

The Aesthetic Use of Proverbs in Toni Duruaku's *Silhouettes* and *A Matter of Identity*

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Abstract

The proverb in the Igbo social matrix remains a documentation of the lives of the people at a particular time. It is a timeless truth in the form of a simple illustration that exposes a fundamental reality of life. The proverb is thus regarded as the wisdom of many and the wits of one in that it is a word of wisdom with deep meaning which people - especially the Igbos – use for the purpose of language aesthetics. As a form of language aesthetics, creative writers use proverbs in their works as a sort of embellishments and a proof of their deep knowledge in their cultures. This paper, examines the aesthetic use of proverbs in Toni Duruaku's *Silhouettes* and *A Matter of Identity*. Using Wolfgang Iser's readers-response theory of 'aesthetic reception' as the theoretical framework, the paper exposes readers to the phenomenological philosophy of proverbs in the texts. The paper suggests that readers of the plays and other literary materials, against the background of the incident in a literary material, should reformulate and re-interpret the importance of language aesthetics in literary texts.

Key Words: Aesthetics, Proverbs, Culture, *Silhouettes*, *A Matter of Identity*, Creative Writers, Toni Duruaku

Introduction

The enormous roles of a literary and creative writer is one saddled with a lot of responsibilities among which is the 'aesthetic' use of words. This entails that a creative writer who does not understand the 'art of aesthetics' in writing is more or less embarking on an important journey without understanding the real purpose of the journey. In literature, aesthetics is the inclusion of references to artistic elements or expressions within a textual work. It is a method used to promote or educate readers about important artistic expressions in society. In present usage, according to M.H Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "aesthetics designates the systematic study of all of the *finearts*, as well as of the nature of beauty in any object, whether natural or artificial"(4) . Aesthetics, therefore, is the beauty in words – language embellishments - in creative writing. Abrams and Harpham further explains that "aesthetic end is the perfection of sensuous cognition such as: this is beauty" (4).

One of the aesthetics 'language embellishments' of writing in African literature is proverbs. A proverb is a simple and insightful, traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience. According to Gerald Adewole, proverb is "a pithy saying, especially one of condensing the wisdom of experience; adage, saying maxim" (1). This simply means that proverbs, in the African context is used to exhume wisdom and other experiences of life. Citing JK, Adewole also posits that "proverbs are sayings in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt"(1). The term 'sense and salt' as used here entails wisdom and beauty. This means that proverbs are not only words of wisdom; they are also couched in aesthetics. Adewole, argues further that "in addition to terseness and relative fixity, most sayings classified as proverbs are also marked by some kind of poetic quality style and senses, and are, in this way, set apart from more straightforward maxims"(2). Adewole further explains that "proverbs represent the quintessence of people's collective wisdom, sustained and transmitted from generation to generation. Adewole, therefore, asserts that "proverbs are couched in concise statements; a product of cumulative knowledge and experience of the society"(3).

From the foregoing, we have been able to identify the various functions of proverbs and the various contexts in which they can be used. The image-making function, the poetic function, the advisory function, the expressive function, the historic function, the communal function, the invocative function, etc. are all embedded in the aesthetic function of proverbs in Duruaku's *Silhouettes* and *A Matter of Identity*. Proverbs are indeed essential ingredients of communication in Africa, and the literary works

of most African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong’O, Akachi-Adimora-Ezeigbo, Wole Soyinka, Efua Sutherland, Okot P’ Bitek, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, to mention but a few are laced in proverbs.

Expressing the place of proverbs as a rich communication source in Ghana, Joseph Hanson Kwabena Nketia, notes that “the value of proverb in modern Ghana does not lie in what it reveals of the thoughts of the past” (4). Nketia submits further that for the poet, and indeed the speaker and the creative writer, “proverb is a model of compressed or forceful language” (5). In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe postulates that “among the Igbos, the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten” (3). As palm oil serves as a natural sauce for roasted or boiled yam, so are proverbs used in rendering oral speech among the Igbos.

Furthermore, J.O.J Nwachukwu-Agbada expressing his thoughts on the importance of proverbs among the Igbos asserts that “... proverb in the Igbo social matrix remains a documentation of the lives of the people at a particular time. Like some of the other oral forms, it records the history, experience, the trauma and tension of a society at every stage in its evolution...” (4). For Agbada, proverbs is a way of life for the Igbos. For a people’s social history to be complete, their indigenous ways of expression must be considered in that their mode of expression is wholly their way of identity. According to Bukar Usman:

Every member of a human community is a member of a subjective “environment” that is different from any other social entity because of the way it adapts to the natural environment through unique cultural beliefs, practices and expressions. The group’s indigenous language is the vehicle through which all these take place and the most public mark of its identity as a group. (13)

From Usman’s assertions, one of the unique cultural beliefs and identity of a people is in their mode of expression in which among the Igbos of Toni Duruaku, important conversations cannot be eroded of proverbs which are used to embellish such conversations whether they in an official or unofficial context. Nwachukwu-Agbada further explains that “the proverb is easily one of the longest surviving non-material artifacts of a heritage. In the particular case of the Igbo, proverbs remain the reality tools for thinking and communicating, not only for their aesthetic exquisiteness, but also for their being a way of life in Igbo culture” (3).

Deeply rooted in his culture and aware of the beauty that proverbs portray in language embellishments of a creative African writer, Duruaku tolls the line of so many African greats to carve a niche for himself in his use of proverbs for the “beautification of language” in creative writing. Thus, Duruaku embarked on the literary journey to creating two masterpieces, *Silhouettes* and *A Matter of Identity*, not only to identify with his people but to also create a cultural and traditional impact through African drama that will stand the test of time.

Two of a Kind – *Silhouettes* (1993) and *A Matter of Identity* (2003)

Toni Duruaku’s *Silhouettes* and *A Matter of Identity* are two plays deeply rooted in the traditional Igbo society. Set in the fictitious historical Amadike and Umukwenu respectively in the South-East of Nigeria, the plays explore the traditional Igbo society where despite modernity, the people still have great regards for the old order, and are also ready to go all the way to uphold the beliefs and wishes of their fore bearers. *Silhouette* and *A Matter of Identity* explore other elements of African drama such as songs, dances, history and myths, idioms, festivals and rituals, masks and masquerades, and more importantly, both are enriched with proverbs which are the major concern of this study.

Language in traditional African drama is expressed in the traditional speech convention of proverbs and other speech elements such as riddles, jokes, idioms, storytelling, incantations, invocation just to mention but a few; and virtually every African community employs the aforementioned in their day-to-day communal living and narratives. Thus, Duruaku extensively explored the use of proverbs to embellish the dramatic dialogue and convey deeper meanings as well as essence in the two plays under

study. Proverbs do not only advance the plots and settings of the two plays, they also add flavor to the art of conversations, characterizations and project the characters' capacities to manipulate their languages at any point in time and when the need arises. Both plays, through the flashback and foreshadowing techniques, show the cultural milieu of the Igbo clan in the past and present as well as give a deep insight into the future.

The Aesthetics of Proverbs in *Silhouettes*

In *Silhouettes*, Duruaku presents a community – Amadike – that is caught in the web of throne succession tussle. J.C Kalu-Nwiwu and Ken Uche Chukwu posit that “the succession tussle is rendered through a complex plot that captures both the present and the past in a careful weave of flashback and suspense” (*Nka* 8, 32). In different contexts throughout the play, Duruaku rolls out the drums of ancient wisdom to take us into savory journey of word embellishments with proverbs.

The play opens with what seems like a council of elders' meeting, where the issue of who succeeds the demised monarch is being discussed. As earlier asserted, among the Igbos, especially in the gathering of elders, the use of proverbs becomes a norm. Hope Eghagha posits that “... proverbs are infused into character to indicate status, age and experience” (*Lit.Lang*, 421). Almost all the characters in *Silhouettes* are infused with proverbs irrespective of their age, gender or situation. This simply means that there is a proverb for everyone in every situation. The dialogue in Obialor's residence at the beginning of the play heralds Duruaku's aesthetic use of proverbs throughout the play. Nwaeze: “... like the gorilla of our folklore, I bide my time; but like the elephant, I have a long memory” (*Sil*,1). Even though the conversation between Nwaeze, Maduka and Obialor seems not to be in favour Nwaeze and Maduka, yet the former chooses a witty way of expressing his patience and his sharp memory. For the wisdom Nwaeze exhibited in such situation through his choice proverb, his right hand man, Maduka, whom Obialor describes as an acolyte is full of praise “... Dry meat that chokes if swallowed in haste! He who says we shall not live, shall show us where to rest” (*Sil*,1). Here, Duruaku deploys another aesthetic role of proverbs – praise singing. Though the purpose for the praise singing here is to extol one to spite another, yet the dexterity exhibited by the playwright in making the reader understand the level of sycophancy is commendable.

The fact is that the deft deployment of the proverb is regarded by literary artists as an index of one's intelligence, the philosophical turn of one's mind. Duruaku's deployment of proverbs in the conversation among the characters, especially the elderly is proving of the philosophical turn of his mind. Obialor refuses not to be influenced by Nwaeze's wealth and the dubious means which Nwaeze wants to ascend the throne. He insists on the old order “... This is my sacred duty... my holy trust. My position is therefore unassailable” (*Sil*,2). In Nwaeze's response to Obialor's philosophy, Nwaeze responds subtly to convince him to put down his stand about the old order thus:

We discard an old wrapper that is worn and torn. What use is a woman who is past child-bearing to a man who craves for a child. A hoe that is taken to the farm must till the soil; otherwise it is a useless piece of equipment weighing down the unfortunate farmer. We cannot allow the shadow of the past to cast itself on the present. (*Sil*, 3)

Even though Nwaeze's motives are selfish, but his attempt to play with words, showing his in-depth knowledge and experience in oratory is very commendable. Since he is in a discussion with a well respected wise man, Obialor, Nwaeze's aim no matter how futile is to convince his listener with wise and witty sayings. Nwaeze's remarks to Maduka “Tradition is Tradition. We cannot uproot it” (*Sil*,3) tells us of a man who is witty in speech and who knows when to switch codes when the occasion arises. He further admonishes Maduka “... a performing masquerade dances forward; it also dances backwards; it turns to all sides of the arena; but it knows where to turn to get money and where to turn for ordinary applause...” (*Sil*, 3). Duruaku uses Nwaeze to educate us about the many functions of proverbs within the same context or environment. In a moment, Nwaeze uses proverbs to convince Obialor, the next moment he advises Maduka not to be rash even in their quest to win Obialor over. The peak of one's intelligence is in his ability to find his ways in and out of proverb usage, and Nwachukwu-

Agbada suggests that “Anyone going to encounter a person with such mind will either be a match to his intellectual endowments or go in the company of another who is relatively well-grounded in the use of words” (5). This, we see in Obialor who matches Nwaeze for his wits. While we can say that Nwaeze is a man of many words, we cannot say same of Obialor but when he speaks, he speaks not only intelligently but wisely. He is goal-oriented and not easily provoked or influenced. He advised Nwaeze thus “... a wise man learns from his first mistake, but a wiser man learns from the mistake of others” (*Sil*,5).

Occasions give rise to speech which in turn promotes the use of proverbs as reflected by Obialor’s advice to his son, Chidi, who attempts to retaliate on Nwaeze and Maduka for addressing his father rudely. This entails that a user of a proverb is influenced in his choice of proverb by what happens before him. For example, Obialor advises Chidi thus:

Do not be hasty, Chidi. A little boy who longs for a swim must ensure that the water is not infested with guinea worm. (sits) My son, the lion in its wisdom withdraws from a sudden encounter in order to prepare for the fight. Look at the heels of the lady you meet in the market place, son; she may well be a spirit.

(*Chidi nods in agreement as Obialor continues*). A father does not willingly make sacrificial example of his child whatever his inclination to a deity. The piece of yam I give you cannot be a source of discomfort to you. (*Sil*,8)

The above invariably reveals one of the aesthetic values and importance of context in proverb application. In other words, speech, conversation or even action may be difficult to strike home without the occasional use of proverbs. Obialor’s words of wisdom are the tonic Chidi needed to sheath his sword, and be assured of his father’s support. There is usually an automatic association of proverb utterances and circumstances of usage. Nwachukwu-Agbada asserts that “It is not easy to establish when the realization took place in African cultures but it would seem that the use of proverbs in nearly all aspects of the informal education of the African child, and the fact that practically every activity conjures its own proverbs are evidence of immemorial awareness... (33-34).

The conversation between Chidi, a young man of about 21 and his mother, Nwanyioma is another prove of Duruaku’s effort in making language beautiful. Here, Duruaku makes us to understand that proverb could be for all ages irrespective of gender. It is also worthy of note that in Igbo land, young people do not use proverbs when interacting with elders, especially if the elder is a male. However, in the case of Chidi and his mother - a female elder - Duruaku uses them to explore the conversational qualities of proverbs. This means that two familiar faces, whether official or unofficial can converse with proverbs depending on their relationship with each other.

Chidi: ... The long distance runner cannot afford to break any rules on the last lap of the race.

Nwanyioma: That is why our people say: “Age is sincere” ...

Chidi: A society where poverty has taken the front seat has little moral values. A contented man is hard to bribe... (*Sil*, 8-9).

The above actually shows that every activity conjures its own proverbs as Nwachukwu-Agbada rightly said, and the discussion between mother and son about the social and moral decadence in a society where only a few are willing to uphold the truth lay credence to the value Duruaku places on proverbs. Another aesthetic use of proverbs in *Silhouettes* is in its provocative, warning, poetic and invocative usages. The flashback to Nwaeze’s house in *Incident 4* of the play tells it all.

Maduka: ... I shall show you what the spirits do with the ears of a rat.

Nwaeze: ... He will feel the jaws of the crocodile... When a child forgets he is a small boy, the rustiness of age blinds him...

Maduka: ... He will regret to have gone into a wrestling arena with a gorilla... (*Sil*, 40).

Both men were provoked by what they felt was Chidi's intrusion and dare to them; thus, they threaten him while they try to manhandle him. Chidi, in self-defense, begins to mouth a mantra from his crouched position. As he speaks, one notices that he invokes the powers of his fore bearers to come to his aid.

Chidi: The leopard has spots
But they do not hide it
In the jungle
The elephant is the biggest beast
Yet the monkey scampers
Out of its reach
Fire burns
Yet grandmother brings the pot down
Bare handed.
... The chick is helpless
But the fool falls down
Trying to catch it
Rainfall behind, sunshine ahead
What you see was not
What is, you did not see. (*Sil*,41)

Chidi's mantra is not only invocative but poetic. Again, Duruaku infused dual functions of proverb in one speech context. This shows a writer who is not only culturally aware of the importance of proverbs in the invocation of the gods and how quick the gods could respond when the right words are used, but he also turns the proverbs to a verse of poetry to capture the interest of his audience. In incident 8, we also see a similar situation as above where Duruaku infused some elements of African drama – drama, music, rituals, chants and proverbs – into one to give the readers insightful idea into the African oral tradition. Obialor and Chidi are doing a bizarre dance around a tree trunk as they invoke their fore bears for another plea for intervention; they look sky-wards.

Obialor: Prepare for the dance.
The enemy is not weak

Chidi: However strong the warrior
He prepares for the opponent
However weak.

Obialor: Surprise exposes the weakness
Of a valiant warrior.

Chidi: The leopard runs
To return for battle
The fool tarries for death.

Obialor: Mighty Guardian of yore.
Protector!

Chidi: Fourth Eye,
Ancestors before us
Fortify your children

Obialor: We don your cloth of dread
Awaiting your guidance. (*Thunder!*)

Chidi: The yam from the father
Cannot be too hot
For the child.

Obialor: *Ogunaofo* are in our hands
Merge the past with the present.

Chidi: Trouble knocks on the door
Stand behind
And before your children.

Obialor: The past lives again
In the present (*Thunder!*). (*Sil*,72-73)

From the foregoing, Duruaku fused in one multiple roles of proverbs - an invocation of mythic powers, a prayer, a communion with the spirits, a poetic rendition, rituals, etc. Some of its end rhymes make it musical and bring out the beauty in the use of proverbs. The instant response from the ancestors through thunder informs one on the effect of proverbs in the traditional African society not only to the living but also to celestial beings especially in the Igbo world view.

The Aesthetic of Proverbs in *A Matter of Identity*

A Matter of Identity focuses on the essence of maintaining the sanctity of the cultural identity – of which proverb is one – of the people in order not to become “a people without culture”; “a shameless race.” Duruaku noted the above when he posits that “this work of fiction is not a chronicle of a people’s shortcomings. Rather, it is a call for solidarity, for sacrifice, for mobilization, for guarding that which distinguishes one person from another...” (*A Matter*,iii). In the play, Umukwenu has been forbidden by the gods from holding an annual festival of peace and harmony because of ‘wholesome adoption’ rather than ‘adaptation’ of an exported culture. The gods stipulate that the emissaries should be sent to the ‘Never-Never Land’ for instructions on the way forward for the community. Chidiebere S. Ekweariri posits that “the play utilizes drama, dance, ritual, myth and other cultural idioms to project the subject matter of culture” (*Nka13*, 116).

Like *Silhouettes*, Duruaku imbues in almost all his characters in *A Matter of Identity* with the aesthetic speech art of proverbs. He wastes no time in doing so with an unusual character in the conversation between two young friends - Okoli and Nkechi - who eventually suit the description of the gods as events unfold in the play. Duruaku’s ability to create a young female character of about 16 who understands the culture and traditions of her people including “he whose wine tastes better” (*A Matter*,4) in her community shows the willingness of the writer to educate both the old and young in the use of proverbs. Nkechi tells Okoli whom she feels has the intentions of making her drunk in order to take advantage of her, “... I must keep my wits about me, especially when I’m near a he-goat like you” (*A Matter*, 4). Here, the young girl uses proverb to advise herself of a possible antics from a young male admirer. She does not want to be carried away by the offer of drinking more palm-wine from a calabash. When Okoli wants to take another advantage, she was quick to explain with another proverb “... I mean a bee that flies from one calabash to another...” (*A Matter*,4). Deep into their conversation, in an attempt to buttress the importance of originality, Okoli replies Nkechi “... A monkey should not try to be a chimpanzee” (*A Matter*, 9). The use of proverbs by these two adolescents show the earlier assertion made in this study that for Duruaku, proverb is not just a way of life but also a means of identity. Through the constant use of proverbs in their conversations, Nkechi and Okoli make childhood love affair and dreams memorable; one an elderly would want to reminisce.

The intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of proverbs are probably why it is said that when elders are gathered, one should expect proverbs of all kinds – entertainment, wise counsel, communion with the gods, jokes, history, decision making – to edify oneself. The conversation between the elders – Obiocha, Ntagbu, Mbagwu and Ocheze – points to the fact that the above uses and functions of proverbs are no fluke. In ensuring that the right decisions are taken, Obiocha tells his fellow elders “... Inaction is worse than wrong action” (*A Matter*, 13). This is a proverbial warning not to take decisions that would neither be in their favour nor of the community. Mbagwu uses proverbs to inform of his awareness of things happening around, and he tells another elder “Ntagbu, my brother, I know all about what happens to the other fingers that border the palm oil-licking one” (*A Matter*,14). A brief look at some of the proverbs used by the elders in the course of their conversations will help inform us of the aesthetics of proverbs within a speech community in a traditional African society.

Ocheze: ... We are all on edge. But a wise man is one who watches his every step, considers different options... (14). (*Ocheze warns that despite the fact that they are in dare need of a solution, they must be careful in making decisions*).

Obiocha: ... Let me tell you my friend, a clan that forgets her heroes cannot breed new one. A land with no heroes is dead...(15) (*Obiocha explains the need to appreciate past deeds*).

Mbagwu: ... A man does not run away from his duty simply because of a tease. How else does the chicken get to chase away the cockroach from the meeting of the animals so that decision will be to eat him, except by annoying cockroach enough for him to leave (15). (*Here suggests Mbagwu's advice that one should not get unnecessarily upset by mere jokes and abandon an important conversation where crucial decisions are taken*).

Ntagbu: ... There is no problem in a little altercation. Our people say: "The thing that makes walking elegant is the swinging of the arms..." (17). (*Ntagbu encourages the beauty of communal living*).

Ntagbu: No wonder we had this little argument. Our people say that if you sacrifice to the gods on an empty stomach, you'll smell like the spirits... (17). (*Ntagbu further tries to explain the importance of communal living*).

All: (*severally*) A man who brings kola, brings life (18). (Shows acceptance of hospitality, especially kola nut)

Ntagbu: The kola is in the hand of the king. Let him bless it (18). (*Shows acceptance and approval for the host to do the needful before the eating of the kolanuts presented to the guests*)

Mbagwu: ... A hot coal given to a child by his elder cannot scorch him. But if you send a child to catch a shrew, you give him water to wash his hands (19). (*Shows encouragement and support*)

Duruaku creates an interesting and informative scene here. Throughout the meeting, the elders affirm Achebe's "proverb is the oil with which words are eaten. The various situations that arise in the cause of their discussions are all beauty to behold due the aesthetic use of proverbs especially in settling differences and taking good decisions. Some proverbs are even used to create comic relief; to douse the tension of the moment especially from Ntagbu who seems to be the clown among the elders despite being the chief ritualist.

In *a Matter of Identity*, Duruaku also shows the poetic use of proverbs in praise singing, invocation and prayers. Mbagwu blesses the kola thus:

Kola is like dance:
It brings abundance
A good life.
Kola is offered a well-wisher
Like a water pitcher
To a wayfarer.
A piece of kola nut,
Is also a brother, not
Only for the visitor.
As the door is unlatched
The mouth is unlocked:
Our people now live in fear.
This coming night
Answers to our plight
We hope to get
Community suffering,
Like community offering
Weighs heavily on the leader.... (20-21)

Duruaku uses the above lines enriched in proverbs to achieve not only an expressive function but also sacred and wishful functions. The manner in which the proverbs are used, run-on-lines embellished with internal and end rhymes give the proverbs a poetic look. At various point in their meeting, the elders used proverbs to make one salient point or the other. Some are meant to encourage, some to put an end to a brooding rancor while others are meant finding a way forward.

In incident 6, the aesthetic use of proverbs continues as Duruaku through the ancestors, *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo* and *Nkwo* continues from where mere mortals stopped in appraising and admonishing the emissaries while taking them into the future. In an attempt to bring Nkechi and Okoli to realize and admit the shortcomings of their people, *Afo* confronts Okoli who denied any wrong doing by the community thus:

“A child who cannot tell where the rain started beating him cannot tell when it stopped” (*A Matter*, 47-48). *Eke* lends his voice to the advice in a similar tone and method “If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up somewhere else” (*A Matter*, 48). The ancestors’ words of wisdom which come in form of proverbs are meant to correct and caution the people not to further derail. In their judgments, the ancestors did not mince words in talking to their progenies as they would if they were alive. Calling for unity, *Afo* intones “... Your clan has failed to bind. They have forgotten that when a group urinates, froth is inevitable” (*A Matter*, 57). In the same vein, *Orie* charges “... Your clan has sold their rights. Greed has driven a wedge between the community good and the personal goal. You have sold your brothers for coin” (*A Matter*, 58). Even their final charge, *Duruaku* ensures that he uses a simple but strong proverb to drive the message home as all the ancestors chorused “Unity is all” (*A Matter*, 60).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that proverbs are condensed anecdotes which overtime has become more popular than the folktale from which it probably emanated. And a consideration of the aesthetics which proverbs fulfill in a society is a legitimate preoccupation since proverb is essentially social and communicative. The location of the aesthetics of proverbs in *Toni Duruaku’s Silhouette* and *A Matter of Identity* is made more crucial by its literary emphases. Thus, the aesthetics of proverbs in this work hinges on the social significance of proverbs, its pragmatic utility and how this utility conforms to literary and social normative expectations. According to *Nwachukwu-Agbada* “Proverbs embellish speech by investing it with artistic beauty which ordinarily it may not have. Being symbolic statements, proverbs attract attention to themselves not always because of their truth value or their didactic fervor, but in fact because of their poesies” (133).

Duruaku’s effort in using proverbs throughout the course of the two plays makes it easier for readers in advancement of discourse and ideas, and in the investment of utterance pleasure. In African communities, especially in Igbo land, people strive to know and use proverbs - just as we have seen in all the characters in *Silhouettes* and *A Matter of Identity*. In both plays, both the young and old, males and females use proverbs – not because proverbs replace facts, but because they amplify one’s position and justify one’s attitude or stance. *Nwachukwu-Agbada* suggests that ‘their capsular form enables a speaker to say a little without leaving much to say’ (134) just as *Duruaku* has done with the two plays. This in itself is a pleasurable and aesthetic venture since such a manner of verbal art is laden with ornamentation and semantic surprise. It is probably because of this that speech-making is taken very seriously in *Duruaku’s* culture, such that those who are not gifted in it or who were not lucky to have literally grown at the feet of wise elders decline offers requiring contact with a public. *Duruaku* does not shy away from this huge responsibility of addressing the public through the plays. Rather, he seized the opportunity to establish his image as a playwright who knows his ways around his culture and tradition; to show that he received the appropriate cultural education to merit being declared *nwa-afọ*, *nwadiala* or *nwamadi* – a true son of the soil.

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