In spite of these woes man is warned to be as "harmless as a dove" (KNT Charitable Trust The Living Bible, 1971, p. 754), "Woe inhabitants of the earth for the devil is cast into them" and "Lets the tears and the wheat grow together



till harvest time" are also scriptural verses that confuse the already confused man. If God could say "woe to" man who inhabits the earth, because of this deliberate casting of the devil, to the earth, Ebaje Kofo, man on earth could say nothing but the following lamentation:

I am alone again. This time I am not just alone, I am lonely. Kemi has gone, leaving a heavy heart and an uncertain mind behind. I am uncertain of many possible futures which lie ahead of us both. Innocent wing flapping against an whirlwind of emotions, known and unknown. Both of us, near each other in our hearts, but separated by distances whose origin we are both oblivious of. Yet, we are on the threshold of a future in which we may not see our way through to the ultimate desires of our hearts (p. 118).

Men are "innocent wings flapping against a whirlwind..." their separatedness clouded in mystery, the dreams unrealizable, God's contender cast into their midst in spite of their acknowledged innocence. Ebaje Kofo in his lamentation went further to analyze the contraries thus: "Mansions and rented slums, Vee-boots with tainted glasses against rickety motor bikes; opportunities and privileges versus deprivation and want. These tangles lay on our path..." (p. 118).

In deed these insurmountable tangles lay on our torn littered paths that no matter how careful we are, it is difficult to walk on with our sore foots. Hence, each dawn brings us to our daily ritual of yarning for an elusive liberation/freedom.

#### 4. Conclusion

Olu Obafemi is an existentialist from the genesis. The prologue of *Wheels* makes one shudder with the dread of a child forced to behold the most dreaded masquerade of the old, at mid-day on a lonely foot path. His first four words: "life is a wheel" with which he depicts the restless and unproductive motions that characterize the unending turning of the wheel of life, are enough to frighten even a lion. As the elders return/From the harrowing taunt/Of the harsh sun's sweat/Mostly, from labour lost, with neither love nor car (Obafemi, 2000, p. 5).

Olu Obafemi explains how much nature mocks man by using "harrowing taunt", "harsh sun's sweat", "mostly from labour lost..." (Obafemi, 2000, p. 5). This is the reason why Jimmy Asabo Sonala Olumhernse's major character in *No Second Chance* could be welcomed home after being in gaol for wanting an ideal Nigeria with a placard "welcome stranger" by Ofure the only star in his family, a star cut short even by the Nature. No wonder Albert Camus (1942) in *The Stranger* could say that "With death so near, Mother must have felt like someone on the brink of freedom, ready to start life all over again" (p. 154).

In conclusion, man's problem is perennial because of the wheel, our life is "forever splashing mud on our thrashed, threaded and tattered garments" (Obafemi, 2000, p. 6). This is the reason why "we gaze into a bleak horizon", asking repeatedly "will this rain of plenty every fall?" (Obafemi, 2000, p. 5). The use of "we" talks about the universality of this endless waiting, a longing that never gets satisfied. Why not? When we walk "with the calloused, blistered surface of the foot sole" (Obafemi, 2000, p. 5).

And no one walks with a calloused, blistered surface of the foot sole and feels comfortable. Obafemi moved further:

There our land is being bled white by white people with the authority of the cracks in our walls, our own government at the centre. They are reaping millions of dollars from our natural endowment from God with neither our consent nor our benefit. Foreign companies dredging our soil and scooping our wealth. They are the serpents and reptiles seeping through our cracked walls like long pipes connecting our rivers to their seas. That as the reason for this searing hate and deep conflicts among our people (p. 164).

That Ebaje Kofo, a very young child could so succinctly explain the horrible state of Giro, a metaphor for Nigeria, puts things bluntly. He was quick to add "we are young, but we are neither blind nor dumb" (Obafemi, 2000, p. 162) to the realities of life, for "bad condition never favours beauty our town is not as peaceful as it can be" (Obafemi, 2000, p. 162).

Olu Obafemi in this his first published novel craftily ends the novel in a way that shows how humans endlessly believe in, and wait for a better tomorrow that never comes. "Tomorrow we March/Tomorrow we March/End to Enmity/Down with Exploiters" (Obafemi, 2000, p.165). This has always been the slogan of man. Endless waiting, waiting for Godot for like Soyinka (1982) would put it:

They begin to arrive. As usual in the same order. This one who always comes earliest. I have prophesied that he will be made a chief in his home town. That is a very safe prophecy. As safe as our most popular prophecy, that a man will live to be eighty. If it doesn't come true... that man doesn't find out until he's on the other side (Soyinka, 1982, p. 25).

That is deception. Everything on earth has been put in place to ensure the perfection of such deceptions. Or how else would one be "a sheep among wolves?". This signifies the meaninglessness of life (Achebe, 1981; Olumhense, 1982; Burgess, 1986).

In conclusion, therefore, our task is to let the world know that "society, even when perfect, is but a jungle" (p. 192) as Camus (2000) would put it. Olu Obafemi is right: Man is a fly in a spider's web.

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