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## A Literary Appraisal of Poets as Historians

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*Keywords:* poets, orature, history, allusion, culture.

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# A Literary Appraisal of Poets as Historians

Dr. J.B. Agbaje

**Abstract-** The Yoruba believe that our past and present histories are being preserved for future generation. Hence, the Yoruba genres can be used to trace the history of a set of people and one occurrence or the other. Various genres of the Yoruba are embodiment of their history. In essence, Yoruba poets are seen as historians or repertoire of knowledge. All the stories which are embedded in Yoruba oral literature are seen in form of allusion. Yoruba orature helps to remember important cultural information and history of the Yoruba people. It is pertinent to note that the role of orature in the construction and reconstruction of history is remarkable as seen in the following genres of Yoruba oral literature such as *alámò*, *ijálá*, *èṣà* and *orin*. This paper concludes that in the above mentioned genres, like other Yoruba genres, poets play the roles of historians and that our past and present histories are preserved for future generation.

**Keywords:** poets, orature, history, allusion, culture.

## I. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the Yorùbá genres, the poets play the roles of historians wherein our past and present histories are preserved for future generation. This study established the fact that Yorùbá genres can be used to trace the history of a set of people and one occurrence or the other. There are different types of orature among the Yorùbás and all these genres are embodiment of their history. Yorùbá poets are seen as historians or repository of knowledge whereby many of the Yorùbá histories are kept. All these stories are seen in form of allusions. Blacking (1977: 22) says:

Orature is committed to preserving the history and culture of individual people through performance; and through it vital cultural information is passed down from generation to generation.

Here, Blacking reveals it that Yorùbá orature is based on preserving history and culture, and vital information are known through it. Without orature, many of the cultural information and history might have been forgotten. But through it, they were able to pass it to other generation. That is why it is rightly said that histories are known through poetry.

Ajibade (2009: 101) also agreed to this why discussing Yorùbá Nuptial poetry. He said that, Epithetlamiums, like other Yorùbá poetry illuminates the culture of the Yorùbá people especially the formation of social groups, kinship, solidarity, sexuality, and childbearing among others.

Olatunji (1984: 115) supported this fact in his work titled *Features of Yorùbá Oral Poetry*. He says: Èṣe Ifá can be treated as verbal and a storehouse of information about Yorùbá mythology and cosmology.

Olatunji says this because he knows that a lot of information are embedded in èṣe Ifá.

Abimbola (1975: 32) supports the fact that èṣe Ifá constitutes a compendium of information on Yorùbá world view. He says: "Ifa literary corpus is the storehouse of Yorùbá culture inside which the Yorùbá comprehension of their own historical experiences and understanding of their environment can always be found. It is recognized as a repository for Yorùbá traditional body of knowledge embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore." This also gives another revelation that Yorùbá poets are historian since èṣe Ifá is one of the oratures of Yorùbá, full of history, philosophy, medicine and folklore.

Also Olabimtan (1980: 153) says:

Poetry, like religion, is essential to the life of the traditional Yorùbá. It is the vehicle of all that is sublimed in the culture of the people, and that is why there are many genres of traditional Yorùbá poetry to convey the various aspects of the people's cultures.

Barber (1990: 315) says:

Each *oríkì* gestures away from its location within the performed text to an interland of meaning outside the text. Not only that some are specific historical references and some are generalized comments referring to a timeless or ideal state of affairs.

Awe (1974: 331) also buttresses it that the role of orature in the construction and reconstruction of history is tremendous. Going by the Yorùbá *Alamo*, *ijala*, *esa* and *orin*, it is clearly evident that many of these histories are embedded in them.

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## II. ANALYSIS

a) *Ijálá chant**Ikòyí*

<p>Ìkòyí Ọmọ Arógun dádé  Olúkòyí ọmọ akú dá gbèdú àkàlà  Ọmọ ogun bámi nígbó mo dolú igbó,  Ogun bámi lódàn mo dèrò ọdàn,  Ogun bámi ní pàlàpálá  Ìjèni mowé ju ọpá ìbọn ọ  Ogun àjàwèyin lomuu ilé Olúkòyí wùmí gbé,    Ogun joojúmọ ló mú ilé baba wọn sùmi í ọ,    Ọba kọ, Ọba ọ sígun  Èsè ọsì Ọba ọ pesè dà,  Ọba ní káfi ọdún yí kàgbò ọfe,    Èmí ìsoògùn làyà,  Ìlàlà tó bá ọdún méta òní níkọ?  Ogun ní bẹ lówọ ọba,  Ìjèni mi ọbebe,  Tí mo rọgun gbéra bí aṣọ  Ìkòyí ọmọ ojú oróoró  Ìkòyí ọmọ ọrà ọrà  Kín àbá mú rel'e rẹ?  Gbabí wá  Olúkòyí ọmọ ogun lósàn-án olè lóru    Bí ewúré rẹ bá sọnù  Mábi èsọ Ìkòyí  Sùgbọn tóbìnrin rọgbòdò rẹ bá sọnù  Wábi èsọ Ìkòyí  Olúkòyí ọ ogun sùgbọn kò wálé mọ  Wọn gbé orí Olúkòyí genge  Lọ sí ààfin ọba  Olúkòyí sọ pé ọun ọ t'iidé oórì bàbá ọun    Agbede gbédé</p>	<p>Olúkòyí, son of Akúdagbòdiàkàlà  The son of war meets me at forest  I become the master of forest  War meet me at grass-field  I become the master of grass-field  War meet me at a tight corner  War fought without retreating is why I love to live in  Olúkoyi's house  War at everyday makes me be tired of their father's  house  The king refuses to declare war  The left leg of the king doesn't change his legs  The king said we should use this year to prepare àgbò  ọfe  To do draws is to be brave  What of ilàlà that spends another 3 years from now?  War is at the king's finger tip    That I got war to put on like cloth  Ìkòyí the child of Ojú oró oró  Ìkòyí the child of Ọrà ọrà  What would we have taken along to your house  Branch here  Olúkòyí the off-spring of war in the daylight but stealing  in the night  If your goat is lost  Don't ask èsọ Ìkòyí  But if your beautiful wife is lost,  Ask èsọ Ìkòyí  Olúkoyi went to war but didn't come back home again  Then, they carried Olúkòyí's head majestically  To the king's palace  Olúkòyí said he had not reached the burial ground of  his father  Agbede gbédé</p>
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In the above extract, the chanter makes allusion to the history of Onikoyi's lineage. Here the chanter makes it known that the Ikoyi people are brave people and great herbalists. Besides, the chanter depicts the Onikoyi's lineage to be womanizers that is, they flirt with women. This attitude could be seen in their ways of life wherever they may be either at festive mood or war front. Also, the chanter depicts that the Onikoyi's lineage are warlike people, that is, they have flair for war. They are not tired of going to the battle field at any point in time because of the love they have for their fathers' land. Below is another example from Èsà Chant:

b) *Èsà Chant Ológbòjò*

<p>Arólú owó, Èsà ògbín Qmq léègi ò wóso Qmq òwóso Wóyè nígbàlè Qmq ò wóso kéké règbe Rèè gbégún wale Ológbòjò qmq kòndú oní wọ Àiná ni iyá Ògbín je, Báágídé ni baba Ológbòjò ní gbahun Mọlé mọlé ará òde Ò gbólúké, Oológbòjò Oólógbòjò Oólógbòjò Mo mọlé yín o Èsà ògbín Bó yo ọl Ọlún afòní bùn ni Èsà ògbín moríké Mo yáa súnké sí Arólú owó Awon ọmọ arágò gbálè Nígbàlè Awon ọmọ oní sékété N wére Arólú owó Èyin ọmọ pálasà Ológbòjò má gun igi ilá Ìwọ ni ọmọ Arégunsinmọdélé ọko Lóní àti lánàa àmũyagàn ní iyá jé fọmọ</p>	<p>Arólú owó Èsà ògbín The child of Léègi did not wear cloth The child of those who wear cloth To belittle chieftaincy in secret The child of those who wear kéké's cloth To the bush to bring a masquerade home. Ológbòjò, son of Kòndú Oniwọ Àiná was Ògbín's mother Baagide was Ológbòjò's father then A builder, a family of those outside One who cares for Olú Ológbòjò Ológbòjò Ológbòjò I know your house Èsà Ògbín If God wishes, He grant us this day Èsà Ògbín I'm cared for I quickly Arólú owó They are the children of Àrágògbálè In secret They are the children of the owner of sékété In a hurry Arólú owó You are the children of Pálasà Don't back okro to limb Ológbòjò You are the children of Arégunsinmodele ọko Today and yesterday, everyone is proud of his/her mother.</p>
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In the foregoing extract, the chanter establishes that Arólú Owó, Èsà Ògbín's lineage are masqueraders. Here, the chanter traces the history of the lineage to Kòndú Oniwọ. It is made known that the Èsà Ògbín's lineage are great entertainers. Even, the Èsà Ògbín's lineage uses their masquerades to perform for the audience during their children's marriages. That is to say, the Èsà Ògbín's lineage were known from the time immemorial as great socio-cultural entertainers in the society.

Kéyin sókun song is the next example to be consideration

c) *Keyin sokun song*

Lead:	If we are begging for children Explain it to God A child who puts hand in people's pocket To steal people's money Is not a child. But a child who will uplift his/her father's house  Who shall favour his/her mother's house God hear me out It doesn't just start at our time Ever since, thieves have been dying ruthlessly Ever since, thieves have been dying shamefully During the time of Olúgbón During the time of Arèsà During the time of Òrànmíyàn, father of the Ifèland Thieves turned their backs to the sea May I not turn my back to the sea	Lílé:	Bí a bá n tọ̀ọ ọ̀mọ ọ̀wọ́ Ọ̀lórún È sàlàyé ẹ f'Ọ̀lórún Qmọ́ tí n tọ̀wọ́ bọ̀pò Tí n jàwó olówó Ọ̀mọ kọ Sùgbón, ọ̀mọ tí yóò gbélee bàbá ga Tí yí o se ilé iyá lóore Èdùmàre gbóhùn mi Kò sèsè bèrè nígbà tiwa Láéláé lolè tí n kúkú oró Láéláé lolè tí n kúkú iyà Láyé Olúgbón Láyé Arèsà Láyé Òrànmíyàn baba nílẹ̀ Ifẹ̀
Chorus:	A child who wakes up in the morning Who doesn't have a job Who wants to buy an expensive velvet Who wants to buy lace Who wants to buy Damask Pool of blood on the thieves who turned their backs to the sea May I not turn my back to the sea.	Ègbè:	Olè á kẹ̀yin sókun Kí n ma se kẹ̀yin sókun Ọ̀mọ tó jí lówúúrò Tí ò nísé lápá Tó fẹ́ ra àrán olówó Tó fẹ́ ra Léèsì Tó fẹ́ ra Damask Èjẹ̀ yòròyòrò lára olè tó kẹ̀yin sókun
Lead:	See them on the tree See a thick rope on the thief A big barrel is the trap of death A big barrel is the trap of suffering Pool of blood on the thieves who turned their back to the sea The head of a thief shall sleep at Ìbòkun	Lílé:	Kí n má se kẹ̀yin sókun È wò wón lórí igi È wò ìjára okùn lára ìgára Gorodóòmù ni pàkúté ikú Gorodóòmù ni pàkúté iyà Èjẹ̀ yòròyòrò lára olè tó kẹ̀yin sókun
Chorus:	Parent warn your child Warn them A child who wakes up in the morning Who doesn't have a job Who wants to buy an expensive velvet Who wants to buy lace Who wants to buy Damask Who wants to buy vehicle Pool of blood on he thief whose back is turned to the sea The head of a thief shall sleep at Ibokun	Ègbè:	Ìbòkun lorí olè ó sùn Ọ̀lómọ kílò fómọ È kílò fún wọn Ọ̀mọ tó jí lówúúrò Tí ò nísé lówó Tó fẹ́ ra àrán olówó Tó fẹ́ ra Léèsì Tó fẹ́ ra Damask Tó fẹ́ ra mótò Èjẹ̀ yòròyòrò lára olè tó kẹ̀yin sókun Ìbòkun lorí olè ó sùn.

From the above song, the singer alludes to the history of the notorious gang led by Oyenusi in 1970s. The notorious gang caused panic everywhere in the country. The Police Force could not curb them because they usually escape arrest in miraculous way. At last, the Military Force overpowered them when the force discovered the gang's hideout. The notorious gang faced the military tribunal and members were found guilty of armed robbery. All the members of the gang were executed by firing squad. Thus, the above singer brought the events into limelight for the consumption of the present generation. Perhaps, the singer intends to tell the on-coming generation to desist from such irritating social vices in the future.

The next example is Alámò chant:

d) *Alámò Chant*

<p>Ìtàn ogun Èkìtì parapò hùn hùn hùn.  Ogun kírijì  Ogun ifijè-bójú  Ogun jálumi, ogun lílá ní</p> <p>Ohun logun á jà gbèyìn  Nílẹ̀ omọ Odùduà  Fábùnmi ní ìpàdé  Pèlú lóbalóba  Sáafin òrè lótùn  Inú ìpàdé ijé è  Ní kete oḅa tí mójùn sòkàn  Wí ó di dandan  Kan jagun Èkìtì parapò  Ná bá rànṣé sí kete ùlú  Kei lí kete Èkìtì  Wí kán mọmọ ogun rànṣé sílúú ọ̀tùn  An onímọ kàn  An onímọ méjì  Kán pàdé líjọ méje oni  Níjọ an a sígun rẹlú lbadàn.  Bí kete ran  Bí an se darí délé lólíjọ ijéè  Ní Fábùnmi múṣé se ni wéréwéré  Fábùnmi Òraráládáá  Adésóyè ọ̀kúnrin ogun  Ó se gudugudu méje  Yàya méfà  Kó mí dī ujó méta-lé-lógún  Kí kete ètò ti tò  Léyìn ùpàdé àkókó  Loorè ọ̀tùn  Oḅa Ọ̀kínbalóyè  Ó tí gbé oúnranṣe dide  Wí kán án rìn láti Èkìtì  Títí lo sílúú Ùlórìn  Kán bèrè sí ní poló ogun Èkìtì parapò  Fábùnmi tika gbéra  Ó dùlú lálá Ọ̀ràngún  Ní kí kete ran kóra jọ  Lábé àkóso Adéyalé  Ní kán án múra ogun  Agada Lámúásán  Omọ Èfàn aláàyè  Oun ni Fábùnmi fàrokò rán</p> <p>Ní kí ó márokò  Lọ sódò Ọ̀gèdèàgbé Agbógungbórò lúlèèṣà  Agada múra  Ó múrin àjò rẹ pọ̀n  Tòun tàrokò ló ọ̀,  Ó múṣé fábùnmi se ni wéréwéré  Àmọ Ọ̀gòtún ni Fábùnmi dé  An án ti jíṣé Ọ̀gèdèàgbé Agbógungbórò sí baba  Uṣé kán jé ó se ni ní kàyèéfi  Uṣé kán jé sí Fábùnmi lójọ ijéè rẹ é o</p> <p>Kete orí kó bá n gbọ mi  Ọ̀gèdèàgbé ní kán an kí ọ.  Kán an se ọ pèlé o.  Inú òun dùn dí kete o o se</p>	<p>The history of Èkìtì parapò war  Kírijì war  A very bloody war  The war which made people to drown in the river, a very mighty war  It was the last war  In the land of Oduduwa (Yorubaland)  Fabunmi held a meeting  With council of Oḅas  At Oorè Otún's palace  In the meeting of that day  All the Oḅas unanimously agreed  That it was compulsory  To declare the war of Èkìtì parapò  They sent message to all the towns  In Ekitiland  That they should send warriors to Ọ̀tùn Èkìtì  Those who knew one thing  Those who knew two things.  Should meet in seven (7) days time  The day they would wage war against Ibadan.  When they all  Got home that time  Fabunmi promptly took action  Fábùnmi a great warrior,  Adésóyè, a warlord  He performed wonderfully  He performed wonderfully  After twenty-three (23) days  That all things had been set  After the first meeting  That Oorè Otún  Oḅa Ọ̀kínbalóyè  He sent war messengers  He started their journey from Èkìtì  To Ilorin  To promote the war of Èkìtì parapò.  Fabunmi, himself  Travelled to lálá Ọ̀ràngún  Where they all converged  Under the leadership of Adéyalé  That they should get set for war.  Agada Lámúásán  Who hailed from Èfàn-Alaaye  Was the person who took the special message (Articles)  And took the special message (Arako) with him  To Ogedengbe a Warlord at Ilesa.  Agada got set  He went on his journey  With the special message (Articles)  He carried out Fabunmi's message promptly.  But, Fábùnmi got to Ọ̀gòtún  This is the message delivered to Fabunmi then;  The message delivered was mysterious  The message delivered to Fábùnmi that time goes thus  All the people that hear me  Ogedengbe said we should greet you  And wish you well.  That he, Ogedengbe, was happy with your</p>
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<p>Àti kete iwà ò ní wù  Sí an Ajélè Ìbàdàn  Mo fẹ o múra gírí  Gégé bí alágbára omọ  Kí o síwájú an Ọ̀nyàn rẹ,  Kí o jìjà ọ̀minira  Kete ̀rànlọ́ kọ ọ bá ì fẹ  Kọ ọ ránsẹ sí mí...</p>	<p>actions  And your behaviours  Against Ibadan district officers.  I want you to be up and doing  As a hero  And lead your people  To fight for freedom  All necessary assistance needed  Should be made known to me...</p>
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In the above Alámò chant, the chanter alludes to the history of the inter-tribal war between the Qyqs and Ekiti-parapq (i.e the Kírìjì war). The war was fought in the 18th century. It lasted nine good years. It was the greatest war ever fought by the Yorùbá people in which many lives and properties were lost. It was through the intervention of the colonial masters that the war came to an end. The above Alámò chanter brought the event into limelight for the memory of the present generation.

### III. CONCLUSION

It is established in this paper that Yorùbá orature is the compendium of information and storehouse of Yorùbá culture inside which the Yorùbá comprehension of their own historical experiences and understanding of their environment can always be found. Orature is committed to preserving the history and culture of individual people and the community through performance; and through it vital cultural information is passed down from generation to generation. Yorùbá poets are seen as historians or repository of knowledge whereby many of the Yorùbá histories are kept. All these stories are seen in form of allusions.

Finally, this paper concludes that in the Yoruba Ìjálá, Èsà, Alámò, and Orin (song) like other Yorùbá genres, poets play the roles of historians and that our past and present histories are preserved for future generation.

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