

**ANALYSIS OF YORUBA FOLKTALE: “ALO ONITAN AJEMO ENIYAN ATI ERANKO”  
(HUMAN AND ANIMAL FOLKTALE) BY BABALOLA**

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**Abstract**

Yoruba folktales popularly known as ‘Alo’ are on the verge of extinction among the Yorubas. This study explores the meaning and different types of folktales/folklore and their functions in Yoruba society. Folktale teaches morals and values and allows children to know about their culture and environment. Folktale makes for a memorable lesson in morality. The study also looks at different views of scholars concerning the classifications of folktales. The study analyzes a folktale “human and animal” (Alo Onitan Ajemo Eniyan ati Eranko) written by Babalola, using sociology of Literature theory as a framework. The study reveals that there is a contradiction in the scholar’s classification of Yoruba folktales based on the theme of humans and animals. The study, therefore, recommends that Yorubas should go back to the ancient times of using folklore because there are lots of benefits in it. Folktales are more important and influential and the advantages of using folklore cannot be overemphasized. Folktales have always been useful and are still useful till date.

**Introduction**

Folktales are traditional stories. As its name implies, folktales are fictional stories about imaginary people and events. They may have humans or animals as characters. The main function of a folktale is to teach children good morals. Many a time, folktales may include songs that a group of listeners would recite together accompanied with clapping, the beating of drums, and dancing. How interesting and suitable the folktale is, depends on the speaker or narrator of the folktale, his ability to use language, to mimic the animal or human being, and his ability to describe the events in the folktale. Apart from this, the narrator of the folktales/stories must narrate the stories as if it is happening in front of him. Folktales are told by elders e.g. grandparents or parents either male or female that have the skills of narrating stories. However, children that used to dance and wine with elders, that have heard or listened to folktales from elders can also tell the stories/folktales. (Bamgbose 1969)

Looking at Africa setting, folktales are told at night or moonlight, when all daily activities have come to an end, grandparents and parents would gather their children and tell them folktales. One must not tell folktales in the morning or afternoon because it is believed that only the lazy ones tell folktales in the afternoon. The activity of folktale begins when the parents start preparing the children’s supper, an elderly man or woman or grandparents would gather the children together and tell them folktale in order not to disturb their peace or not to fall asleep before the food is ready. Sometimes, folktales are told when the children have finished eating their supper; this is done to allow the food consumed by the children to digest before going to bed. In this research work, we will look at the relationship between human being and animal in Yoruba folktales using ‘*Alo Onitan Ajemo Eniyan ati Eranko*’ (Human and Animal folktale) written by Babalola to justify our view. Sociological of literature theory is used because the theory postulates that there is a very close link between literature and society.

**Theoretical Framework**

The Theoretical Framework adopted for this paper is sociology of literature. Sociology is the study of human relations in the social context. The theory pinpoints that there is a cordial relationship between literature and society. According to Ogunlana (1992:11), the writers use their works to show the reality of society. This implies that the writer uses his work to educate, entertain, and mirror the good values and ills of society. This is why most theorists of sociology of literature agree that the role of the theory is to show that literature expresses a societal ideology in a bid to applaud the just ones and condemn the unjust.

Ogunsina (1987:21) concluded that literature cannot be separated from society. The author further stated that:

*a work of art does not exist in isolation  
and should not be studied as...That is  
because works of art are not independent  
of their society.*

Ogunsina pinpointed that a work of art does not exist in isolation. This is because literature and society are interwoven. They cannot be separated from each other. What Ogunsina (1987) said above emphasized the relationship between literature and society. If we look at what a work of art (literature) entails such as, setting, diction, characterization, theme, etc, it will be noticed that. all these features are from the society and for the society.

Adeyemi (2006:31) corroborated Hoggart (1966:56) when he claimed that:

*Without the full literary witness,  
the people of the society will be  
blind to the fullness of a society., pp 31*

From the above extract, Adeyemi implied that if we want to know about the people of a particular society; it is important to have full literary knowledge of that society. Looking at the situation nowadays, it is impossible to have deep knowledge about Yoruba society without reading literature books written in Yoruba or watching Yoruba movies. It is now obvious that Yoruba literature encapsulates everything about Yoruba Society. Moreover, Taine and Karl Max, the profounders of this theory, stated that literature and society are interwoven. This is because the writers and producers of various works of art selected, reflected, discussed, criticized, and refined societal issues in their works. Adeyemi (1977:73) pointed at the work of Wallek & Warren when they said that:

*The writer does not only influence  
the society. Art not merely  
Reproduces life but also shapes it.*

The above extract emphasized that Yoruba education plays important role in referring to societal issues such as politics, economy, religion, societal welfare, etc. Adeyemi (1998) supported scholars that make use of Karl Max's theory that folktale is very important and useful for society and that a work of art used to condemn the unjust is the society.

As is has been discussed above, the sociology of literature has educational knowledge about the relationship between literature and society. Hoggart in Gidden <2006> claimed that knowledge about a particular society is important when it comes to having deep knowledge of that society.

In the analysis of folktale that has to do with human beings and animals, it can be deduced that the writer makes use of Yoruba society as the setting. When we look at the characters that the writer depicted such as the disobedient children in the folktale/story, we can see its relationship with Yoruba society. In the selected story (Folktale) the writer portrayed Yoruba society when he looked at the environment and the use of the animal world. (other living things). This is the reason why the writer makes use of the bird as one of the characters in the story. This implies that the incidence/occurrence and the characters used by the writer are from the Yoruba society. Also, the Yorubas have the knowledge about the setting, environment birds, and animals and not brought by the British/Europeans/Whites.

### **The Importance of Folktale**

Folktales are fascinating and are suitable for hearing. Folktales are not only highly entertaining but also play an important role in passing along core values or character traits. In Yoruba land, folktales are used to teach the youths good morals. Folktales are often employed to pass along character traits like honesty, good character, obedience, patriotism, and hardworking. Folktales are didactic because they teach people the right ways in life; such as telling the truth, being kind or generous, being patient,

obedient to our elders and leaders, and also fearing God and human beings. Similarly, folktales teach people the danger or consequences of being greedy. They show that greedy people do not have good morals and they always end up in disgrace.

Other forms of folktales also teach people why something happened or the reason why something appeared the way it is, for example, why pigs eat sand, why the cat kills rats, why the vulture becomes bore-headed, why the back of tortoise becomes rough, why the sun is far away from land, etc. Folktales can be used to help children develop positive thinking. This happens when a child tries to re-organize folktales heard from someone. While these folktales are not only highly entertaining, they also help children play with each other. This brings harmony between them when they become adults. The children also benefit by developing the habit of staying in-door and not to be wandering around the street at the night.

Folktales by their nature help children to learn more about things of nature, most especially domestic animals and wild animals in the jungle. Children learn about different animals most especially those that are very wise among them; animals such as tortoise, rodent, lion, snake, jackal, dog, etc. Children can develop confidence on how to speak in public through folktales. Among the importance of folktales is that when children listen to a story that has to do with a particular animal and also see it on television or zoo, it makes them believe that the events in the story are real and not fiction. Storytelling is an important means of teaching children good morals in society. It is also a means of teaching children the Yoruba language to make them fluent in the language. Looking at the importance of folktale to the children and society at large, there is a need for school managements to adopt folktale as a tool in teaching moral, value and norms to pupils or children in kindergarten or nursery schools and primary schools.

### **Classification of Yoruba Folktales**

Literary critics and folklorists have worked on the forms of classifications of Yoruba folktales, various scholars such as Ojo (2005), Babalola (1976), Ogunpolu (1990), Opatotun (1994), Oyerinde et al (2002) among others have made laudable contributions towards the taxonomy of Yoruba folktales based on themes. Bamgbose (1969) classified Yoruba folktales into three. Initially, Oyerinde classified Yoruba folktales into five, among his classifications, only moral stories (Itan Feyikogbon) related to folktales. Opatotun (1994) also worked on the taxonomy of Yoruba folktales. He re-classified the work done by Ogunpolu (1990) that initially, classified Yoruba folktales into two (2). Opatotun (1994) classified them into three. What is however observed in this classification is that Yoruba folktales have been vaguely classified. Similarly, Opatotun agreed that if Yoruba folktales are classified using different templates, it would not have a precise classification. What Opatotun observed in his classification using different templates is that a type of Yoruba folktale may be classified into different groups.

However, what is observed in these different parameters adopted by scholars is that literary critics used thematic pre-occupation in doing the taxonomy of Yoruba folktales. In his work, Ojo (2005) identified different types of Yoruba folktales but did not classify them. If we take a critical look at his work, (Yoruba folktales can be classified into the following) or the following classifications can be made:

- (1). Tortoise and Monster folktale
- (2). Tortoise and Ghost folktale
- (3). Tortoise and Human being folktale
- (4). Tortoise and Bird folktale
- (5). Tortoise and Aquatic Animal Folktale
- (6). Tortoise and Animals folktales
- (7). Tortoise and Spirit folktales

Oyerinde (2002) critiques Yoruba folktales along the line of character types. In his classification, he gives six characters – types in folktales. They are:-

- (1). Singing or chorus folktale
- (2). Tortoise folktale
- (3). Why folktale
- (4). Human beings folktale
- (5). Animal folktales
- (6). Humans and Animals folktales

Despite various submissions on the taxonomy of Yoruba folktales, it can be seen that all the classifications are interwoven. That is, if we critically look at the characteristics or themes of each type of folktale, each type can still be found in different classifications or groups. If singing or chorus folktales are seen in one classification, it can also be seen in another.

**Plot construction of “Alo Onitan Ajemo Eniyan ati Eranko” (Human and Animals Folktale) written by Babalola**

There is a story about a man who gave birth to a male child. He was a farmer and used to sleep on his farm. Beside his farm, there was a hut and beside the hut, was a fruit tree called Isin in Yoruba. Birds used to eat fruit (Isin) on the tree every time and did not allow the farmer and his son to eat this fruit on the tree. One day, when they came back from the farm to observe their lunch, this child was annoyed as he saw these two birds eating the fruits on the tree. The boy desperately grabbed his gun and shot one of the birds dead. While the second bird flew away he was so happy that he has killed one of the birds. He carried the bird and started removing the feather. The second bird was on a tree closer to the boy watching what the boy was doing. As he was removing the feather, the bird that was shot dead started singing that:

<b>Song</b>	<b>Chorus</b>
T’omo losoro	An-un-gba/es
Toun tokun ni o re gbo	An-un---gba
Tomo onimoto	An-un-gba/es
	An-un-gba

The farmer (the boy’s father) was surprised as he heard what the bird was saying. He quickly warned his boy not to eat a dangerous bird. But the boy refused to yield to his father’s advice and vowed to eat the bird. The boy continued and as he was trying to remove the feather on the bird’s head, the bird sang another song as follows:

<b>Song</b>	<b>Chorus</b>
Toun tokun ni o re gbo	An-un-gba n e/es
Sa re le low’omo	An-un-gba neee/es
Tomo losoro	An-un---gba
Tomo onimoto	An-un-gba

Once again, his father warned/scolded him not to eat the dangerous bird but the boy was adamant. He cooked the bird and prepared to eat pounded yam made by his father. For the last time, the boy’s father warned him and he was un-yielded his father’s warning. He said to the boy: “A word is enough for the wise”. The boy ate all the body and left the bird’s head. As he was about to eat the head, the bird sang a song again:

<b>Song</b>	<b>Chorus</b>
Sa re le low’omo	An-un-gba neee/es
T’omo losoro	An-un-gba
Tomo onimoto	An-un-gba
Toun tokun ni o re gbo	An-un-gba n e/se

The boy did not listen to the bird’s warning but his father kept on watching him. The proverb of the adage says: When a child is cutting a tree in the bush, it is only elders that know the direction the tree

will fall off or detach. His father knew something bad would happen as a result of what the boy did. When the boy finished eating, his stomach started increasing. He thought it was due to over-eating. He told his father that he wanted to defecate. Before he reached where to defecate, the second bird was already there before him. As the boy squatted to defecate, his stomach busted into two pieces, he fell and died. The bird that the boy ate flew out of his stomach alive and flew away with the second bird. The boy's father carefully traced his son, searched everywhere for him after he had waited for the boy to come back home. Not quite long, he saw his dead body which had swollen. His father said to him: "This is where your disobedience has led you" (Babalola, 1976).

### **Analysis of Alo Onitan Ajemo Eniyan ati Eranko" (Human and Animals Folktale) in Accordance with Sociology of Literature Theory**

From the above story, it is revealed that the use of Yoruba traditional occupation which is farming is found. This is what make Yorubas to composed song that says:

Ise Agbe nise ile wa...

Farming is the main occupation in our country...

The village life is also observed in the story, where people sleep on the farm, and the farmers sleep inside the hut. Hut is found on the farm and whenever it is raining or when it is hot in the afternoon, farmers make use of the hut as a shed. Similarly, farmers also make use of hut as a resting place. Furthermore, as mentioned above, all the features used by a writer in his or her work of art are from society. One of those features used in the above story is "*Igi Isin*" Igi Isin is one of the fruit trees. Almost all the children nowadays cannot identify this tree. But, this folktale/story will show the children or let the children that do not know 'Igi Isin' know about it. The storyteller looked at his environment, he observed how the birds destroyed fruits on the farm. Birds are like destroyers that are used to destroy farm products. Hunting as one of the traditional occupations is observed in the story. Guns are used by hunters to kill bush animals on the farm. The boy made use of a gun to kill a bird.

In Yoruba society, it is said according to an adage proverb, "Kolanut befits only the elders" This means that our elders used to express a basic truth by making use of proverbs that may be applied to common situations.

In the story, it is observed that the boy's father used proverbs when he said that "whatever happens to the ghost in the graveyard he will not inform anyone" and that if a child clothes like elders, he will never have dirty clothes like elders. However, using proverbs is part of Yoruba culture. Proverbs are manifold in Yoruba society. What is learnt from the story /folktale is that "Obedience is better than sacrifice" as it is said in the Holy Bible used by the followers of Jesus Christ. Also, our elders have more life experience than the youths of nowadays. The youths nowadays need to learn from their elders. As in a Yoruba proverb which says that "a child's head will not bend when the elders are in the market". It is also learnt from the story that there are many benefits from being obedient. Similarly, disobedient people always end up in regret or disgrace. And also, we must not eat everything we see, we have to be very careful of what we eat. Greediness was what made the boy ate that dangerous bird. Therefore, being stubborn and greedy does not have good morals, and also disobedience can lead us to an untimely death.

However, using sociology of literature for the analysis of this story, it can be said that Yoruba folktales contain a wide range of words or a conscious selection of a set of linguistics features that are understood by the society. Karl Marx's theory and its followers saw literature as not only a reflection of the society but live in the society and made for the society. The reality of life about people's experiences, their environment, the universe, and human beings generally are encapsulated in literature especially folktale. Therefore, for this reason, folktales are the recreation of life we live in and they are fiction.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted analysis of humans and animals folktale written by Babalola. The paper discussed the meaning of Yoruba folktales and various submissions from scholars on the taxonomy of Yoruba folktales. Similarly, the paper x-rayed the importance of folktales in Yoruba society. folktales are meant to teach people good morals, they make children to be great thinkers and allow children to be creative. Also, folktale entertains Yoruba children, it gives children opportunity to make research from their teenagehood, it does not allow children to be walking around in the night, teaches the children the right ways in life and values of their communities as well.

The paper also looked at Oyerinde's classification of Yoruba folktales. He classified them into six: singing/chorus stories, tortoise stories, why stories, human beings and animal stories. Human stories, animal stories, monster stories, and their example.

In addition, sociology of literature is employed to analyze a type of Yoruba folktale: Human and Animal story/folktale. It is not surprising that relationships exist between human and animal characters in Yoruba folktales but it is contrary to what people think about real life in Yoruba land. Birds do not sing or talk, this only happens in folktales. There must be reasons behind using humans and animals as characters in Yoruba folktales, an adage proverb says: "If there is no reason, a female child will not be named as Kumolu". It is known that animals cannot talk like humans in real-life situations but the writer or storyteller makes use of humans and animals as characters in his folktale to inform the listeners about their environment, birds, trees, and fruits by allowing the relationship that exists between them. Similarly, the narrator tells the story to inform the listeners of the kind of destruction caused to farm products by the birds. For this reason, the storyteller does not make any mistake by allowing human and animal relationships in his folktale but passing messages across to society. The study, therefore, recommends that Yorubas should go back to the ancient times of using folklore because there are lots of benefits in it. Folktales are more important and influential and the advantages of using folklore cannot be overemphasized. Folktales have always been useful and are still useful till date

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