

## LITERATURE

### PARADIGM SHIFT IN CLASSICAL LITERARY CRITICISM: HOW NOT TO ASSESS THE POETRY OF OLUMIDE OLANIYAN

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#### Abstract

European missionary education in Africa has always emphasized the supremacy of the European cultural ideals over those of the so-called lesser races particularly in Africa. Thus, they have always provided the European parameters as the basis for adjudging the literary merits of the works of African scholars. Therefore, literary standards set by Graeco-Roman scholars such as Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, etc. are the **fait accompli** by which all literary works are to be assessed. To this end, a United States of America-based academic, Farook Kperogi, a PhD and Associate Professor, uses Plato's **Republic** as the basis for commenting on the maiden poetry collection of an emerging African writer, Olumide Olaniyan. This paper takes a deconstructionist approach by rejecting the comparison made with Plato's work, and analyzes Olaniyan's work from the postcolonial Afrocentric framework which portrays him as an authentic Afrocentric literary artist with great literary potentials.

**Keywords:** Plato, Olaniyan, Kperogi, Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism

In the blurb of Olumide Olaniyan's 83-page 2017 Ibadan-based Kraftgriots publication of 60 poems called *Lucidity of Absurdity*, Farooq Kperogi, a PhD and Associate Professor of Journalism and Emerging Media, at Kennesaw State University, the United States of America (USA) makes the following remarks:

In Plato's Republic, poets are to be ostracized because poetry is putatively an authentic simulacrum of reality. But in powerful, inspired, and evocative verses, Olumide Olaniyan's *Lucidity of Absurdity* explodes the Platonic distrust of the veridical capacities of poetic imagination. With clear, vivid imagery and strikingly resonant metaphors, Olaniyan's poems both encapsulate and illuminate quotidian reality with such clarity, such manifest authenticity, and such delightfully homespun witticisms that Plato would certainly make an exception for this poet....

To be sure, Plato holds a spellbinding literary allure for Kperogi to borrow the eyes of the Athenian scholar to see through Olaniyan's poetry. Plato (428? – 347 BCE) was the son of Ariston, an aristocratic father, and Perictione, a mother vaguely related to the 6th-century BCE Athenian lawmaker, Solon. He was Aristotle's teacher and founder of the Academy in 387 BCE, the foremost citadel of learning in ancient Europe. However, the primacy given to Plato by Kperogi and other scholars in their literary analysis courts deconstruction. Indeed, the analogy to Plato does grave damage to Olaniyan's effort because whereas Plato's authorship of *Republic* is dubious, that of Olaniyan is quite authentic. Evidence against Plato's authorship is weighty. Martin Bernal, a Jewish-American historian, links Plato's *Republic* (written between 380 and 370 BCE) to an earlier treatise, *Bousiris* (written around 390 BCE) by another Greek scholar, Isokrates, on the same subject as the *Republic*. Further, James (107) goes on to cite ancient historians including Diogenes Laertius, Aristoxenus and Favorinus who stated that the *Republic's* subject matter was lifted from the *Controversies* authored earlier by Protagoras (481 – 411 BCE). Protagoras had gotten the idea from the Kemetians (ancient Egyptians); while the *Republic* and *Bousiris* also drew heavily on the Kemetian sources (*Black Athena*). Karl Marx despite his racism against the black Africans confirmed the Kemetian influence in his *Das Kapital*, published posthumously in 1885 and 1894 CE, when he said that, "Plato's *Republic*, in so far as division of labour is treated in it, as the formative principle of the state, is merely an Athenian idealization of the Egyptian system of castes (Bernal *Black Athena* 106)." All these cumulative evidences led James to conclude that, "the subject matter of Plato's *Republic* was neither produced by Plato nor any Greek philosopher" (James 109). He cites Plato's earliest commentator, Krantor, who, writing within few generations of Plato, said:

Plato's contemporaries mocked him, saying that he was not the inventor of his republic, but that he had copied Egyptian institutions. He attached so much importance to the

mockers that he attributed to the Egyptians the story of the Athenians and the Atlantines to make them say that the Athenians had really lived under this regime at a certain moment in the past (Bernal *Black Athena* 106).

In addition, James (106) states categorically that, “First, Plato was not the author of the *Republic* and second, the allegory of the charioteer and winged steeds, is not a product of Plato, but is derived from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, in the Judgment Drama.” James explains that Plato had spent some time, probably around 390 BCE, in Kemet (ancient Egypt), which gave him substantial materials to reflect in his later works. Furthermore, Bernal points out that in *Philebus* Plato went into extensive detail on the Kemetian Tehuti (Greek Thoth) as the creator of writing, language and all sciences. In another place Plato complimented the Kemetian art and music and called for their being used in Greece (Bernal *Black Athena Writes* 368). Besides the *Republic*, Plato appears to be a serial plagiarist of other works as James further disputes Plato’s authorship of *Timaeus*, pointing out that the doctrine of the Demiurge had been taught by the Persians more than 600 BCE through their leader, Zoroaster and by Pythagoras (500 BCE) through the concept of Monads. Indeed, he cites a damning evidence against Plato where he wrote, “According also to Diogenes Laertius *Book VIII* p. 399 – 401, when Plato visited Dionysius at Sicily, he paid Philolaus, a Pythagorean, 40 Alexandrian Minae of silver, for a book, from which he copied the whole contents of the *Timaeus*” (James 109). He therefore concludes on the same page that, “Under these circumstances it is clear that Plato wrote neither the *Republic* nor the *Timaeus*, whose subject matter identifies them with the purpose of the Mysteries of Egypt.” Earlier, he said, “the original source of the doctrine of a Demiurge in creation was Egypt, and it dates back to the creation story of Egypt 4000 BCE which is to be found in the account given by *The Memphite Theology*; an inscription on a stone, now kept in the British Museum” (James 102). The point being made here is that Plato’s authorship, as much as Aristotle’s authorship of several books across multiple disciplines including *Poetics*, is dubious while that of Olaniyan is not. While those two famous Greek scholars may be fake, Olaniyan is quite original.

In any case, why should Olaniyan or any authentic black African writer be even compared to Plato or Aristotle given their ancestral pedigrees? As a black African, Olaniyan is a great descendant of the black African pioneers of written literature in the world who started writing over 5,000 BCE (Murray 194). They include **Imhotep**, the authentic father of medicine (NOT Hippocrates) who lived and wrote on medicine and architectural designs of the pyramids and temples around 2700 BCE; **Ptah Hotep** who wrote around 2414 BCE, and currently has the oldest book in the world; **Merikare** who wrote on rhetoric and the art of human relations around 1990 BCE; **Sehotipibre** who wrote on the virtues of loyalty, monarchy or legal authority around 1991 BCE; **Amenemhat**, contemporary of **Sehotibre** who wrote on the art of human deception; **Amenhotep** who wrote around 1400 BCE; **Duauf** who wrote love books, and urged the youths to embrace learning by reading around 1340 BCE; and **Akhenaton** who wrote on religious philosophy around 1300 BCE, etc. (Asante 35). These were great African pioneer writers some of whom preceded the Graeco-Roman scholars by over 2000 years yet, modern black Africans hardly know them because of the defective colonial education system established and promoted in Africa. African educational curriculum is only awash with European and Asian (Arabs) authors many of whom had travelled to Africa to obtain scholarship in the great Egyptian temples and monasteries. To date, Africa boasts of the oldest universities in the world – the al-Karaouine University of Fez, Morocco and the al-Azhar University of Cairo, Egypt. They predate the earliest varsity in Europe, the University of Salamanca in Spain (Al-Bishak 30). So here is a challenge to African education curriculum experts to dispense with Eurocentric history that over-glorifies the literary achievements of the Europeans and integrate the Afrocentric perspective to correctly teach the literary history of the world, particularly African literary history, to African students.

In assessing Olaniyan’s poetic sentiments vis-a-viz Plato’s judgmental abhorrence of poets, it is doubtful if Plato, contrary to Kperogi’s claim, will favour Olaniyan’s radicalism against the state and humanity. After all, Plato’s sentiments against poets were in tandem with the general resentment of philosophers by the Greek establishment with their artistic cohorts who abhorred poets/ artists, and ruthlessly dealt with them. Aristophanes, the chief exponent of Attic Comedy, relentlessly lampooned Socrates. In his play, *The Clouds* Aristophanes lambastes Socrates together with the leading philosophers of his day called the Sophists. He accuses them of corrupting the youths with his strange ideas that offended the democratic ideals of the Athenian state and the gods of the land. Aristophanes writes:

Socrates is a miserable recluse, who speaks a great deal of absurd and amusing nonsense about Physics, and declares that Zeus is dethroned, that Rotation reigns in his stead, and that the new divinities are Air, which holds the earth suspended, Ether, the Clouds and Tongue.

He professes to possess the power of Belial, which enables him to make the worse appear the better reason, and his teachings cause children to beat their parents (James 89).

In 399 BCE Socrates was charged with heresy and sedition and condemned to death by being forced by the state to commit suicide by drinking hemlock. Plato was sold into slavery by Dionysius the Younger, the new ruler of Syracuse and his former pupil (James 95). Aristotle, not being able to withstand the strong anti-Macedonian sentiments that whipped up in Athens following the death of Alexander II 'The Great' in 323 BCE and the condemnation for his impropriety by a priest called Eurymedon, retired miserably in virtual solitary confinement to a family estate in Euboea (Évvoia) where he gave up the ghost the following year. Aristotle's reputation fell in Western Europe following the collapse of the Roman Empire.

Unlike Plato, Olaniyan is a revolutionary to the core – interestingly, even in love matters he bares his fangs to win back his love being *captured* by a rival in the poem "Musing all night". He cries:

I shall search for her at dawn  
The forests and savannahs I shall comb  
I shall not rest till I push this captor to drown  
Once I rescue my pearl from his clutch (Olaniyan 50).

Whereas Plato's desire is to preserve his perceived, incorruptible republic, Olaniyan's objective is to remodel the absurd republic based on equity and justice since its perception of incorruptibility is *ab initio* an authorial bias. A taste of his radicalism against the state can be found in the poem, "Dire silence". After documenting the various kinds of oppression in the society he has witnessed, he charges:

In my head I thought it all  
How my silence waters this iniquity, when my voice could halt it  
How my surrender strengthens it, when my defiance could weaken it  
How my cowardice sustains it, when my courage could stifle it

Now I know it all  
This has to be salvaged with my life or I keep living in vain  
I must speak up for the poor or keep looking away in shame

I must break this silence or surrender my soul to this pain (Olaniyan 45).

In general terms, Olaniyan's poetry collection titled "Lucidity of Absurdity", is a blistering satire that bleeds the society against oppression which he sees as an 'absurdity'. In a sense, his poetry casts him in the mould of artists that may be categorized as practitioners of absurdist literature. In this literary tribe are foremost post-war European artists like Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Jacques Audiberti, Jean Genet, and Jean Tardieu. Absurdist writing highlights "the inadequacy of language for communication and the absence of meaning in everyday life. To this end they (practitioners) use inconsistent and even interchangeable characters, illogical or nonexistent plot development, and parody of the conventions of theatre." In the words of Austrian-born British critic, Martin Esslin (1918 - 2002), it "strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought." A dose of the absurdist situation can be seen on the book cover of *Lucidity of Absurdity* whereby the lamb chases the lion; or the poem entitled "False force" where the poet observes the upside-down of life:

The sky is beneath the earth  
The universe does not exist  
The seed is not from the fruit

The semen does not form the fetus  
The chick is not from the egg  
The ruler does not lead ...  
This is all false force (Olaniyan 64).

Olaniyan takes pain to document the string of abnormalities that endanger the society. The absurdities cut across all strata of the society as distributed in the sixty poetic pieces segmented into five parts. Part One headlined 'Of Politics and Power' contains 12 poems; Part Two called 'When the Earth Cries' has five poems; Part Three tagged 'Humanity – Slavery and History' floats 14 poems; Part Four named 'Aches and Balms' has seven poems; while Part Five titled 'Aspects of Humanity' bristles with 22 poems. Interestingly, the segments are not water tight as the thematic concerns overlap into all the sections. Notwithstanding the segmentation, it is not difficult to come to grip with similar issues of absurdities that affect societal or human life in any section of the poetry collection. Olaniyan however, is both a chronicler and commentator of absurd events. Even though saddened by the absurdities of his society or continent, a postcolonial byproduct, he equally recognizes the origin of the absurdities. It is therefore apposite to start from the very beginning, which is pre-history.

Olaniyan reminds the reader in the poem titled "The fall of yesterday" that:

Before the fall of yesterday  
This realm at the centre of the globe  
Fed its offspring with fish and shrubs  
The ocean did not submerge it (Olaniyan 43).

This is a poem with striking **metaphors**. That the African continent fed its children with "fish and shrubs" indicates not only food self-sufficiency of the African past but also its untold riches and splendor that attracted foreigners notably the Europeans and Asians to settle here. The "ocean" that did not submerge the continent relates to its initial attacks by the Eurasian invaders that were not enough to subdue Africa because of its great prowess. It was the era of the Kemetian Empire (present Egypt), the first global empire. It was the era of the Kingdom of Nubia (now Sudan), the Kingdom of Kush (present Ethiopia), etc. It was the era of conquering Emperors like Thutmose III (reigned from 1479 to 1425 BCE after the death of the famous female pharaoh and poetess, Hatshepsut). Called "The Napoleon of Ancient Egypt" ([discoveringegypt.com](http://discoveringegypt.com)), he launched seventeen (17) successful military campaigns in Eurasia and annexed 110 countries to the Kemetian Empire including Syria, Palestine, Phoenicia, Mesopotamia and the Mitannian cities. It was the era of Ethiopian King Taharqa who boasted that he was the "Emperor of the world". It was the era of Hannibal (247 – 183 BCE), the great military genius of Kart Haddas (Carthage, near Tunisia). Stationed in overrun Spain as the successful chief commander of the Carthaginian forces, he devised a surprise strategy of invading Rome by marching on Southern France with 40,000 troops and African war elephants, crossing over the icy Alps mountains in five months, to the north of Italy. He outwitted as well as defeated the Roman army that was hundreds of thousands strong. It was the era of three great black Africans that ruled the Roman Empire. They are Lucius Septimius Severus (146-211), Roman emperor (193-211 CE) jointly succeeded by his two sons, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (188-217) nicknamed Caracalla (ruled 212 – 217 CE) and Publius Septimius Geta (ruled jointly 211 – 212 CE). It was the era that provided black African men among the earliest popes in Christendom. Some of the earliest black African popes mentioned by Du Bois (146) were Pope Victor I (187 – 198 CE); Pope Melchisedes (311 – 314 CE); Pope Gelasius (493 – 496 CE). Others listed by Ehui (29 – 30) were Tertullian and Cyprian from Carthage; Arnobius from Sicca Veneria; Lactantius, Municius Feli and Augustine from Coptic Egypt. Their Latin names notwithstanding, they were black natives of Africa.

However, the great African continent eventually succumbed to external attacks, invasion and occupation. In the poem titled "Uprooted", Olaniyan cries:

Gunboats roared from the ocean ...

Young men and maidens are to be captured

Cowed, chained, conquered  
Channelled into vast floating irons in the ocean  
The passage into a new land about to commence  
A people uprooted to hew to build captors' heavens (42).

So, the African continent was ravaged, and its able-bodied youths carted away as slaves to Eurasia and the Americas. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade alone cost Africa nearly 500 million lives and human cargo. That is in addition to the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade championed much earlier by the Arabs which cost Africa about 30 million lives. At the end of the slave trade, the Eurasian colonialists occupied and colonized the Africans. In the process they tampered with the African culture especially its worldview. Olaniyan says:

In the dead of night  
Natives' ethos and gods were murdered  
Sojourners inherited vigour, flesh and blood  
All liberty, all dignity, all custom, impounded (43).

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century almost all African countries had won their political independence from the colonial masters. It was to be expected that the absurdities associated with rulership in Africa under the sledgehammer of the slave masters and colonialists would end. But that was not to be. The African landscape is strewn with both female and male oppressors. The female oppressor is named "Succubus" while the male oppressor is "Octopus". In the poem titled "Succubus", the poet laments:

Today, we awaken to sight our torn flee  
Our blood drips from her lower lip  
She laps up more blood unfazed  
Our screams only heighten her glee  
  
Succubus' sway smothers us daily  
Till we lose the power to think or act  
Our ethos, our land, our being, they decay direly  
Death now our freedom from her dart (Olaniyan 12).

A similar situation of absurd rule occurs in the poem titled "Octopus" where the poet observes horrifyingly thus:

Clutching a sword made of feathers  
The rulers thrust at its heart  
Rabbis quibble on its plunders  
This octopus has seized our earth  
Tempting the poor with unholy wealth  
  
At its behest  
Virgins trade off their flower  
Priests alter creeds to New Age tenets  
In vain, the masses crave for flour  
Octopus strangles our land with its paws (Olaniyan 13).

The absurdities of our rulers continue in their style of managing the eco-system. "The earth brawls" is a poem that aptly captures this alarming scenario:

Its bowels litter the surface  
As ordinances pierce its face

We scoop its blood as energies  
Unconcerned with its agonies (Olaniyan 26).

The scourge of desert encroachment into our land is vaguely suggested in the poem titled “the dragon” where the persona analyzes that:

The dragon is a victim of drought  
His meals, his verve, the assailants’ draught  
A soul is surrendered to death  
A placid youth ruined into a brute (Olaniyan 27).

So, our African leaders are incapable of effectively managing our eco-system. The most horrendous observation of the poet is our leaders’ inability to soundly manage the economy. This is appropriately captured in the poem titled “The forlorn palm tree”. The poet says:

The forlorn palm tree  
Perched beside the delta  
Surrounded by creeks  
Yet thirsty for water ...

The forlorn palm tree  
A pillar of income twisted into a barren stem  
Running from the feller’s axe  
Onto the path of drillers’ bit (Olaniyan 28).

Here Olaniyan dramatizes the sordid situation in the Niger Delta area where the palm tree used to be a great economic tree that produced tons of palm oil and made Africa rich as the foremost exporter of the commodity. But, with the discovery of crude petroleum in the area in 1958 at Oloibiri the government has abandoned agriculture thus neglecting the palm tree. Interestingly, Malaysia had come to Nigeria in the early 1960s to obtain the palm kernel seedlings and the technology to grow it in that country. Today, Malaysia is the largest exporter of the palm oil in the world while Nigeria is at the lowest rung of the ladder. So, it is a **situational irony** that the palm tree which is planted in the Niger Delta still begs for water to survive. Sadder still, is the fact that many of these economic trees are uprooted to make room for the foreign engineers to drill petroleum and gas. In the process, the environment is degraded as a result of acid rain, gas flaring and oil spillage. The chief culprits here are the multinational oil companies whom the poet calls “Ogres in the canal”. Olaniyan says:

The ogres swarm the creeks  
They traverse the swamps  
And kill the forest with their greed

The ogres rumble the waters  
They stab the earth and soil the altars  
In their search for black gold (30).

Olaniyan further turns the heat on the politicians who manipulate the electorate to win votes, and then abandon them afterwards. In the poem titled “Numb thumb” he complains that,

For a bag of rice  
You sold our tomorrow  
To a mortician (Olaniyan 23).

In another poem titled, “Surrendered”, Olaniyan laments on the absurd attitude of the politician before and after his election thus:

Then, he listened to us  
Now, he leers at us  
All entreats for polls are over  
Our future has been surrendered  
Into the ballot box  
Our friend on the soapbox  
Has descended as a fox  
We have been boxed (15).

However, even though Olaniyan abhors the manipulative style of the deceitful politician he believes that the solution is in the electorate who must change power wisely through the ballot box. He therefore joins the bandwagon of those warning against military interregnum no matter how disappointing the polity is. In the poem titled “Khaki” he reminds us of the nature of the military:

The khaki uniform  
Schools man in the lethal art  
Of killing without leniency  
In defence of national honour  
In hindrance of dishonor  
This turns out as horror  
The commandant gets honoured

The khaki uniform  
Deludes wearers with fatal ego  
Who see others as mere mortals  
To be mowed down with mortars  
In order to uphold national order  
This turns out as the ethos of others (Olaniyan 19).

Olaniyan is not a tiger with a mauled paw that merely sobs at his problem. He bays for blood. That defines his social activism. Thus, he constantly berates those he considers cowards or weaklings that are incapable of fighting to change the political landscape on the continent. In the poem titled “Ignoble silence” he says:

Ignoble silence is the yoke of weaklings  
A quietude that kills  
An impotent weapon betrothed by citizens  
That are succumbing to the monarch’s sentries  
This inane silence preserves deadness  
And subdues the cowards to eternal sadness (Olaniyan 35).

Curiously, Olaniyan redefines the word “slave” to mean coward or weakling. In the poem “Slave’s fear” he says, “The slave loves freedom/ But only laments his doom” (Olaniyan 32); in “Woe in the land of whole” Olaniyan says, “The serfs forever sit in this shame/ They say the cosmos is to blame” (36); in “Tool in the saddlebag” Olaniyan says, “The slave awaits his ruler for the rules of life/ A tool in the ruler’s saddlebag” (38); and in “Decaying souls” the poet says:

A being is broken  
When a man is altered into a faun  
Serving every emerging heathen  
Earth has lost another son (Olaniyan 34).

So Olaniyan galvanizes his readers, as much as his compatriots, to take action against absurd rule by absurd leaders. More so that he betrays a horrifyingly absurd legacy of the current rulers who have left a continent of the unborn generation locked up in an absurd, uncertain future in the poem titled “Tomorrow”. He says:

Right there in the womb  
The embryo rests cocooned  
But he will shape the future:  
He will plunder the world  
Or enhance its excellence

Will he defend bigotry?  
Or prevent schism?  
Will he fire the artillery?  
Or foster humanism?  
Bestowed ethos shall decide (Olaniyan 18).

Even though the unborn African child is placed on the scale of probability of doing good or bad, it is more likely to tilt in favour of the bad because modern leadership traits are inundated with the negative tendencies. With such radical disposition against the state, Olaniyan certainly cannot earn a haven in Plato’s republic.

In his rendition **style** Olaniyan tends to the universal rather than the local sources to garnish his poetry. He writes mostly in **free verse** with un-sustained effort at maintaining a **standard rhyme scheme**. Some poems start with but do not end with rhyme. Case in point is “Succubus” which has the following rhyme scheme: **aabb** (smiles/miles, merry/misery); **ccdd** (cowries/allies, godmother/mother); **eeff** (fête/fate, error/horror); **xxxx** (flesh/lip, unfazed/glee); **gxgx** (daily/act, direly/dart); **xhhx** (being/meeting, bowing/cowries); xixi (souls/sell, protest/hell). It must be quickly said that the rhyme scheme **cc** (cowries/allies) is only for convenience sake because ‘cowries’ does not rhyme with ‘allies’ even though the last three letters of each word are spelt the same but pronounced differently. Indeed, some of the rhymes are **pararhymes** such as ‘fête/fate’; or **incongruous rhymes** such as ‘cowries/allies’. Olaniyan loves words or expressions that are self-contradicting often captured in **oxymorons** such as “Gory glory” (22), “virtuous vampire” (59) and “Aromatic toxin” (63) and **paradoxes** such as “A human has been trapped in mankind” (71) in his poetry. Even the title “Lucidity of Absurdity” has some medical contradiction. In medical parlance ‘lucid’ is a rational and mentally clear state of a psychiatric patient between episodes of delirium or psychosis. ‘Absurdity’ is a ridiculous thing due to its being irrational, illogical or incongruous. Thus, medically the title could mean the “logicality of illogicality” which is simply contradictory. There are attempts at playing up **alliteration** as “Westward wind whirls me to the west” (39) and “bustling bumpy road” (20). He makes use of **epithet** to emphasize meaning as in “diseased treasures” and “rotten wealth” (45). There is the occasional use of **Classical** or **Medieval Latin allusions** and some **French phrase**. Case in point of the Classical reference is Janus, the two-faced Roman god associated with “the beginnings, the past and the future, gates, doorways, and bridges, and peace.” From this god the compound phrase “Janus-faced” is got to refer to a person considered to be “insincere or hypocritical”. “Janus!” is the title poem where the poet deprecates double-faced characters like the politicians. Another **allusion** is Succubus, a Medieval Latin mythic woman demon having sex with men during sleep. It has already been explained that Succubus **symbolizes** the female oppressor. To Olaniyan oppression, just like the oppressor, is colour-blind – it strikes at anybody not minding gender, race or creed. The **French phrase** “Déjà vu” is the title poem where the poet relives the gory experience of manipulative politicians who come in various guises to scour for votes, and sprint away thereafter. Really the collection thrives on a lot of **ironies**. Even the title poem reflects this **ironic** situation because the poet impresses that what the public considers the absurd is the reverse:

Bards alter speeches to words in rhythm  
The world, bewildered, sees an absurdity



But the shrewd souls delight at the lucidity of the rhymes (Olaniyan 61)

Not many people love poetry and may not patronize Olaniyan's or any other person's. However, Sappho, a highly romantically passionate poetess of 7th century BCE often presented as a white woman of Greek origin, but of truth a black African woman, based in Lesbos island with her retinue of multitude erotic maids, has a word for them in this very short poetry titled "To One Who Loved Not Poetry":

Thou liest dead, and there will be no memory left behind  
Of thee or thine in all the earth, for never didst thou bind  
The roses of Peirian streams upon thy brow; thy doom  
Is now to flit with unknown ghosts in cold and nameless gloom.

Poetry is tonic for the soul meant to salvage it and re-order the world. Olaniyan's maiden effort as a poet successfully paints him as a poet of social relevance. In this collection he has come clean as a multiple purveyor of truths. He is a pre-historian, a historian and a post-historian rolled into one social commentator. He should be judged by his own standard as a committed Africanist and original author, not a Eurocentrist or plagiarist like Plato or Aristotle. Nevertheless, as no writing has ultimate perfection, Olaniyan should work on few typographical and grammatical flaws. He should also avoid pedantic expressions in his poetry, and endeavor to fashion new words or expressions or force new meanings out of old words or clichés. In conclusion, Olaniyan deserves encouraging patronage so that the world may become a better place for all.

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