

**Toothsome Pearls of Rogue Daemons:  
A Short Survey of Tanure Ojaide's  
*The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems***

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**Who built the seven gates of Thebes?  
The books are filled with the names of Kings  
Was it Kings who hauled  
The craggy blocks of stone?  
- Bertolt Brecht**

**Please. Stop the dirge.  
I want to dream.  
- Kofi Anyidoho**

(i)

Tanure Ojaide's *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* provides one of the most iconic synthesis of elements from a variety of modes of poetic composition thereby lending credence to Funso Aiyejina's pioneering scholarship "Recent Nigerian Poetry in English: An Alter- Native Tradition" (1988) in the following terms:

The shift from the obscurantism and eurocentricism of most of the first generation of modern Nigerian poets to the preoccupations of the present crop of poets, whose focus as well as literary antecedents are more indigenous than foreign, can be said to have signalled a much desired alter/native tradition. Individual poets would, for example, be expected to evolve, through experimentation with the component forms of this tradition, distinctive personal styles which, while being personal to them, can also be traced back to the base tradition (1988:128)

Until the situation began to rapidly reverse itself, humanist literary studies have long been resistant to the idea that creative writing has anything to do with politics, on the grounds that the former is too subjective, individual and personal or else too universal and transcendent to be thus tainted. However, ever since Plato, it has been acknowledged that poetry mediates between the real and the imaginary. This further accentuates Marxist notion that all ideas are interdependent with economic reality.

The collection of 51 poems demonstrates the aesthetic credo of Tanure Ojaide insofar as these theories concern his role as poet and the language of his poetry. The volume expresses the need for a revolutionary socialist answer to the quality of Nigerian and African life. In presenting a dialectical image, at once specific and universal, immediate and transcendental, tangible and intangible, poetic harvests are to be seen as not being after all very literary but as deriving from the class configuration of social values in general.

When and where a poem is composed, the language in which it is inscribed, the traditions and debates within which it intervenes all come together to create the poetic fabric. The French materialist Pierre Macherey astutely suggests that texts can only be understood in the context of utterance "The poem...is not created by an intention (objective or subjective), it is produced under determinate conditions" (1978:78). Ojaide's poetry therefore attests to the effectiveness in employing revolutionary aesthetics as an instrument of raising social awareness. This is what

enables *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* to survive beyond the particular country or epoch that generated it.

Ojaide has largely been pre-occupied in *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* with objectifying the Nigerian and continental reality with an underlying revolutionary compass. He demonstrates a poetic sensibility that defies the original formative intention in its restless concourse of poetic ambience. The perspective from which he creates is determined by his vision of the world since works of modern African literature as thumbprints of history are often living testimonies of their period. J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish in *The Western Intellectual Tradition*, (1970) confirm the argument that character and style of an epoch determine the writer's weltanschauung or modus operandi:

The style of a period is a vivid expression of its totality, in which we read as it were, the thumbprint of history – or to change the metaphor, we discover the character of an age from its handwriting (1970:150).

Politics and history is recycled in the mill of *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* and the result is a radical, revolutionary Fanonist consciousness in which new axioms, transcend the original propositions and conflicts in actual history.

Edward Said it was who said that it was as crucial to read outside Western culture, to become comparative in a new sense, “to read Austen without also reading Fanon and Cabral is to disaffiliate modern culture from its enjoyments and attachments” (1995:38). Similarly, Aimé Césaire has claimed that colonisation not only exploited but dehumanised the colonial subject, as it degrades the coloniser himself. He explained this by a stark “equation: colonisation = thingification”. It is an aphorismic indictment that explains the leader-led relationship in contemporary times in which the neo-colonised person is reduced into an object of exploitation by his own kind. Much of Ojaide's free verse cannot therefore be fully understood without some knowledge of the references and allusions. “My Next Step” (p20, 21) a tribute to Malawian poet-scholar Jack Mapanje is a simple example. Of course a formalistic reading of the poem can yield meaning at a certain level of comprehension without the background knowledge; but it emerges as a subtler piece of poetic masterpiece when some of its political allusions are appreciated.

In 1985 the Malawi Censorship Board that had been established through the Censorship and Control Entertainments Act in 1968 withdrew copies of Jack

Mapanje's first collection of poems *Of Chameleons and Gods* (1981) which depicted the dehumanisation of Kamuzu Banda's despotic rule. The poet was incarcerated on September 25, 1987 under the legislation on preventive detention that had originally been developed under the British colonial government but re-introduced into the Malawian statutes few months after independence, in October 1964. It took only weeks for Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda to start oppressing the people, who effectively worshipped him as President. Mapanje of course was never charged nor tried.

In "Righting the Orality of Dictatorship", the poet renders this experience so succinctly:

Banda's reign of terror, which forced some of us to take up writing in order to keep our sanity, was legitimised by two myths. Banda himself shamelessly declared thus at political rallies: "People outside this country call me dictator. But I tell them this: if I am a dictator, I am a dictator by the people's will". And mesmerized, probably by the magic from his flywhisk, which he invariably swiped at us as he addressed his political rallies, we all vigorously applauded, painfully swallowing the myth that he was a dictator by our design! Second, Banda's secretaries to the president and cabinet, including the first British secretary to the president and cabinet after independence, promulgated another myth: "Whatever Banda does, he does it according to the law"... Banda's totalitarian regime was legitimised not only by British colonial legislation, which he refused to repeal but also by what can only be referred to as the orality of his dictatorship (2002:29)

Two other poetry anthologies dealing with Mapanje's prison experiences *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* (1993) and *Skipping Without Ropes* (1998) were subsequently published after the poet scholar had been released under intense international pressure in May 1991. Earlier in 1988 *Of Chameleons and Gods* was awarded the Rotterdam International Poetry Prize. Thus for a poet like Mapanje "who revels on the anecdote that is full of larger implications than will easily become apparent" (Dean Makuluni 2002:22-26), *Of Chameleons and Gods* draws attention to the care with which the chameleon walks testing three or four times before putting each foot down since this is the way in which one lived during Dr. Banda's dictatorship. These momentous events in the life of Mapanje form the creative tapestry, psychology and intensity of Ojaide's "My Next Step":

My next step will go too far. Let it be treason if that's what  
it takes to revive the land...

I see frightened gods wearing stinking charms to prolong  
their hopeless age...

I am a devotee of the faith of justice, I wave the borderless  
flag of unity, I enlist in the army of instant recovery, ....

Let me fire at those free to blind the world and pillage  
pockets in the name of power.  
I can no longer wait for the sharp tongues in the tower.  
Let me start to dig the pit that will swallow  
the tortoise chieftain and his bundle of tricks;  
let angry hands fashion the metal to rid the land of the  
hyena and his vicious greed

I know I am no longer myself.  
I hate faces of masqueraders milling about the cabinet.  
I respect the platitudes of the new dispensation,  
I abhor whatever dims love.

.....

I pledge not only support, I give my life. If that's what it  
takes to revive the land (p20, 21)

Ojaide's individuality and the society's values are mediated in this poem, like his Malawian counterpart, he is intrigued by the cyclic nature of human suffering throughout the globe, for in "My Next Step", as in other poems in the collection, he fearlessly denounces attempts at limiting human expression. There is a clamour for revolutionary transformation of society and the abandonment of the prebendal mode of ontology since the masses and their leaders are projected as the real makers of history.

Abdul Jan Mohammed advocates that from the very beginning, the use of arms was closely connected to the use of images, he thus calls for "a profoundly symbiotic relationship between the discursive and the material practices of imperialism" (1985:04).

Subtle in its phrasing, "My Next Step" then is a powerful statement of defiance against those who set rules and regulations. For, it expresses the poet's commitment to socialism and the excoriation of the orality of dictatorship by rogue daemons and their engineers of terror all over the universe. Through a refined crystallisation in consciousness, traditional Urhobo oral poetry and folkloric literature form part of Ojaide's elegiac verse. Thus, deploying contrast, paradox, aphorism,

innuendo, understatement and juxtaposition the poet renders homilies to promethean Third World Leadership comprising the trinity of Mahatma Ghandi, General Murtala Mohammed and *Capitaine* Thomas Sankara who like the biblical Christ before them pay the ultimate price so that mankind may be purged, and redeemed:

I saw Ghandi in white calico, glistening  
his life was the street salt of Calcutta.  
I still weep a stream for Murtala and Sankara.  
But these days, what a change! (p20)

Any valid assessment of *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* will take into consideration Ojaide's commitment to a Pan-African, Third World vision, his fusion of the African and Western poetic traditions as well as the general poetic effect. Folklore and biblical parable are masterfully blended to make a statement on these times. Imagery, diction, sound effect, emotional appeal, mythology, and indigenous cultural life in general lend sophistication to poetic form and phraseology. The anthology not only pays attention to language as a tool of domination and as a means of constructing reality, it also adumbrates a maturity and coherence in the Ojaide's testament of art, life and society. He is not only concerned with the social function of poetry, but he is also concerned with the creative process. In this he shares in both the European view of art as an artifact and in the traditional notion of the *Fundi* as an innovator of form depending on the occasion, we see this concern demonstrated in his lampoon over a mercenary, hack writer who had asked him to launch his book in the poem titled "The man in a borrowed frock" (p44, 45). The self-published author had, "shat the odious mound of his greed" and thus deserve "to sit by his shame / and savour the fuming smell" since nothing has "grown from his angers". The poet's anger rises to flaming intensity when, he condemns the fellow as not only deserving "the worst hell" but should have:

Pour harmattan – cold water on his face let it be steaming hot  
.....  
Worse than a goat, shameless more voracious than a tortoise  
what better thing than make him taste raw the steel shaft of  
your mind?

Never let him go without a savage kick (pp.44, 45).

It can therefore be ascertained that the value of *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* consists mainly in the fact that it appeals to a Third World as well as foreign readers.

In “American Literature and the American Language” (1953) in *To Criticize the Critic* (1965), T. S. Eliot illuminates this point in his characteristic manner:

Universality can never come except writing about what one knows thoroughly...And, though it is only too easy for a writer to be local without being universal, I doubt whether a poet can be universal without being local too (Eliot 1965:55,56).

In pushing his analysis into the reaction of the psyche and the subjectivity of colonised people, as well as the stunted psychology of their masters, Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, we recall, defines those “in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its cultural originality” (1967:18).

There can therefore be no meaningful history of the flowering of the alternative tradition of modern African poetry in English today, which fails to pay tribute to the towering stature of a poet who has used the healing power of the imagination to address the postcolonial trauma from a post- foundationalist perspective (Gaurav Desai, 2001).

(ii)

The most striking quality of Ojaide’s verse inheres in its Okigboean sense of rhythm; its thunder- can-break drumbeats; one needs to visualize his poetic landscape to capture their modulation and unsurpassed associations.

In this instance, we can single out his longest poem in the collection.

“When the plague struck” (pp. 79-86) as part of the rich complexity of his talent. The tendency to compress his materials create the possibility for multiple interpretation. Understatement is seen in the deliberate underplaying of emotion, thought, or the implications of the situation. The simplicity and acuteness of the language, the incantatory inclinations, repetitions, images, symbolization etc are not meant to be merely ornamental, indeed, they are part of the meaning of his poetic canon, as we will see, both structurally and thematically. The result of all these is that it has enriched the total impact of *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems*:

*Shoot down the sparrow  
which dims your light,  
shoot down the sparrow  
which steel arrows  
to save tomorrow  
from a sun-eclipse*  
So sang upland dancers  
converting the advantage  
of the hills to power  
to conquer the strong.  
There are always spices  
for a good palate.  
And so they sang upland;

*Shoot down the sparrow  
which dims your light;  
shoot down the sparrow  
with steel arrows  
to save tomorrow  
from a sun-eclipse*  
("When the plague struck", 81,82)

Christopher Okigbo was under the magic spell of the composers Debussy, César Franck and Ravel when he wrote his visionary sequence *Heavensgate* (1962) and *Limits* (1964). His favourite poets were not only Ovid, Catullus, Horace, Vergil, but he was no less inspired by the work of the tragedians Aeschylus and Sophocles and the comic genius Aristophanes and, admired the supreme criterion of artistic beauty as enunciated in his personal pantheon of Keats, Coleridge and Browning. (See Sunday Anozie *Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric*, 1978) Okigbo did not therefore only pay attention to the thematic preoccupations of his verse but he was equally aware that he was under an obligation to convince the reader of the veracity of the world he had fashioned in a manner that suited his vision.

Technique cannot therefore be neglected in the evaluation of a work's quality. The totality of *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* impact and meaning is a composite of subject matter, metrical patterns, allusion, structure, and symbolization thereby confirming Chidi Amuta's assertion that "symbolization is a primary artistic vehicle by means of which meaning is presented in its ideological essence" (*The Theory of African Literature* 1980:148). The basic organisation or arrangement of all the words, details, images and parts of the verse, setting, perspective, voice etc do

have a profound influence on how Ojaide like his masters Vladimir Mayakovsky, David Mandessi Diop, and Christopher Okigbo especially (See *Paths of Thunder: Poems Propheying War*) arranges and organizes his imaginative rendering of politics and history as palpable, lived experience. Declan Kiberd in *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (1995) posits that postcolonial aesthetics actually begins with any texts which contest or resist colonialism “postcolonial writing does not begin only when the occupier withdraws: rather it is initiated at that very moment when a native writer formulates a text committed to cultural resistance (1995:6).

Satire of social and political phenomenon, for instance, ranges in the poem “The Slave Traffic” (p12) in which Ojaide employs contrast as his basic principle of poetic structure. There is no vitiation of focus since the poet portrays almost every conceivable human action in the pre-colonial and colonial context in language that is forceful and imagery that is intellectually sustained.

The idea of “anthropophagy” (used by the Roman writer Pliny the Elder in his *National History* to refer to human beings who ate their own kind) was directly used, we recall, to justify slavery and the slave trade (Hulme 1986a; Miles 1989:25) Besides, Charles Darwin in his *Descent of Man* (1971) wrote “Extinction follows chiefly from the competition of tribe with tribe, and race with race... when civilized nations come into contact with barbarians the struggle is short” (quoted in Young 1995;18). This could be the background that inspired Ojaide’s poetic and cultural resistance. In “The Slave Traffic” the poet communicates to his audience that the words of his poem add – up to a representation of a concrete historical encounter, of a realistic world peopled by realistic men and women engaged in realistic activity. The causticity and poignancy of the message is couched in the satirical impalement of the imperial trinity of Africa’s enslavement viz. “The catholic Rock” in Rome, “The desert prophet” of Islam and, “The October city of Ideograd”. Ridicule, sarcasm, or *reductio ad absurdum* are weapons of the satirical poet.

Every good modern African poem, like every good work of art, again, we must recall is a reflection of life and human experience. The linking of ideas or feelings which are seemingly contradictory, but which actually express a basic truth when they are put together and the implications are deduced, underlines the paradox of the contemporary African slave route, which is still:

“trans-Atlantic,  
trans-Saharan,

trans-air” (“Slave Traffic p. 28)

Poetry has become an important avenue, as we earlier stated of appropriating and inscribing aspects of the “other” culture, creating new identities, new ideas in the process. Conflict is therefore an essential poetic tool. By its very nature it suggests contrast, and it is vital to revolutionary aesthetics.

Ojaide’s signifying practice is that art could only show depth of feeling and universal sentiment as well as being fully understood if placed in the context of the economic, social and political relationships to which they refer. “The Slave Traffic” reflects historical contradictions and does not conjure them away through excess of revolutionary optimism. The poem demonstrates a cognitive, Gorkyian function, offering, a knowledge of historical development through “an anthropomorphic and poetically concrete depiction of the socially typical” (Amuta, *The Theory*, 1981). The continental space is the arena in which the conflicting interests of different races and classes are presented and fought out. Césaire, we recall, grappled with the connection between race and class as well as foregrounding Marxist ideology as per colonial encounter in this manner “Marx is all right, but we need to complete Marx” (1972:21). “Slave Traffic” then, is truthful representation of reality which is germane to the Aimé Césairean pivot of Ojaide’s revolutionary aesthetics:

‘The catholic Rock, the desert prophet  
and the bearded proletariat, these  
are no strangers in my sun-tanned landmass;  
they have their multi-million doubles...  
Guardians of foreign fiat bristling with exotica, mercenaries  
of foreign legions brandishing deadly weapons,  
porters of foreign offerings fouling up themselves, who but  
slaves are answerable to masters  
in evangelical colleges of business oratory..., (“Slave Traffic,  
p. 28).

The poem, at root, combines the whole essence of things: reality, reflection, universality, particularity, typicality, and individuality (Georg Lukács, 1980). Ojaide not only possesses the rare distinction- so far we have noted - of cross-fertilization; a succinct osmosis in objectifying the indigenous and foreign poetic traditions, but by standing up and honestly facing the world he has given a real dignity to the black people of *abibiman* and to dispossessed humanity as a whole.

In domesticating and de-colonizing the English language infusing in his *vers libre* proverbs, myths, folklore and images, he raises African languages and cultures to the mainstream of world discourse.

(iii)

A brief survey of Ojaide's collection of poems facilitates both the identification of some of the fundamental issues in African literature and their examination. The volume is one of the most glorious anthems of an organic synthesis of elements from a variety of modes of poetic composition. We trace in it a harmonious unity of vision, inspiration and technique. Aderemi Bamikunle in an earlier critique of Ojaide's poetic canon argues that:

His poetry takes off from the present in desperate search for values to redeem its malaise. The search takes him to the immediate past in the history of colonialism, and beyond that into the pre-colonial ancestral history and culture... he believes it is possible to move history forward through progressive regeneration (1991:81)

"Orphans of Hope" (pp 23-24) dedicated to the memory of Thomas Sankara "the captain whose cap generals wish to wear / a pauper to whom chiefs of affluence are indebted" is in this mode. The poet persona prays that "For once, o gods, let this mound turn to an oasis" (p23) where pilgrims "come to take titles of state heads". Sankara like Murtala Mohamed fell before "the crowd of crooks/who know the evil medicine of self preservation" (23).

As the poet "roams the corridors of history, past and present to recreate a future" (Bamikunle, 82) he celebrates the achievement of heroes-martyrs who one can count, "on a handful of fingers / stray orphans of hope/brutally ambushed on the straight forward road of faith: (24).

Ojaide conveys much in a little space, and such lines are often made more pointed, compact and telling by the skilful use of understatement; the deliberate playing of an emotion, a thought, a judgement, or the implications of a situation. The understatement in the elegy implies that the emotion is too vast to express; hence the reader detects that ironic difference between what Ojaide actually says and what the circumstances would really allow him to state. Besides, the purposeful alteration of the dominant tone, illustrates how the poet moves from a state of mourning for

Thomas Sankara to some kind of faith; a triumphant recognition of the immortality of “the upright ones” (24).

On the other hand “When tomorrow is too long” (pp 18-19) is a fierce bludgeoning of the Blaise Compaore’s and the Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida’s “with his gap-toothed shine”(18) calling on the reader to “Do to him what you’ll do/to a cobra in your doorstep”, (19). “When soldiers are diplomats” probably a parody of the late Major General Joe Garba’s *Diplomatic Soldering* (1987) is full of images of violence, brutality, bestiality, systematic looting of the public coffers and, sadism, “smug cannibals”, heirs to “the savage sophisticraft / of diplomatic soldiering” (4).

As earlier indicated, Ojaide, a master of the terse, pithy expression packs as much thought as possible into a short concentrated statement. *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* is divided into four major sections according to the central pre-occupation in each section. Part I which carries the title poem “*The Fate of Vultures*”(11-13) contains eleven poems, Part II and III carry eleven poems each while Part IV carries the largest number of poems at eighteen. Each of the sections validates Ojaide’s vision of leadership from Africa’s historical past to the postcolonial era as a chronicle of brutality. The process of decolonisation and the problems of recovery from the viewpoint of the oppressed from a post-colonialist perspective are highlighted. As Bruce Robbins warns us “thinking small is not enough and while we must stay clear of the early generalisations we should retain the right to difficult generalisations” (1992:174-176). The Abachas, Babangidas, Buharis and the Tunde Idiagbons and their civilian counterparts such as the Kamuzu Bandas, Macias Nguemas and the Paul Biyas are used as a contrast to traditional, historical figures as Ogidigbo, Esiri, Shaka, Ijaw and the Paul Biya’s Itsekiri of Nigeria and the Zulu of South Africa. Their mythical heroism is evoked “as a courageous way to surmounting” according to Osita Ezeliora’s scholarship (2000) “the predicaments of contemporary Africa” (46).

Whereas past political leaders have re-incarnated in the Biyas and the Abachas, Ojaide thus shows his interest in the Sankaras and the Murtala Mohammeds. He venerates the omnipotence of the living-dead as a way of showing how the new African would have to lean heavily “on an episteme that would unravel aspects of his metaphysical universe”(64). The ancestral presence in Nigeria poetry in English has been a device chosen by the Nigerian poet to educate his local and foreign audiences about the essential socio-cultural and metaphysical elements, which

have always been with the black race and have kept her people together. In making a distinction between this aspect of African mythopoeia of post-colonial Nigerian poets of Gabriel Okara, Wole Soyinka, J. P Clark-Bekederemo and Christopher Okigbo and the new generation of Nigerian poets of whom, Tanure Ojaide, more than anyone else, explores the immense presences of Africa's living-dead, Ezeliora proffers the following explanation:

Most of the new poets are inclined to an essentially humanistic ideological position, and tend to operate basically within the ambience and tenets of expressive and pragmatic framework of poetry. The implication is that in their hands, elegiac poetry takes on new functions, which transcend its traditional role of simply mourning the dead. Here the departed are challenged to embrace the urgent task of restoring sanity in a general state of chaos and anarchy (2000:47).

*The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems*, again and again, testifies to Ojaide's sensibilities as an artist whose works are essentially designed to elevate the worth of human beings. There is thus a nexus between the living and the spiritual realities of the ancestors.

In the hands of an Aimé Cesairean imagination which, asks "has colonialism really placed civilizations in contact? I answer no... No human contact, but relations of domination and submission (1972:10) in the title poem "The Fate of Vultures (p11,12) Ojaide projects just such an aesthetic sensibility as an important "contact zone" to use Mary Louise Pratts term, where "transculturation" takes place in all its complexity.

In underlining the psychic injury which Nigeria and the black race's farcical existence represents, like David Mandessi Drop, Ojaide makes great use of symbol, thereby, confirming Chidi Amuta's assertion that "symbolization is a primary artistic vehicle by means of which meaning is presented in its ideological essence" (*The Theory*.148). In fact Ojaide's "The Ambush" (38,39), "Compatriots" and his title poem "*The Fate of Vultures*" can be said to draw their poetic modus operandi from David Mandessi Diop's fiery and prophetic corpus (*Hammer Blows Poems*, 1973) since the poems are reminiscent of "Les Vautours" (French for "The Vultures" (pp406), "To The Bamboozlers" (*Aux Mystificateurs*) (pp 16-18) or "The True Road" (In French 'La Route Véritable') (pp6-8).

*The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* therefore in true David Mandessi Diopean vein increases the socio-political horizon of African literature and cultural studies in its attempt “to cognise and problematize the contradictions and alienation in human and social relationships from bourgeois ethics and psychology” (Lenin, 1970:85).

Nobody who wishes to appreciate the literary direction of modern African literature – in terms of techniques and style – can afford not to read Tanure Ojaide’s *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems*.

Ojaide’s relevance to the struggle for a more democratic and humane society entails going to the roots of the African predicament by exposing the vultures in the corridors of power, the “gasping eagle/shorn of proud feathers’. Since the poet has also paid attention to language as a tool of domination as a means of constructing ideology, there are lines, phrases, and even whole strophes in the collection that enchant.

## CONCLUSION

TANURE Ojaide is much concerned with style as with what he says in *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems*. Seriousness of attitude and cultural assertion as an integral part of the political and economic struggle are among the most admirable aspects of his verse. An intriguing trope of this efflorescence of his craftsmanship is the way in which history is seen as the crucible in which man relates to the political and economic conditions of society. Ojaide's significance lies essentially in his historical consciousness and his perspicacious insight into human nature.

His sophisticated sense of irony and rhythm, his ability to capture local colour and, the sensitivity of the image of people exploited and discarded is central to his poetic rhetoric. He is consistently sensitive to the nuances of the larger society and, extremely careful in the organisation of his ideas.

*The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* strongly expresses the poet's awareness of the cultural side of man and the social reality around him in which politics and economics feature prominently. His aesthetic preferences adumbrate a consistent message that harmony in thought and action is a sine qua non for peace and progress.

The ability to deal with the human factor side-by-side with social political and economic issues is one of the main planks of his achievement as a poet, for it contributes to the depth and clarity of analysis of the pantheon. It is therefore best to approach his work as explorations into history conducted through the medium and conventions of poetry.

In seeking for a new channel of history, I suggest, that, Tanure Ojaide shows how closely modern African literature is linked with the historical processes within which it is produced.

In "Toothsome Pearls of Rogue Daemons: A Short Survey of Tanure Ojaide's *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems*", I have argued that the collection is meaningful, significant and purposeful architectural compositions, if read and analysed within the context of the men and events that inform their tapestries.

Tanure Ojaide's prismatic canon shows his awareness of the social realities of his time. This is because the poems are, in terms of artistic achievements, living meditations upon the attitudes, style, mood and generation of the scholar-poet. Anyone familiar with the iconography of *The Fate of Vultures & Other Poems* would have recognized the voice of a bard with a vision who had applied that eagle's vision to a complex public task.

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