

ANA LITERARY PRIZES REPORTS 2018

A, 2018 ANA PRIZE FOR PROSE FICTION: LIST OF SHORTLISTED NOVELS

Of the horde of works submitted for this very important category of literary prizes, twenty two of them are considerable as worthy of classification under the genre. This implies that there are many of the works that are outrightly unworthy of the minimum standard set for prequalifying a prose work for entry into the competition. Our criteria for assessment are based on benchmark critical principles for the composition and analysis of the prose fiction genre. These include, ability to flow in the structure, style, and language that shape the unity of plot, setting, action and characterization that help in the creative articulation of prose fiction narrative. It is unfortunate that many of our budding writers do not take the time to study and to understand the expectations of the intellectual reading public for ideal works of prose fiction. Some of the titles are religiously vague or lacking in imaginative slotch... Many of the writers do not even understand the difference between fiction, fac-tion, epistolary writing, memoir, autobiography and history. Some of the works submitted suffer the poverty of grammatical editing, while some fail to govern or maintain the thread of their narratives through such weaknesses as disjointedness in the story or narrative thread.

Despite these weaknesses, some of the works are really worthy of applause in the literary band of imaginative method with which they handle the flow of narrative, coherence of events, and ironic surprises that sustain the reader's interest in the work.

In a nutshell, the following entries are invariably being shortlisted for the Competition:

1. Onyeka Nwelue, The Beginning of Everything Colourful- Ist Runner up
2. Bolaji Olatunde, Hang No Clothes Here- 2nd Runner up
3. Uchenna Eze, The Longest Trial- Winner
4. Oreva Ode-Irri, Absolution
5. Chukwudi Eze, The Return of Half-Something

It should be noted that the serial order of listing here is not linked to the hierarchy of comparative performance of the prose works. But, they are listed as a group of novels whose comparative

values are contiguous, and are invariably considerable to make the Shortlist of possible Winner(s) to be announced at the Annual ANA CONVENTION ...

All the best.

Prof. Nelson O. Fashina

University of Ibadan

B. ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIAN AUTHORS (ANA) LITERARY PRIZES 2018: THE DRAMA REPORT

Preamble: What a pleasant surprise it was for me to be appointed “Drama Assessor” by the very esteemed Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA). To think that the appointment was made even while I was absent in the 2017 conference, made it such an unusual privilege and a rare thing of honour for me. I want to use this platform to appreciate the very distinguished Executive Council of ANA for the high regards, trust and confidence they obviously had in me. I am highly indebted to the officer who took the risk to nominate me and defend same; and the council that obliged his recommendation for my appointment. I am most grateful.

Introduction: My attention was drawn by Dr. Ofonime Inyang of the Theatre Arts Department, University of Uyo, on June 12, 2018, to a way bill in my name, to receive a parcel in the courier section of the State transport company. I received a parcel containing thirty-two (32) play scripts, being the 2018 drama entries for ANA literary prizes. They were meant for my assessment. A note signed by Denja Abdullahi, President, ANA, defined my responsibility. Forthwith, I set out my strategy to accomplish the task if the deadline of submitting a report on first week of October were to be realized. Out of the thirty-two scripts, seventeen (17) were published works while sixteen (16) were not. Some of the published texts carried strong endorsements by respectable literary names and renowned critics in the country. For the assessor not to be unduly influenced by *Anyone’s Opinion Whatsoever except his own*, the following methodologies were adopted:

- i. Independent reading of *ALL* scripts to determine their creative credibility and extract their own dramatic essences.
- ii. Adoption of Reader-Response theory, especially *affective stylistics* and *efferent* principles to decipher *stimulus* or *stimuli* within the text's *blueprint*.
- iii. Adoption of deconstruction theory, to empower the assessor to apply the principles of *undecidability*, *non-closure* and the many dimensions of horizons to which a single text can gain significations. By this theory, nothing that any endorser said or the author's profile and impetus, could impress the assessor, let alone influence ham to the point of *closure*.

Templates for Assessment: As a playwriting lecturer, templates for the assessment of scripts, especially scripts for stage presentation, like the case here, were not farfetched for this assessor. *Fundamentals of Playwriting, Adaptation and Story Dramatization, Script Analysis and Interpretation, Dramatic Literature, Introduction to Directing, and Advanced Directing*, respectively (to list a few) are the courses taught by this assessor from Diploma to Ph.D. these are all scripts-based courses. This tasks from ANA was therefore given to one whose standing(s) were credible enough for the exercise.

The evaluating templates for the scripts comprised:

- a. Drama: its stage performative advantage (Note: they were not film scripts)
- b. The drama Genre: Clarity of Genre with the Presence of Basic Elements as proof.
- c. Thematic preoccupation and authorial perspective.
- d. Creative plot construction and the enhancement of sequential flow.
- e. Title suitability especially its correspondence with dramatic contents.
- f. Dimensions of conflicts for rhythm, tempo, suspense and interest generation.
- g. Character development/convincing characterization.

- h. Language/communication/aesthetics
- i. Dramatic techniques
- j. Entertainment indices in the drama including message thrust(s)

The above templates, ten in number, provided the lens through which all the scripts were evaluated. Each point attracted ten (10) marks. And for the ten items of the templates, one hundred (100) percent was assessor stands protected absolutely by his efferent decision of ten (10) marks a piece for the ten-item template. Perhaps another assessor might have felt otherwise. But such a fellow would have to wait until ANA would appoint higher an assessor!

SHORT REPORTS ON THE BEST THREE SCRIPTS: IN DESCENDING ORDER

3rd place: Mr. Brother by Achalugo Ezekobe (A Melodrama)

Synopsis: Mr. Brother dramatizes a jinxed marriage plan between Nnanyelugo Obioha and Anna Onwrodi. Both Nigerian lovers work in Ghana. They come home to consummate their exciting love in marriage. But just at the climax of the preparation for the event, on the eve of the traditional marriage, Maxwell Obioha, business man and cousin to the Obioha's, uncovers the shattering ordeal that the would be couple were actually first cousins! Taboo is to be avoided by all means, especially as the Igbo culture comes across as absolutely uncompromising in apparently incestuous affairs. But Nnanyelugo's love for Obioha transcends all nuances of unnerving traditions, inclusive of incest. With desperation as a joker for sympathy and succor, he fakes and fronts his fiancée's pregnancy as a bait to secure agreement to damn tradition and marry his heat.... Let to tame any obnoxious repercussion of taboo-marriage. The couple's families summon one Nwoye for Itiwa-ite, a breaking of blood ties, ritual so that the couple can get married and it wouldn't be incest. The ritual enactment notwithstanding, irony persuades the subsequent actions of Nnanyelugo as the revelation of his wife's blood relationship with him frustrates his sex life right from the outset of the honey moon night, setting Mr. Brother on a new needed re-orientation to life.

Mr. Brother: Melodrama in Genre

1. A very interesting and entertaining story

2. Beautiful language, rich in Igbo traditions
3. Suspense especially with Maxwell's expectation.
4. Climatic discovery at the Zenith of story
5. Conflicts, physical/emotional/cultural/religious abound.
6. Artistic/ritualistic resolution or is it?
7. Symbolism of all not going well.
8. All not going well, but enforced wellness at the end.
9. Ironies – Jachiana, talkative, yet dropping insightful thoughts.
10. Relevance – thorough investigation before marital contracts recommended
11. Main critical issue – too many sets would make fluid action difficult.

Mr. Brother: Score

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Drama: its stage performative advantage | 6 |
| 2. The drama Genre: Clarity of genre with basic elements as proof | 7 |
| 3. The Drama Genre: Clarity of genre with basic elements as proof | 7 |
| 4. Thematic preoccupation and Authorial perspective | 7 |
| 5. Creative plot construction and enhancement of sequential flow | 8 |
| 6. Dimensions of conflicts | 6 |
| 7. Character development/convincing characterization | 7 |
| 8. Language/Communication/Aesthetics | 8 |
| 9. Dramatic Techniques | 6 |
| 10. Entertainment indices and message thrust(s) | 8 |

2nd Place: Saint Ojedi by Amechi Chiedu Obumse (A tragic-comedy)

Synopsis: The festival in honour of Ojedi, the myth of a beautiful young woman who offered herself in willing compassion to be buried alive to save. Ado n' Idu from the ravages of a mysterious plague, in however challenged, opposed and criticized as fetish by adherents of the corpus Christy. A fierce and bloody [providing] encounter ensues between the die-hard traditionists of Ojede and the martyr-ready devotees of corpus Christi. The priestess of Ojedi shrine recounts of the unprecedented sacrificial feat of Ojedi to salvage her people to the Rev. father-led Cristi team, disarms the provoked believers, douses the tension between the poised groups, and resolves the are a conflict(s). The two groups come to terms with the essence of Ojedi celebration as worthwhile. However, Ojedi, despite her saintliness cannot be so called (except by the play's author) because she was not of the fold of Corpus Cristi. But peace is embraced the two sects via mutual understanding and tolerance.

St. Ojedi

1. An excitingly told story
2. A systematic justification for sainthood/saintliness.
3. Compares favourbaly with the strength of God's love for humanity except for mortal nature.
4. Real, true, and genuine love transcends above all earthly lures-family, marriage, husband, sex, wealth etc.
5. Exemplifies values needed for healing current societal plogun. In essence, it's a metaphor of conquest over the indices of doom in Nigeria's social fabric.
6. A of interest which waxes to its apogee in every succeeding scene.
7. Good and appropriate language/characterization: idioms, proverbs, figures of speech.

8. Spices of total African theatre aesthetics – rituals, divinations, songs, drumming, crowds, etc splashed on the play’s canvass.
9. Convincing relevance
10. Dramatic technique - flashback is generously deployed. African cosmology especially three realms of existence and reincarnation.

Saint Ojedi: Score

1. Drama: its stage performative advantage	8
2. The drama genre: Clarity of genre with basic elements of proof	7
3. Thematic preoccupation an dauthorial perspective	7
4. Creative plot construction and enhancement of sequential flow	7
5. Title suitability of dramatic contents	8
6. Dimensions of conflicts	7
7. Character development/convincing characterization	8
8. language/communication/aesthetics	7
9. dramatic techniques	8
10. entertainment indices and message thrust	8
total points earned	75%

1st place: Guerrilla Post by Obari Gomba

Poet Kafka has an e-publishing outfit which has gained speedy notoriety through his collection of twenty poems about sex. Two factors account for the quick ascendancy of the book/s hierarchical climb, namely, the subject of sex and the free download licence on the net. Five thousand downloads have already been recorded in a week. Best, Kafka’s friend sends the collection to Rosa, Supol Maden’s lawyer wife, whom he has been friendly with from school days, as a known lover of poetry. But Supol Maden, already estranged in relationship with

wife, stumbles on the sex-based poems and concludes that they were apparently, sent by Kafka on no other basis than that of the and wife were lovers. This is the crux for Supol Maden's haunt and multi-dimensional revengeful missions against Kafka. In the very next poetry night of readings, Supol Maden's planted men, Inspector Kuru and Sergeant Olade, storm the venue, molest Professor Maute and arrest Kafka. Treasonable allegations fabricated as anti-state activities, terrorism, illegal oil bunkering, public disturbance and sedition are wanton charges heaped upon Kafka by the police, the ultimate aim being to waste Kafka by the police. Pake, Kafka's friend is unrelenting in underground plots to circumvent the schemes of the police and rescue Kafka. Gun battles between Spol's force meet sizeably with Pake's squad recording casualties.

The resultant effect is Supol Maden's last onslaught, and that, to defile Kafka's fiancée, Jess, perhaps to revenge his supposed love affairs with Rosa, his wife. However, he is to be stopped short in the process by the timely arrival of Kafka in the scene. Desperate in frustration and conflated in anger, he shoots Kafka down while Pake's long borne venom of Supol Maden is satisfied as he pummels him with repeated bouts of angry shots.

Guerrilla Post

1. genre – Tragedy (the tragedy of the common man) An unnerving story of the police brazen brutality in Nigeria; this time failed by suspicion, the suspicion of wife banging by a poet – Kafka.
2. The plot - Takes stock of current major challenges in the country; Boko Haram, herdsman, terrorism etc, and how these spells have re-christened the citizenry into spasms of lunacies.
3. The language: Exquisite, appropriate, descriptive, reflexive, communicating. He style, lofty, aesthetic and suave.
4. The drama – realistic, sequential build-up, suspense-clad, tension-soaked, climatic indeed.
5. Evinces proofs of research with creative/adaptable proportionate indices into dramatic content for relevance, justification, instruction, warning. Currency with polity, society, culture reality.

6. Characterization – elitists yet acceptable, promotable, admirable language appropriateness with character background and temperament.
7. An attempt to celebrate/tolerate/advertise cultism (?) who is Pake? How did he come across with guns, and who are his men? Smoking, drinking, fornicating are vices in characters milieus.
8. And why must Kafka die? Even after surviving all the ordeals of Maden and his cohorts in uniform? Who are you leaving Jess for, Pake? Perhaps in keeping with true artistic heroism, Kafka should have lived.
9. Theatre survival is marketed as a delightful possibility – poetry reading attracting crowd. Or is it because of the spice of sex in the mean?
10. Dramatic suggestions/prophecies/caution as the case may be 24/25 etc.

Guerrilla Post: Score

1. Drama: Its stage performative advantage	9
2. The Drama Genre with basic elements of proof	8
3. Thematic preoccupation and authorial perspective	7
4. Creative plot construction and enhancement of sequential flow	7
5. Title suitability to dramatic contents	8
6. Dimensions of conflicts	7
7. Character development/convincing characterization	8
8. Language/communication/aesthetics	9
9. Dramatic techniques	8
10. Entertainment indices and message thrust(s)	9
Total points Earned	80%

Award presentation

From the scores of the three best plays, the first prize should be awarded to Guerrilla Post by Obari Gomba. The second prize should go to Sain Ojedi by Amechi Chiedli Obumse; while the third prize should be given to the play Mr. Brother by Achalugo Ezekobe.

Appreciation and Recommendations

Again, let me very heartily thank Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) for finding me worthy to be assigned the noble duty of acting proxy for them. I am humbled that the approaches, methodologies and templates, all diligently deployed in the exercise to establish relative credence, fairness and professionalism, have been deemed acceptable and satisfactory. Or lease accept the assurances of my appreciation of ANA, particularly its executives.

Drama being a rather broad-based sub-genre of literature, it might be needful to further streamline it by limiting the yearly or annual competition to particular sub-genres, say, tragedy; or comedy; or farce or Satire; or melodrama; or tragic-comedy; etc. by so doing, it would have encouraged the exploitation of the preferred sub-genre, and research and added more stringent but qualitative indices to the development of drama in all its genres. More importantly, the assessment would be much easier and the parameters or templates would apply very appropriately. Yardsticks for evaluating tragedy, given its unique aesthetics, do not appear exactly the same as those for farce or satire for that matter. By appointing, the 'special' genre fore competition, more [e]quality, objectivity or balance would have been preferred for critical evaluation.

Recommendation

In this country, the major industry that absorbs professionally-trained personnel of the creative moulds, is Nollywood. And Nollywood thrives nearly, entirely, on the film adjunct of theatre business. ANA would do well to promote not only playwrighting (which by nomenclature, delineates wiring for the stage), but more essentially, scriptwriting; and that, for the film essence. Radio and television, they must be remembered, are all within the purview and praxis of theatre curriculum. (The theatre curriculum exists in not less than one hundred (100) tertiary schools across the country).

ANA could be very specific in spelling the exact genre of script for the competition. It might schedule its priorities over time, say; this year, stage scripts; next year, film scripts; then television or radio scripts, as the case may be. By so doing, the Association would show knoweldgeability in the spectra of dramatic genres and adjuncts and as well reckon with the industry in promoting town-grown liaison.

I congratulate all the authors of all the –three scripts that made entries to this year’s literary writing. Those whose works have not won any prize should not kill their writing interest. They should instead keep writing, research, more read more, stuff their works more with requisite and composite create-artistic attractions that would accord such works compelling forces of appeal for recommendations. I have been enriched by all the artistic milieus to which your works took me into, and I thank you all for my boosted experiences and ambience(s).

Effiong Johnson Ph.D

*Professor of Theatre, Communication and Film Studies
(Directing & Aesthetics) University of Uyo.*

C. Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Poetry Prize

Judge's Report

The following texts are deserving of this year's Prize:

<i>Bombblast or Breakfast?</i>	Winner
<i>The Poet of Dust</i>	1 st Runner up
<i>The Lagos Cuban Jazz Club</i>	2 nd Runner up

J. O. J. Nwachukwu-Agbada, *Bombblast or Breakfast?*

Like other politically-inclined collections of poetry, *Bombblast or Breakfast?* is not easy to classify. Or, put differently, it is a book which, though could easily be labelled political (given its titular reference to the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria), is also a book which resists such a reductive, simplistic marker. This is because all political poetry — if such a mythical beast exists at all—is hard to be neatly and safely categorised as solely political. Or, rather, it is difficult to exclude other labels from it, even when it, forcefully or subtly, announces itself as nothing other than political.

Discussing the poetry of Tanure Ojaide, the British critic, Stewart Brown, indicts Ojaide's *oeuvre* as falling short of the most basic, critical requirements of poetry. For Brown, despite Ojaide's practice of what he staunchly preaches, i.e. employing his poetry to fight injustice and

other ills in contemporary Nigerian society, his poetry is decidedly and merely “blunt message from the front”. Brown detects a chilling, marked absence of metaphorical depth, dearth of rhythms and an ear for music in Ojaide; and thereby sees only the pervasive presence of what Brown memorably calls “rhetorical outrage” which pervades his *oeuvre*. Brown’s charge could, as it were, be applied to any other openly proclaimed political poet or collection, not least Prof. Nwachukwu-Agbada, whose book not only announces itself as “political”, but also takes its poetic cue from recent political happenings, and thus engages with it in a deliberate disposition towards politicising it, albeit in verse.

It is clear from the poems collected in *Bombblast or Breakfast?* they could or are exempted from Brown’s charge; for they pay close attention to the tripartite qualities, which would impress even so fastidious a critic like Stewart Brown. *Bombblast or Breakfast?* therefore displays an amazing level of familiarity with tropological subtlety, textual ambiguity and linguistic playfulness. Poems such as “Rumors of War”, “One Sentence” and the title poem “Bombblast or Breakfast?” would attest to that

One recurring feature of political poetry is the need to be somewhat “cryptic”, while being openly allusive to recent political and social upheavals in Nigeria. *Bombblast or Breakfast?* emerges as a book which does not in any way “suffers” from its bold announcement of its political intention and discourse discernible even from its title. It has the singular distinction of probably being the freshest and topical out of the cacophony of new poetic voices in Nigeria today. Prof. Nwachukwu-Agbada has, in more ways than one, succeeded in textually, and no less revealingly laying bare, with all the gory details,

some of the most pressing democratic ills of contemporary Nigeria with a committed, nationalistic vision that is reinforced with a distinct moral purpose. The poet also succeeded in dispelling the myth of a political poet necessarily possessing a kind of “ideological comprehensiveness”. He has, by and large, succeeded in showing that a political poem is not supposedly oppositional or transgressive, but depends on how readers read it, given its level of manifestation of poetic craft. The poet achieves this by understanding a wide variety of demands—what Brown would call causes, consequences, and choices—of his time, not by attempting to ignore the historical and political expediency but by trying to explain it in the most simple of terms: plain, accessible poems that could pass for any that have been written or were written in recent time in their linguistic and metaphoric ability to imbibe, or dispel, in equal measure, a number of interpretations.

Umar Abubakar Sidi, *The Poet of Dust*

The question is still being asked about why people are not enamoured with poetry anymore, and why they do not give a hoot about its supposed literary and cultural importance. Over the years, many poets from different poetic traditions and cultures, whether in an anticipatively defensive move, or just as a routine validation of their art, have often raised up to the defence of poetry. In doing so, what is often stressed and highlighted is what poetry is or ought to be. From Christopher Okigbo to Chris Abani, from Robert Lowell to Randall Jarrell, poetry is seen as either a verbal effort to inscribe and memorialize what humanity has failed to say; or as an attempt to underscore that which is important in life, preserving it in some

linguistic permanence. Therefore, poems are the *things* that people say; or, as Robert Pinsky cheekily proposes, poetry should be at least as interesting as good gossip. Indeed, a poem is seen by many poets as a series (not just a set) of verbal surprises, as being more a mode for joy than happiness; a mode of grief than grievance.

Nowhere are the above assertions seen clearly in recent Nigerian poetry than in Umar Sidi's *The Poet of Dust*, which in its experimental style has forcefully shows that indeed poetry is based on the assumption that whatever a poem is, it is also indubitably what Matthew Arnold calls, in a memorable phrase, "a criticism of life". Of course, as is the case with all critical propositions, a counter claim could also be made that even those poems which openly appear to "interpret" a reality; in effect they attempt no such thing. *The Poet of Dust* in its prosaic, meta-poetic movements contains poems (such as "The Peninsula of Poets", "In Lieu of a Preface" and "Things Poet Do"), which quite patently announce themselves as having no bone with any reality other than their own textuality, flaunting their linguistic and aesthetic consciousness, and are equally equivocal in their reference to extra-lingual reality which their diction portends, but only appears to directly name.

Why, despite all the effort to the contrary, is poetry still not better up? One probable answer is the assertion many times made to the effect that a poem much more than just represents an intrinsic relationship between the poet and the reader. As the prose/prosaic poems in *The Poet of Dust* shows, a poem is an avenue through which something other than "meaning" is encountered. The poems in the book call for and make possible the existence of the reader. Indeed, *The Poet of Dust* underlines powerfully, if that poetry is to survive in

the current climate of cultural amnesia, it must reinvent itself in the realisation that readers are, in the last analysis, the ultimate makers of poems.

In *The Poet of Dust*, the personal, the private and quite often the public and the communal are memorably made to cohere. Umar Sidi is good at poems that hauntingly remind us about the need, and the necessity to once in a while, if not all the time, wax not just lyrical but sensuous (of course not in vulgar, smut sense); for it is his contention in these poems that waxing lyrical is good for our troubled hearts, and as a bonus also address our other more social and political worries.

Onyeka Nwelue, *The Lagos Cuban Jazz Club*

As a reviewer once put it while reviewing a collection of the pre-eminent American poet, John Ashbery, Onyeka Nwelue's poetry seems to be less a poetry of the right words in the right order. Perhaps more than any other recent Nigerian poets Nwelue's *The Lagos Cuban Jazz Club* is a kind of poetry that one would be hard pushed to find a word, or indeed a line that does not earn its place.

Nwelue's poems (such as "A Night in the Bar on a Tuesday", "The Rule for Women" and "In the Realm of a Thousand Demons") do not pretend to be anything ideologically and aesthetically other than an artifice: a self-reflexive construct, which is decidedly contingent upon the deployment of a deceptively simple (thought not simplistic) language.

But the "simplicity" of Nwelue's poetry arises primarily when it is read within a framework that seeks to *deploy* poetry as an importantly informational, communicational or representational product. To read Nwelue's poems is akin to a dramatic enactment whereby meaning is

not only playfully slippery, often postponed and deferred, but is also undermined.

The deceptive simplicity of Nwelu's poetry emanates because the commonly accepted and held meaning of things are severed from readers' everyday conception of them and presented, in turn, in a fresh, wholly surprising form. The poet's demotic idiom is not because he is not interested in merely expressing critique of contemporary society through direct declarations of anger, feeling of outrage or even disgust, but he is more interested in employing poetry to examine the ways in which language operates within a range of different socio-cultural and literary discourses.

A Nwelu's poem (for example, "The last Time God Spoke to me") then is not *about* something, anything, nor is it an easily paraphrasable narrative, or what one critic calls "symbolic nexus" or theme. Rather, it is the very actuality of words. For me, one distinguishing marker of Nwelu's poems in *The Lagos Cuban Jazz Club* is its fierce resistance to an expected closure. This, in the last analysis, is its most important and lasting effects, since it seeks to infuse meaning throughout the poem rather than just overlays it in lyrical epiphanies.



Ismail Bala

Department of English and Literary Studies

Bayero University, Kano

October 10th, 2018

D. **LITERARY CRITICISM/MARIA AJIMA PRIZE**

The entries for this category were two:

- (i) ‘‘Nativization as Style and Identity Marker in Barclays Ayakoroma’s *Dance on His Grave*’’ by Ebi Yeibo
- (ii) ‘‘Ta Aphrodisiac Pandemos: Ifemelu and The Mythic Goddess of Temple Prostitution’’ by Ikechukwu Otuu Egbuta and Chinyere Otuu Egbuta.

Introduction:

The duty of the judge is not to search for major faults to overturn a work, but he/she has the duty to search for minimal faults –that is the first stage that calls for the shortlist. The second stage is that of weighing the minimal faults of a shortlisted work against the minimal culpabilities of any other shortlisted work. The third stage has to do with the score –that is, which of the works has the highest score. The highest score in this sense must be an A grade because it is an A grade alone that has the potential of winning a prize. This was the premise on which each of the entries was read and adjudged.

Nativization as Style and Identity Marker in Barclays Ayakoroma’s *Dance on His Grave* by Ebi Yeibo

Observations:

1. On the abstract

The abstract of this article clearly shows that the writer is enquiring into local contents and cultural identity in Ayakoroma's play: *Dance on His Grave* . It is not clear, however, from the onset whether the reader is being led into literary style even as the writer speaks of "nativized forms in African postcolonial literary text". So much in the abstract is devoted to "Linguistic Hybridity" –this gives the reader the sense that he/she is into literary linguistics/language discourse. Literary linguistics is concerned with the application of tools from linguistic and cognitive science to the study of a literary text. The tools such as "Supra-linguistic, para-verbal devices, code-switching, and code-mixing" are consistent with studies in literary linguistic. The concepts are inconsistent with any form of literary criticism. It is therefore difficult to situate this abstract in literary criticism. The exploration of nativization as style and identity maker is a linguistic project. It seems to me that the writer draws the reader into the study of "language varieties in literary text" to use his words. My supposition is consistent with the idea that "language forms are part of a larger system of symbolic markers of identity...." (29).

Moreover, the keywords in the abstract –"nativization, identity discourse, style makers, and linguistic hybridity" focus the reader's attention on linguistic discourse and style/literary linguistic. The application of Bakhtin's Linguistic Hybridity theory to the study of a literary text appears to me to have a better focus in the domain of literature and culture and not language and culture as claimed by Yeibo who, from his analysis of the play, shows that we are into the study of literature and Izon culture using *Dance on His Grave*. The distinction between literary linguistics and literature and culture, in this case, has not been clearly made in the abstract, even as this essay perhaps is the first critical

writing I have come across under literary criticism category in the past three years. The lack of distinction makes the reader to hang in the balance –am I reading an essay in language and culture/literary linguistics or in literature and Izon culture using *Dance on His Grave* as a case study? The lack of focus of the abstract on literary criticism is a serious matter to be ignored.

2. The Structure/Organisation of the Essay

Introduction

The focus here is on “the duality of linguistic and cultural traits”. If Yeibo is into the study of Izon culture in *Dance on His Grave* as a literary text, oral tradition in African literature should have been a good ground to display scholarship in the introductory section. What I mean is that African writers use oral tradition as part of literary their culture. The language of communication may be part of the oral tradition, but it has to be assessed from the perspective of literature and not linguistic to fit properly into literary criticism which the paper is meant to serve. I also expect the writer to explore the concepts of nativization, style, hybridization and identity marker from the perspective of literature and not from linguistic because we are into literary criticism. In this way, nativization and hybridity become part of creative style in African literature.

This paper functions best in “language and culture [and] stylo-linguistic” to use the writer’s words. Again, one is left to ask: are we assessing this article with language in mind or from the perspective of literature? The apparent weakness in this section, even if we are to assess it from the perspective of literary criticism, is the lack of critical evaluations of quotations taken from scholarly works. There are no comments by the writer as to whether or not he agrees with the views. The writer, at each point, makes no

attempt at showing the literary values of the quotations to further foreground literary criticism that called for the submission of this article. This, certainly, is one of the mortal sins in literary criticism.

I must state that in the linguistic parlance this article is rich enough. Yet I find it difficult to place the introductory section of this article under literary criticism because that amounts to a forceful marriage between heaven and hell. If the purpose of this section is to determine “the influence that one type of verbal art has had upon another” to quote the writer by “exploring the skill with which writers exploit new aesthetic opportunities by incorporating traditional matter in the novels, plays, and poems they write in a language which is not their mother tongue” why has aesthetics degenerates to discourse in language in such a large scale in this article, why?

3. Theoretical Framework

This section displays a very rich understanding of the concept the writer has in mind while working on the article. Unfortunately, it deviates from literary criticism to language discourse. The theory of linguistic hybridity could be used for literary study, but it must be at the mercy of literature since the prize for which the work was submitted is in the area of literary criticism.

4. Brief Biography of the Author

This is a fine treatment. It gives the international reader sufficient background of the author.

5. Synopsis of the Play.

A good approach.

6. Textual Analysis

The analysis is brilliant as the theory of linguistic hybridity is much at work. This section however should have been given a better title such as Nativization as Style and Identity Marker in *Dance on His Grave* to refocus the attention of the reader.

7. The Concluding Section

The concluding section clearly justifies my earlier position that the article is focused on Izon cultural and linguistic studies. It is not a pure literary assessment and could hardly be a literary criticism. Naturally, the concluding section is a summation of ideas presented in the organisational and analytical processes. This essay appears inconclusive because issues/ideas on linguistic frames are restarted with further quotations that remain unexplained. The last statement: “a linguistic and literary counter-attack from the former colonized against the colonizer” demands for further evaluation that is nowhere to be seen. The essay is therefore open-ended.

8. The Works Cited section

This section is very impressive from the perspective of linguistic. The citations in literary studies are also impressive, but are not enough to sustain the weight of the literary criticisms that should have started from the beginning of the article to the end.

9. DECISION

This article, if weighed against the backdrop of *Nuances: A Journal of Humanistic Enquiry*, breaks grounds. But humanism is too broad a term to contemplate in ANA/Maria Ajima Prize for Literary Criticism. We must, based on the decision taken today, watch the future of our literature. On this note, I am reluctant at awarding the

maximum mark of 70% or A Grade as score for this essay. I score it 63% or B Grade because the flaws earlier pointed out are less minimal. The author is commended for a brilliant work.

E. ANA / ABUBAKAR GIMBA PRIZE FOR SHORT STORIES

JUSTICE CLUB (Courtroom Stories) by Sasi Miet Jaja

Observations:

1. Structure of the Text

Judges at the bench do not tell stories, at least not in the courts. They listen to submissions at courtrooms and based on the evidence arising from the submissions they arrive at decisions. Lawyers at the bar also do not tell stories, at least not in the courts. They argue based on available facts and on points of law and leave the judges to take decisions. But litigants tell stories on how judges are swayed or otherwise by the submissions of those at the bar. Whenever the judge becomes the teller of stories of what happen in the court, he/she not only is an entertainer but combines the art of adjudication with the art of storytelling. That makes the job more creative and innovative.

2. The prologue which lays the foundation for the stories is meant to distinguish legal profession from other professions. It is not out of place therefore that Tekena prefers to be “a world class attorney” instead of “a world class diplomat” (5). The idea

of legal terminologies is covertly hinted at as Mrs Cole enquires into the use of English and Onome signals the possibility of using French and Spanish terms in the process to drive home points as a lawyer. And as the prologue implies, the order of things is expected under the watchful eyes of Mrs Cole.

My duty is not to carry out the review of the courtroom stories, but to determine whether the stories are indeed short stories and whether they are good enough to win the ANA/Abubakar Gimba prize for the Short Story category. I must state that each story in this collection is uniquely told from the perspective of the Nigerian legal system. The audience is made to understand how and why certain decisions are arrived at in the court. You do not need to be a lawyer to understand these stories, but you must be an intelligent listener to disentangle the series of arguments in each case. The case of the Robbed Laptop, for instance, rests on William Blackstone's treatise that: "All presumptive evidence of felony should be admitted cautiously; for the law holds it better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent party suffers" (25). What this means is that presumption is hardly adequate in law. It makes the innocent to suffer injustice.

2. Further Observations:

Justice Club is an all-embracing title used to cover the introductory remarks in form of prologue, the five stories and the concluding remarks in form of epilogue. Introductory remarks may not be a format for the short story. But in the present circumstance, the short stories come from within a club/ law clinic. In view of the peculiar background, it is important to foreground the so-called "Order in the Court" on which the entire stories rest. The title, in this sense, acts as law clinic where ideas are hatched and developed for the future growth of the legal profession. I am of the view that Jaja had improved

performance in mind at all levels –those at the bench and the bar, law students and even friends of the court while writing the stories.

There is the technique of suspense in each of the stories and even whenever a particular story ends –it turns out differently from the way it started in conformity to irony at the end. This characteristic is typical of a standard short story. The case of the robbed laptop is instructive in this regard. And of course, each of the five stories has a climax. Consider the acquittal or conviction in the case of the gunrunner. The accused is found guilty of illegal possessing of firearm, but he is acquitted on the charge of murder. The merit in each case is the basis for the short story. The Case of the Robbed Laptop, The Case of the Disputed Land, The Case of the Gunrunner, The Case of the Noisy Neighbour and the Case of the Sick Prisoner are therefore the creation of Sasi Miet Jaja whose knowledge of the law is well informed. The setting/location, in each case, is the courtroom and all actions take place within the court room.

3. Decision

Justice Club is a highly innovative collection. The form as short stories collection and the legal contents have added yet another voice to short story writing in Nigeria. So much had been said on the relationship between creativity and the legal profession, but no short story writer in Nigeria has domesticated the link between the art of imagination and the law the manner Sasi Miet Jaja has done in Courtroom Stories. I am of the view that Justice Club as a text has brought imagination much closer to the legal profession. There are minimal faults in this collection of courtroom stories. I score the author the maximum mark of 70% for his fluency, orderliness, originality and innovative approach

to law and storytelling. He is hereby awarded the ANA/Abubakar Gimba prize for the Short Story category.

***THINGS THAT START SMALL BUT SWEET* by Bibi Ukonu**

Observations

There is no table of contents to guide the reader. It looks the stories were put together in a hurry in spite of the beautiful finishing. Bibi Ukonu's short stories are deceptively fluent. But he is always confused in his use of tenses. Even as he maintains some stability in the use of present tense, there are obvious cases that the reader is deliberately dragged to happenings in the present. Human activities do not run in straight forward manner and cannot be all current as the language of communication tries to show. If, however, the use of present tense is a matter of style to engage the reader, it must be in proper shape. And that does not mean the past must be made current at all times.

I speak of "Things that Start Small But Sweet." The sense of generalisation in this story leads to lack of focus. Escape is the theme of this story, but the reader is again confronted by the demolition of homes, during which Zinwhe is lost. How does the reader reconcile two conflicting themes in a short story? It is, indeed, a story within the story contrary to a standard short story. That is why in any given short story, the theme must be one in order for the writer to maintain the focus. There are also very obvious lapses in the titled story. In normal life situation (and literature depicts reality of life) disease is not diagnosed in chemist (see page13). And at what point in life does a visit to an environment turn to be promise of how big the people in the environment are. Does Bibi mean to say huge "signs"? (14) Again, see this: "the bus conductor who already looks cursed from many fights or maybe from a hit by one of the lorries we are after this

morning (17). Should the verb “are” not be in the past (were)? The tense expresses sense of the past, but Ukonu forces the reader to accept that the happening is now/that the action is taking place.

In “Things that Prospers US” (3) the theme of falsehood is less ambiguous. But Akanja’s falsehood should have been played down after the revelation of Ndukamkpa’s behaviour to enable the reader focus attention on the main character. There is no indication that any other person other than the wife of Uloma knows anything about the fake pastor. The purpose of this very story is to expose evil and the so-called miracles taking place in the church. This has not been properly done. It makes the story less gripping to the reader because only the wife is told that the husband is a cheat. The church congregation is not aware. Revealing the incident to the congregation at the church serves as deterrent to others –that is the message. The thing that prospers us is true divine worship. Adamu and Hassan’s entry into the church speaks so much about religious tolerance and it is a thing that unites us. But the loss of the blue handkerchief contradicts the thing that prospers us because Adamu and Hassan are aware that the handkerchief is the source of Ndukamkpa’s wealth. Surprisingly the two steal the handkerchief and are using it to make money. That is why people begin to gather around the shoe maker like bees.

Decision

It is remarkable that every story revolves around some “thing” to give the collection a unified structure, but the faults are less minimal. The last story is even faulty to the core. It moves from Nwamma to Urenna to Titi and back to Nwamma –each subsection/break introduces different person caught in love circle. The story depicts glimpses of “The

Things We Become’’ but certainly it is not a good one. The kind of flight witnessed in this story is unknown in a standard short story.

This short story collection is not good enough to win this prize.

***VACANCY FOR THE POST OF A BRIDE* by Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika**

The production quality is very poor. You find some letters missing in some words -see pages 98, 130, and 241. The stitches are removed due to poor handling. Asika although has the penchant for creating dialogue in his stories, this collection is more of children’s literature. The book title suggests so and a reading of the titled story “Vacancy for the Post of a Bride’’ confirms the assertion. Vulgarity of language use in some of the stories indicates the writer’s lack of communicative ability. The narrative style is elementary and the behaviours of characters are typical of children. This makes the reading boring and less entertaining. This book made the shortlist in error and the error is highly regretted.

Decision

This short story collection falls short of expectations of winning ANA/Abubakar prize because the faults are less minimal.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a horizontal line with a loop above it and a vertical stroke extending downwards from the right end.

Owojecho Omoha, PhD.
Associate Professor of Poetry & Psychoanalytic Studies

E. ANA Teen Author’s Prize

ANA TEEN Author's Prize had a total of 6 entries. Apart from Ogunyemi's "Tomorrow brings beautiful things: Stories," it is sad to note that all the other five entries have serious technical flaws and as such, do not qualify for a prize. From the plot structure and story line of most of the entries, it is obvious that many of the writers are not conversant with the conventions and rubrics of creative writing. This, among other things, shows insufficient reading and exposure to the conventions of creative writing. It is worrisome to note that some of these writers have gone ahead to print these hapless write-ups as 'novels' as exemplified by the book *If you looked inside a girl and Princess Sarah and other stories*. This is indeed very unfortunate. It is hereby suggested that in future, ANA should insist that all submissions for the Teen author competition should be manuscripts. The Association can then assist the winner in publishing the work thereafter.

Ernest Ogunyemi's "Tomorrow brings beautiful Things: Stories" make very interesting reading. The plot structure is well delineated and the storyline is full of suspense. However, the heavy preponderance on eroticism by some of the stories, does not make this an ideal work for children. Furthermore, the finesse of craftsmanship shows that this is not really written by a child, except if the child had had high level of exposure to reading and great practice in creative writing.

F. Children's Literature Prize

The 2018 ANA Children's Literature Prize has a total of seven entries. While many of the entries showed evidence of poor craft, the entries by Jide Ogunlana, Paschal Okeke/Vera Iwuchukwu and Su'eddie V. Agema showed great promise. Particularly interesting is the innovation in the use of child viewpoint and "I" pronoun by Jide Ogunlana. Paschal Okeke and Vera Iwuchukwu's entry is equally captivating in the dexterity shown in weaving an intricate story of team spirit and healthy competitiveness in children. This story is told in sparing doses of poetry and fluid prose. These are the qualities that make these stories the possible winners of this year's prize. Su'eddie Agema's entry is innovative through the weaving together of folktales and narratives concerning the listeners' of the tales.

Prof G.M.T Emezue