

POETRY AS A WEAPON: SATIRE IN ODIA OFEIMUN'S *THE POET LIED*

BY

**Dike Franklin IMALA
ART2100239**

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CERTIFICATION

We certify that this work was carried out by Dike Franklin IMALA in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, in partial fulfilment for the award of B.A (Hons) degree in English and Literature.

Prof K.C Eke
Project Supervisor

Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty.

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ABSTRACT

This study establishes Ochia Ofeimun as a consummate satirist through an analysis of his poetry collection, *The Poet Lied*. Employing the sociological theory of literature, this study examines how Ofeimun uses satire to critique three key sectors of Nigerian society: the clergy, for promoting a false religion in “Paradise for the Aladuras”; the political class, for their empty promises and false messianism in “A Serious Matter” and “The Messiahs”; and the privileged elite, for their brutal and futile greed in “After the News.” The study concludes that Ofeimun’s poetry serves as a powerful mirror, using sharp irony and vivid imagery to expose societal failings and affirm his standing as a critical voice in African literature.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Life and Works of Odia Ofeimun

Odia Ofeimun, born in 1950 in Irukepe-Ekuma, Nigeria, is a renowned Nigerian poet. Before studying Political Science at the University of Ibadan, he worked as a news reporter. His involvement in Nigeria's political landscape is evidenced by his role as a former secretary to the prominent statesman Chief Obafemi Awolowo and as a member of the editorial board for the Guardian Newspaper in Lagos.

His prolific literary career includes several published poetry collections, such as *The Poet Lied*, *A Handle for the Flutist*, *Dreams at Work*, *London Letters* and other *Poems*, *A Feast of Return*, and *Salute to the Master Builder*.

Ofeimun's significant contributions to literature have been recognized with numerous awards, and he has formerly served as the President of the Association of Nigerian Authors.

1.1 Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this study is to establish Odia Ofeimun as a consummate satirist. This will be demonstrated by analyzing his critique of three key societal pillars: the clergy, whom he scrutinizes for their moral failings; the political class, which he

holds accountable for its hypocrisy; and the aristocratic or privileged class, whose greed and tyranny he exposes.

1.2 Scope of Study

This study focuses specifically on Odia Ofeimun's collection, *The Poet Lied*. This collection was selected because it is suffused with satire, containing a significant number of poems that are intricate and sustained in their satirical critique.

1.3 Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology. The analysis is based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary text is Odia Ofeimun's *The Poet Lied*. Secondary sources include relevant journal articles, literary textbooks, and credible online academic resources.

1.4. Theoretical Background

This study applies the sociological theory of literature as propounded by René Wellek and Austin Warren. This theory posits that literature is a reflection of society, and the artist, as a member of that society, is inevitably influenced by its happenings. Wellek and Austin assert that:

To say that literature mirrors or expresses life is even more ambiguous. A writer inevitably expresses his experience and total conception of life; but it would be manifestly untrue to say that he expresses his experience and total

conception of life or even the whole life of a given time completely and exhaustively. (95)

From the above, Wellek and Warren are of the opinion that literature mirrors life. Although it mirrors events and happenings, it cannot mirror all the events of life. What it does is to mirror a particular event and at a given point in time.

If we apply this theory or point of view to Ochia Ofeimun's poetry, it would appear to us that Ofeimun mirrors some events and happenings in his country, Nigeria. In particular he mirrors the post-colonial politics and experiences in the country. One can say categorically that his poetry captures the catastrophe of the Nigerian society. Furthermore, the poems socially mirror the causes and effects of post-colonial leadership. Here we see pictures of political hypocrisy, greed, tyranny, corruption and bribery. By showing these pictures, Ochia Ofeimun appears as a representative of his age and time.

As Wellek and Warren put it:

Literature is simply a mirror of life, a reproduction, and thus, obviously as social document. Such studies make sense only if we know that artistic method of the novelist studied, and can say, not merely in general terms, but concretely in what relation the picture stands to the social reality. (104)

As we have said earlier, Warren repeatedly mentions the word "mirror". In other words, literature is a speaking picture of all the socio-economic and political realities of any given society. This is because as Warren and Wellek say:

Literature occurs only in a social context, as part of a culture, in a milieu". (105).

In this connection, one is inevitably going to say that literature does not occur in a vacuum. The materials and sources of literature are derived from the society.

The beauty of Odia Ofeimun's poetry lies in his inclination towards the satire sub-genre. There is no reading of his poems that will not bring this fact to the consciousness of the reader.

A lot has been written about satire. In the book *The Art of Satire*, David Worcester says that:

"Satire is the engine of anger, rather than the direct expression of anger. Before our sympathy is worn, we may be freed from the distress of witnessing naked rage. Like Mark Anthony, the artist must simulate coolness and detachment. He must look in one direction while he shoots in the opposite direction" (18)

Through Worcester's expose above, one notices that satiric writings are not born out of anger and indignation. Rather, they are expressions of a super-human artist who

displays self control and "detachment" in the presence of distress and rage. The striking attribute of the satirist enunciated above is that he is a master-craftsman of the irony device. In fact, the summary of Worcester's argument is that the detachment of the satirist from the obvious rage and distress around him grants him the power and impetus to correctly wield his sarcastic note with the strong application of ironic qualities.

Speaking about the satirist further, James Sutherland qualifies him as an artist who is :

"very much alive to the follies and imperfections and faults of men and women, he sees us falling short in one way or another of the standards to which he himself consciously or unconsciously subscribes"(2)

Sutherland's comment re-echoes the fact that satire lampoons human follies and vices, and its structure is based on the subscription of society's standards, which the satirist must protect in his vicious attack against human faults and falling standards.

On his part, M. H. Abrams draws our attention to the "butt" element in satire. He stresses that satire sometimes deviates from the lampoon of human imperfections and faults to the derision of "a butt that exists outside the work itself". He goes on to say that this "butt" - 'may be an individual... or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation, or even the entire human race' (320)

Here, Abrams' focus is on the various entities that exhibits substandard conducts and behavior. When you go through the poetry of Odia Ofeimun, one striking and important

quality of his satiric attack is that it is directed at institutions and persons rather than just faults and substandard conduct.

1.5 Literature Review

Much has been written on the poetry of Odia Ofeimun by critics. For instance, Chidi Amuta says that Odia exhibits an unusual knack towards the combination of poetry and politics. His poetic foray crystallizes through his experience of the political debacle of Nigeria which culminated in the Nigerian civil war. Amuta believes that this even impresses "a patriotic nationalist stance" on the character of Odia Ofeimun and his poetry. These lines summarize his viewpoints:

"Ofeimun writes from a position of impeccable patriotism akin to but contextually different from what we have identified.... His sense of patriotism finds expression through the familiar archetypal love metaphor..." (194)

The strength and genius of Ofeimun's poetry lies in his passion for national and patriotic reconciliation through collective and intelligent restructuring of the state's apparatus for national reformation and renaissance. Ofeimun is constrained by the love factor in his poetry and it is this element that pervades his ideological projection.

Another critic Idaevor Bello maintains a radical approach in his criticism. He basically considers Ofeimun as a revolutionary who uses poetry to devise strategies for

revolutionary change in Nigeria. In addition, Bello does not only see Ofeimun's revolution plan as a call for "mere change", rather it is one of "violent response by the people to conditions that impede their freedom"(86). The radical shift that Ofeimun advocates in his poem concretizes Bello's ideas here:

"in brief, Ofeimun does not just capture and present the sordidness in his society to amuse who reads him but with the objective to make the people see the dirt and pain around them so they can adequately respond to it" (87).

What the excerpt above is saying is that there is a deliberate employment of images that depict the decay in the land by Ofeimun in his poetry so as to spur and arouse the people for a revolution against the forces that perpetuate these wicked acts for their selfish gains and interest. For this is the only way that change will be realized in the land. On his part, Harry Garuba examines the poetry of Odia Ofeimun from diverse perspectives. Consequently, he sees it as a "passionate commitment to public issues and social causes" (270).

Tanure Osaide remarks that anger is the motivating factor behind Ofeimun's poetry. He argues that in Ofeimun's poetry, the expression of anger is directed at writers who are not committed to the people (70).

In view of the fact that these literary critics have examined the poetry of Odia Ofeimun from different backgrounds and perspectives, it places a task for this essay to

take another approach. To this end, therefore, we intend to look at the poetry of Odia Ofeimun from the satiric point of view.

1.6 Thesis Statement

This paper argues that Odia Ofeimun employs satire as a central tool in *The Poet Lied* to critique and expose the moral, political, and social failings of the clergy, the political class, and the privileged elite in Nigerian society.

CHAPTER TWO

SATIRE AGAINST THE CLERGY

In this chapter, we will take a deep and detailed look at one of Odia Ofeimun's most powerful poems, "Paradise for the Aladuras." This poem serves as a perfect example to support our main argument that Ofeimun is a master satirist, especially when he turns his critical eye towards powerful institutions like the church.

To understand the poem fully, we must first understand who the "Aladuras" are. "Aladura" is a Yoruba word that means "praying people." It refers to a group of Christian churches in Nigeria that are known for their very energetic and emotional style of worship. They are often charismatic, placing a strong emphasis on prophecy, visions, loud prayers, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ofeimun, however, does not come to praise this form of worship. Instead, he uses his poem as a satirical weapon to expose what he sees as its flaws. His satire is not a simple mockery; it is a careful and critical examination that questions the true motivation behind such intense religious displays. He suggests that this "frenzy" is often a performance, a way for people to escape the difficult realities of their daily lives rather than a genuine search for spiritual truth.

This chapter will break down the poem, line by line and image by image, to show exactly how Ofeimun builds his satirical critique. We will explore how he portrays the

worshippers, their leader, and their idea of God to reveal a cycle of emptiness and escapism.

The First Strike: Religion as a Useless "Lame Camel"

The poem begins with a shocking and unexpected statement. Instead of using respectful or holy language to talk about worship, Ofeimun presents us with a strange rule:

"Without passable frenzy
religious worship is
a lame camel"

These opening lines are the foundation of the entire poem's criticism. Let's unpack what this means. The word "frenzy" means a state of wild excitement, almost like a madness. The word "passable" is key here. It means something that is just good enough to be accepted. So, right away, Ofeimun is telling us that in this religious setting, worship is not valued for its sincerity, its moral teachings, or its ability to inspire good deeds. It is valued only for its outward show of emotion. If you can't show a sufficient level of excitement, your worship is considered worthless.

This is where the powerful metaphor of the "lame camel" comes in. A camel is an animal known for its strength and ability to carry heavy loads across long, harsh deserts. It is a survivor. But a lame camel is a sad and pitiful creature. It cannot do its job. It cannot carry the load, it cannot travel the journey, and it is of no use to anyone. It is a burden.

By comparing worship without frenzy to a "lame camel," Ofeimun is making a devastating point. He is saying that, in the view he is critiquing, a calm, thoughtful, or quiet faith is seen as useless, broken, and unable to complete the spiritual journey. This immediately sets a satirical tone. The poet is not agreeing with this view; he is exposing its absurdity. He finds it ridiculous that the value of a person's connection with God should be measured by how much they shout, shake, or cry.

A Closer Look at the Worshippers: The Herd on a Tightrope

After setting down this strange rule, Ofeimun then zooms in on the worshippers themselves to show us how they follow it. He writes:

"And fingering this
on the nipples of instinct
they throng the tight-rope
of their orisons"

This description is very physical and not very flattering. The phrase "fingering this on the nipples of instinct" is deliberately unsettling. It mixes the spiritual with the deeply physical and sensual. "Instinct" refers to a basic, animal-like drive, not a higher, intellectual or spiritual thought. It suggests that the worshippers are not acting from a

place of deep understanding or faith, but are instead being driven by their raw, primal emotions. Their worship is portrayed as a kind of self-stimulation, a way to tickle their own nerves rather than connect with a divine power.

Then, he says they "throng the tight-rope of their orisons." "Throng" means to gather in a large, crowded mass. It suggests a group moving together without individual thought, like a herd of animals. "Orisons" is a fancy word for prayers. But these prayers are not described as a straight path to heaven; they are a "tight-rope." A tight-rope is high up, thin, and difficult to walk on. It is a performance. Everyone watches the person on the tight-rope, waiting to see if they will fall. This image perfectly captures Ofeimun's satire: he is saying that their prayer is not a private conversation with God, but a public performance where everyone is trying to balance and show off their religious excitement for others to see.

The satire gets even sharper in the next lines:

"They throng heavenwards
quivering with infernal delight
at the feet of the all-accommodating Kristi"

They are moving "heavenwards," but their delight is described as "infernal." This is a classic oxymoron, a combination of opposite words. "Infernal" means something that comes from hell, not heaven. So, the joy they feel on their way to heaven is a hellish kind of joy—wild, chaotic, and perhaps even destructive. This is a brilliant way for Ofeimun to question the nature of their religious experience. Is it truly holy, or is it something else? Finally, they are gathered at the feet of "the all-accommodating Kristi." Notice the spelling: "Kristi" instead of "Christ." This small change is significant. It might suggest that the God they are worshipping is not the true Christ of the Bible, but a distorted, man-made version. The most important word here is "all-accommodating." A truly all-accommodating God sounds nice, but in this context, it is satirical. Ofeimun suggests that this "Kristi" does not challenge the worshippers, does not ask them to be better people, or to think critically. He simply accepts their frenzy without question. He is a God of convenience, who makes no demands on their morality or their daily lives, as long as they perform the right emotional show.

The Psychology of Escape: Fear and the Desire to Be Lost

Ofeimun now moves from describing the worshippers' actions to revealing their inner thoughts and fears. He uses more powerful metaphors to show us their state of mind:

"They are harpstrings
ready-plucked to the maddening banter

of drums bells"

Here, the worshippers are no longer even people; they are compared to "harpstrings." A harpstring is an instrument. It does not play itself; it is played by someone else. This means the worshippers have given up their own will. They are passive objects, being "plucked" and played by the loud, "maddening" music of the service—the "drums" and "bells." They have surrendered their ability to think for themselves to the overwhelming atmosphere of the group.

He continues:

"uplifted above the clouds of human roofs

they are trolls lost

in the forest of their virgin hungers"

Being "uplifted above the clouds" sounds like a good thing, a spiritual elevation. But Ofeimun immediately twists it. He says they are "trolls." A troll is a mythical, ugly, and often stupid creature that lives under a bridge. This is a brutal dehumanization. He is saying that in their quest to be lifted up, they have actually become monstrous. They are lost in a "forest of their virgin hungers." A "virgin hunger" is a deep, raw, and unmet desire. This suggests that all this religious frenzy is not satisfying their true needs; it is just confusing them more, getting them lost in a jungle of their own unsolved problems and unmet longings.

This leads to the most direct part of the poem, where we hear the actual pleas of the worshipper:

"-if only you could hold me
-if only you could protect me
-if only you could save me from myself
and from the unpredictable labyrinths of the earth"

This repeated cry of "if only" is a cry of deep fear and helplessness. The worshipper is not asking for wisdom, strength, or guidance to face life's challenges. Instead, they are asking to be completely rescued from life itself. They are afraid of the world ("the unpredictable labyrinths of the earth") and, even more importantly, they are afraid of "myself." Their faith, as portrayed by Ofeimun, is not about self-improvement or courage; it is about running away. It is a desperate plea for someone else to take over because the burden of being an independent person is too heavy.

This culminates in the frantic cry:

"Kristi Kristi Kristi
let me get lost in your legend"

This is the ultimate summary of Ofeimun's critique. The goal is not to be "found" in Christ, not to discover truth or purpose. The goal is to "get lost." They want to disappear completely, to lose their identity and their problems inside a "legend"—a story,

a myth. This is the deepest form of escapism. It is an admission that they do not want to engage with the real, complicated world.

The Final Plea: Choosing the Fire Over the Camel

The poem ends by reinforcing this desire for total surrender:

"And let me get lost
Surrender myself completely to your timeless fire
away from the lame camel"

The worshipper repeats the desire to "get lost" and to "surrender myself completely." They want to give up all responsibility. The "timeless fire" could be seen as God's purifying power, but in this context of wanting to be lost, it sounds more like a destructive force that will burn away their individual self, which is exactly what they want.

The final line is a masterstroke of satire: "away from the lame camel." Remember, the poem started by calling worship without frenzy a "lame camel." But here, the meaning has twisted. Now, the "lame camel" represents the earthly life they are trying to escape—the difficult, boring, and painful reality of human existence. They are not trying to find a better form of worship; they are trying to use worship as a rocket ship to blast off away from life itself. Ofeimun shows us that their "Paradise" is not a place of peace

and love, but a place of escape and self-destruction, which is a very hollow and sad kind of paradise.

In conclusion, "Paradise for the Aladuras" is a brilliant and successful piece of satire. Odia Ofeimun does not just call the clergy names; he carefully and systematically exposes what he believes is a flawed and even dangerous form of religion. He achieves this by, firstly mocking the rules: He starts by showing the absurd rule that worship must be frenzied to be valid. Secondly, Odia dehumanizes the worshippers: He describes them as a herd, as animals driven by instinct, as trolls, and as musical instruments with no will of their own. Again, he exposes their motivation: He reveals that the true force behind this frenzy is not love or devotion, but fear—fear of the world and fear of oneself. Additionally, he criticizes the God-Figure: He presents "Kristi" as an "all-accommodating" and weak god who allows this escapism to continue instead of challenging his followers to be better. And lastly, he condemns the goal: He shows that the ultimate goal of this worship is not enlightenment or salvation, but a desperate desire to "get lost" and avoid the responsibilities of life.

Through this powerful poem, Ofeimun firmly establishes his satirical voice against the clergy. He argues that when religion becomes a theatrical performance based on fear and escapism, it fails in its true duty to guide and uplift people in their actual lives. He holds the clergy and their followers accountable for creating a "paradise" that is

nothing more than a beautiful prison for the mind and spirit, thus proving his skill as a sharp and insightful satirist.

CHAPTER THREE

SATIRE AGAINST POLITICAL HYPOCRISY

In this chapter, we will continue our journey into the satirical world of Odi Ofeimun, now turning our attention to his sharp criticism of politicians. We will look at two poems "A Serious Matter." and "The Messiahs"

"A Serious Matter"

The title itself is a clue. It suggests that the subject of the poem is something important, urgent, and needing immediate attention. For ordinary people, a "serious matter" might be finding food to eat, getting a job, or having a safe place to live. However, as we will see in the poem, the politicians have a very different idea of what a "serious matter" is.

Ofeimun uses this poem to expose the deep hypocrisy and wide gap that exists between the political leaders and the citizens they are supposed to serve. Hypocrisy means saying one thing but doing another. It is the behaviour of a person who pretends to have beliefs or opinions that they do not actually hold. In this poem, we see politicians who call themselves "spokespersons of the people," but their actions show that they have forgotten the people completely. They are more concerned with their own power, their own arguments, and their own victory celebrations than with the real suffering of the masses.

This chapter will break down "A Serious Matter" into small, understandable parts. We will look at how Ofeimun uses simple but powerful images to show the empty promises of politicians, the useless debates they have, and the painful reality of the common people, especially using the powerful figure of a mother returning from a political rally with nothing for her children.

The Opening Lie: Pretending There is No Hunger

The poem begins with a statement that is so shocking and untrue that it immediately grabs our attention and sets the satirical tone:

"We have no need for
the common salt of want and hunger
said the spokespersons of the people"

Let us look closely at these lines. The politicians are called "the spokespersons of the people." This is a title that suggests they are the voice of the masses, the representatives who speak for the poor and the common man. But what is the first thing they say? They claim, "We have no need for the common salt of want and hunger." What does "the common salt of want and hunger" mean? Salt is a basic necessity. It is cheap, common, and found in every kitchen. It is essential for life. By linking it to "want and

hunger," Ofeimun is talking about the most basic, everyday struggles of the common people. "Want" means not having what you need, and "hunger" is the physical pain of not having food. So, the "common salt of want and hunger" is a powerful metaphor for the shared, daily experience of poverty and suffering that millions of ordinary people face.

For the "spokespersons of the people" to say they have "no need" for this is a huge and terrible lie. It means they are pretending that poverty does not exist. They are acting as if the problems of hunger and need are not important or are not even real. This is the heart of their hypocrisy. They claim to represent the people, but they are completely ignoring the people's biggest problem.

The Fantasy World of Politicians: Riding Kites of Ballot Paper

What are these politicians doing instead of addressing hunger? Ofeimun paints a picture of their childish and unrealistic world:

"as they rode kites of ballot paper
to the truth of an ancient wish"

This is a brilliant use of satire through imagery. A kite is a child's toy. It is not a serious object for a grown-up, especially for a leader. It is light, flies in the air, and is

controlled by the wind. By saying they "rode kites," Ofeimun is comparing the politicians to children playing a game. They are not serious about governance. But these are not ordinary kites. They are kites made of "ballot paper." Ballot paper is what people use to vote during elections. This image tells us that the politicians are only interested in the game of winning elections. They use the people's votes—the "ballot paper"—not as a tool for service, but as a toy for their own amusement and ambition. They are "riding" on the votes, enjoying the high feeling of victory, without any thought for the people who gave them that power.

Where are these kites taking them? To "the truth of an ancient wish." This phrase is deeply sarcastic. An "ancient wish" for a politician is probably the wish for power, fame, and wealth. They have achieved their personal, selfish "wish" through the elections. For them, this is the only "truth" that matters. The real truth—the truth of people's hunger—is forgotten. Ofeimun satirizes them by showing that they live in a fantasy land of their own making, a world built on the paper of votes but with no solid foundation in the reality of the people's lives.

The Useless Debate: "Air-Conditioned Arguments"

In the next part of the poem, we are introduced to another group of elites: the lawyers.

"But we must stop these

air-conditioned arguments -
do something -said the people's lawyers
as they stood up and were
carried shoulder high"

The lawyers seem to be saying the right thing. They identify a problem: "air-conditioned arguments." This is another fantastic metaphor from Ofeimun. Think about an air-conditioned room. It is closed off from the outside world. It is cool, comfortable, and separate from the heat, dust, and noise of the street. "Air-conditioned arguments" are therefore debates and discussions that happen in comfortable offices, fancy courtrooms, and closed-door government chambers, far away from the suffering masses.

These arguments are disconnected from reality. The lawyers say, "we must stop these... do something." On the surface, this sounds responsible. They are calling for action instead of just talk. However, Ofeimun immediately exposes their hypocrisy too. What happens the moment they say this? They "stood up and were carried shoulder high." This is a classic image of celebration and hero-worship. The lawyers did not actually do anything. They merely spoke about doing something. Yet, for that mere suggestion, they are treated like heroes and carried on people's shoulders. This shows that even the critics and professionals are part of the same system. They perform a gesture of concern, and they are instantly rewarded with fame and admiration, without having to

produce any real results for the people. Their "action" is just another form of inaction, another performance in the political game.

The Painful Reality: The Mother and the Empty Kitchen

Now, Ofeimun shifts the scene dramatically. He moves from the fantasy world of politicians and the celebrated world of lawyers to the harsh, painful reality of an ordinary citizen. He does this by introducing a character everyone can understand: a mother.

....when my mother came back
from the rally of rallies
the kitchenware welcomed her with blank stares"

This is the most powerful and heartbreaking part of the poem. The "rally of rallies" was probably a huge political gathering. The politicians would have given fiery speeches, making grand promises. The mother, hoping for a better future, attended this rally. She invested her time and energy, believing in the promises of the "spokespersons of the people." But what happens when she returns home? The reality hits her in the face. Her kitchen, the heart of the home, has nothing for her. Ofeimun does not say the kitchen was empty. He uses a more powerful personification. He says "the kitchenware welcomed her with blank stares." "Kitchenware" are her pots, pans, plates, and cups.

These are objects used for cooking and eating. To say they gave her "blank stares" is a beautiful and sad way of saying they were empty. The pots have no food in them. The plates have nothing on them. They look back at her, empty and useless. The word "blank" suggests confusion, emptiness, and a lack of answers. The mother has returned from a rally full of big words, but her home is full of a big, silent emptiness.

The Final Betrayal: The Unanswered Question

The poem ends with the core of the problem, the "serious matter" that the politicians have ignored:

"The spokespersons of the people
did not tell her
where to find the next morsel for her children"

This is the ultimate condemnation of the political class. After all the speeches, the kite-flying, the arguments, and the celebrations, the most basic question of a parent remains unanswered: "How will I feed my children?" A "morsel" is a tiny piece of food. The mother is not asking for a feast; she is asking for the next small bit of food to keep her children alive. The "spokespersons of the people," who claimed to have "no need" for the subject of hunger, have completely failed to address this fundamental need.

This final line drives home Ofeimun's satirical point with immense force. It shows that the entire political process, as he portrays it, is a hollow show. It is a performance

that has no connection to the daily struggle for survival that defines the lives of the very people the politicians claim to represent. The mother's empty kitchen is the true verdict on their leadership.

Conclusion: Ofeimun's Masterful Exposure of Political Hypocrisy

In "A Serious Matter," Odia Ofeimun proves himself to be a sharp and effective satirist of political hypocrisy. He does not need to use complicated words or loud insults. Instead, he uses simple, contrasting images to show the great divide between the powerful and the powerless. He exposes the lie by showing how politicians deny the very existence of poverty ("no need for hunger"). He reveals their fantasy world by comparing them to children playing with kites made of ballot paper, showing they are only interested in the game of winning power. Additionally, he criticizes the useless debate: He talks about "air-conditioned arguments" and lawyers who are celebrated for just talking about action, not for taking any real action. He brings the problem down to a single, relatable story of a mother who comes home from a political rally to an empty kitchen. This makes the abstract problem of political failure feel real and painfule ends with the simple, devastating fact that the politicians did not solve the most basic problem of all: finding food for a hungry child.

Through this poem, Ofeimun holds a mirror to the political class of his time, and sadly, to many politicians today. He shows that their hypocrisy is not just a minor fault; it is a "serious matter" that leads to the suffering of real people. By giving a voice to the silent "blank stares" of an empty kitchen, Odia Ofeimun fulfills his role as a satirist who speaks truth to power, firmly establishing his critique of the political hypocrisy that betrays the people's trust.

The False Saviors

To further strengthen our analysis of Odia Ofeimun's satire against politicians, we will now look at another powerful poem, "The Messiahs." A "messiah" is a savior or a liberator—someone who is sent by God to rescue people from their suffering. In this poem, Ofeimun uses this religious term sarcastically to describe the political leaders who present themselves as the saviors of the people, but who are actually the source of their problems.

The poem is built on a tone of heavy irony. Irony means saying the opposite of what you truly mean, often to highlight a ridiculous situation. The poem repeatedly claims, "They are not doing a bad job," but as we read the descriptions of their "job," we see that they are actually doing a terrible, destructive job. This chapter will break down this ironic poem to show how Ofeimun exposes politicians as false messiahs who

perform empty miracles, lie about their achievements, and force the people to pretend to be happy.

The Ironic Praise: "They are not doing a bad job"

The poem starts and continues with a lying statement:

"They are not doing a bad job
the messiahs
are still riding high
on the fervid winged horses
of their triumphal entry"

The poet begins by saying the leaders are not doing badly. But he immediately shows us a picture that contradicts this. They are "riding high on fervid winged horses." This image makes them look like gods or angels from a storybook, arriving in a grand, triumphant parade. But this is not reality. It is an illusion, a show they put on to make themselves look glorious. The word "fervid" means intense and emotional, suggesting that the people's hope and excitement during elections ("triumphal entry") is what the leaders are using to ride to power. They are not working; they are just enjoying the ride on the people's backs.

Ofeimun then deepens his satire by comparing the politicians' actions to the works of Christ, but in a twisted, empty way.

"The Christs
are still performing miracles
in the market places
heroding the masses with imperatives"

True Christ performed miracles like healing the sick and feeding the hungry. These false "Christs" perform their "miracles" in the "market places." This means their works are for commercial show and public display, not genuine help. The word "heroding" is very clever. King Herod in the Bible was a cruel ruler who killed children. By saying the leaders are "heroding the masses," Ofeimun suggests they are not leading but tyrannizing the people with "imperatives"—commands and orders, not compassion.

The most biting irony comes next:

"feeding the hungry
with 21-gun salutes
for victories that are yet to be won"

This is a masterful piece of satire. How can you feed a hungry person with a "21-gun salute"? A 21-gun salute is a loud, ceremonial firing of guns to honor a very important person, like a head of state. It is not food. It is noise and show. Ofeimun is saying that the politicians are celebrating empty victories with loud ceremonies while the

people starve. They are throwing parties for "victories that are yet to be won," meaning they haven't actually achieved anything real for the people. They are celebrating lies.

In the next section, the poet attacks the false data and propaganda that the government uses to deceive everyone.

"Their harvest reports say
the barns explode
with tubers of plenty..."

A harvest report tells how much food has been grown. The government's reports claim that the barns are so full of yams ("tubers of plenty") that they are exploding. But this is just a report, a paper statement. It is not the reality that the people live in. The poet adds to the absurdity by saying:

"all the trees are watered
with scented alcohol
now they grow faster than they ever did"

This is a ridiculous image. You don't water trees with expensive, "scented alcohol." It is a waste and it would kill the plant. This symbolizes the government's wasteful spending on luxurious, imported things that do not help the economy grow. Their management is not just bad; it is foolish and destructive.

The poet then delivers a simple, powerful line that summarizes the effect of these lies:

"Their harvest reports
manure the earth."

Manure is animal waste used as fertilizer. This is a deep insult. Ofeimun is saying that the government's beautiful harvest reports are not helping the land. Instead, they are like rubbish, like poop, that is polluting the country. Their lies are poisoning the truth and making the situation worse for everyone.

The most painful part of the poem shows how the people are forced to participate in this big lie.

"On horseback
they issue the word: we dance"

The leaders, from their high position ("on horseback"), command that the people must dance. They must show happiness. The people are so poor that when their Sunday clothes wear out and become "rags," they are still forced to "spread palm fronds on the roads" for the leaders' motorcades. Palm fronds are what people spread on the road when Jesus entered Jerusalem, shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes!" The people are forced to treat these corrupt leaders like gods, repeating "blessed are they that come," even though they are bringing suffering, not salvation.

"And we must hire praise-singers,
talking drummers. Be happy"

This is not a suggestion; it is an order: "Be happy." The government even makes the people pay for their own deception—they have to hire the musicians who will sing the praises of their oppressors. The pressure to pretend is immense.

The poem ends with a devastating, sarcastic question:

"And why must we be sad
when the messiahs are with us
to hound us and butt-gun us
into greater tomorrows."

This is the final, bitter irony. The word "hound" means to chase and harass someone, like a dog chasing a rabbit. A "butt-gun" is the blunt end of a rifle used to hit and push people. So, the poet sarcastically asks, "Why should we be sad when our saviors are here to chase us, beat us, and push us with guns towards a 'greater tomorrow'?" This exposes the brutal reality behind the smiling propaganda. The "greater tomorrow" is a

empty slogan, and the method to get there is not through development, but through violence and force.

Together, these poems paint a complete picture. The politicians are false messiahs ("The Messiahs") who make grand promises but are actually disconnected tyrants ("A Serious Matter"). They use propaganda to hide their failure and violence to silence dissent. They create a theater of governance where everyone is forced to act happy while suffering in silence.

CHAPTER FOUR

SATIRE AGAINST THE PRIVILEGED CLASS

In this chapter, we will look at Odia Ofeimun's satire aimed at the privileged and powerful elite in society. The poem we will use is titled "After the News." The title tells us that something has happened, and the news is now spreading. As we read the first line, we find out what that news is: "So he died."

The entire poem is a reaction to the death of a very powerful man. In Nigeria and many parts of Africa, such a powerful, wealthy, and influential person is often called a "Bigman." This "Bigman" is not just rich; he is someone who uses his power and wealth to control others, someone who believes he is above everyone else. He is the peak of the privileged class.

When such a person dies, people usually show respect. They might cry, praise his good works, and talk about his great legacy. But Odia Ofeimun does not do this. Instead, he uses this poem to perform a different kind of task. He takes this moment of death to satirize the "Bigman." He strips away all his power and wealth and shows us that despite all his pride and conquests, he was just a mortal man who had to die like everyone else. This chapter will show how Ofeimun mocks the man's life, his cruel actions, and his empty legacy, proving that in the end, death is the great leveler that exposes the futility of his wicked wealth.

The Mocking Refrain: "So he died. The... The bigman died"

The first thing you notice when you read this poem is the repeating line. It comes back again and again, like a song's chorus:

"So he died. The Mogul. The bigman died"

"So he died. The warlord. The bigman died"

"So he died. The rhino. The bigman died"

"So he died. The bulldozer. The bigman died"

This repeating line is the backbone of the poem's satire. Let's break down why it is so effective. First, the phrase "So he died" is very simple and direct. It does not say "he passed away" or "he left us," which are softer, more respectful phrases. "So he died" is a blunt, factual statement. It cuts through any pretence or ceremony. The poet is presenting the raw, unchangeable fact: this powerful man is dead.

Second, each time the line repeats, Ofeimun uses a different name to describe the man: First, he him "The Mogul": A mogul is a very rich and powerful business person, like an oil magnate or a factory owner. Secondly, he called him "The Warlord"; A warlord is a violent leader who uses an army or thugs to control people through fear.

Thirdly, he calls him "The Rhino": A rhino is a thick-skinned, aggressive animal that charges and destroys things without thinking. And lastly, he calls him "The Bulldozer": A bulldozer is a machine that flattens everything in its path to clear the land.

None of these names are nice. They are not titles of honour. By calling him a "warlord" and a "rhino," Ofeimun is insulting him. He is saying that the man's power was not noble or intelligent; it was brutal, animal-like, and destructive. The repetition of this line, with these insulting names, is like Ofeimun hammering a nail. With each strike, he is nailing down the idea that this man, for all his titles, was just a brutal force, and now that force is gone. He is dead.

A Life of Greed and Cruelty: Ripping the Earth and People Apart

After each refrain, Ofeimun describes the kind of life the "Bigman" lived. He shows us that this man's wealth and power were built on cruelty and destruction. The first verse says his pears were ripened not by sun and water, but by "disdain for his kind." This is a complex but important idea. "Disdain" means a feeling that someone or something is unworthy of your respect. So, Ofeimun is saying that the Bigman's wealth (his ripe pears) grew from his hatred and lack of respect for other human beings. He was "removed from the sun," "distanced from the fragrance of grass." This means he lived in a man-made world of concrete and air conditioning, completely cut off from the simple, beautiful, and

natural things that ordinary people enjoy. He was too busy being rich to appreciate life itself.

He is "snatched from magic reeds and the chafe of flattering wine." "Flattering wine" is wine that is served by people who are praising him falsely to get something from him. His whole life was surrounded by these false friends and flatterers. He is also "denied the gentle rout of woman's hands." This suggests that even love and gentle touch were probably just transactions for him, not real affection. He dies, "deserting his titles, his swaggersticks and his weighted beads." A swaggerstick is a short stick carried by a military officer to show authority. Weighted beads could be expensive, heavy jewellery. Ofeimun points out that he could not take any of these symbols of his power with him when he died. They are now useless.

The Brutal Conquest

This is the core of his criticism. Ofeimun describes how the Bigman built his empire:

"after wining and winning the earth
with bulldozers and hooves of pride-gored gold"

He didn't win the earth through hard work and kindness; he "wined" it, suggesting corruption and parties to get his way. He used "bulldozers"—literally machines that

destroy, and "hooves of pride-gored gold." A hoof is like a horse's foot that stomps on things. "Gored" means stabbed. So his gold (wealth) was like a dangerous animal's hoof that stomped on people, driven by his pride.

"after reaching his gory fingers
into the bowels of rocks and the womb of forests"

This is a very powerful and disgusting image. "Gory" means bloody. "Bowels" are the intestines inside a body. The "womb" is where life begins. Ofeimun is saying the Bigman did not just mine rocks and log trees. He violently ripped them out, like a murderer tearing into the stomach of the earth itself. He was destroying nature, the source of all life, for his own profit.

"after conquering the lagoon and the stock exchange"

He controlled everything—from the natural environment (the lagoon) to the economy (the stock exchange). No part of life was safe from his greedy hands.

The Great Leveler: Death Humiliates the Powerful

Now, Ofeimun delivers his main satirical punch. After listing all the terrible things the Bigman did, he declares:

"So they also die who pull other lives by the roots

to make music from broken skulls"

This means: "So, even people who destroy others for their own pleasure, they die too." The "music from broken skulls" is a horrifying metaphor. It means the Bigman enjoyed his wealth and power even though it was built on the suffering and death of other people (their broken skulls). His beautiful life was a song played on the bones of the poor. Then, Ofeimun uses the most humiliating image possible to describe this powerful man's death:

"So they also cower with tails between their legs and
fart"

This is the ultimate insult. To "cower" means to shrink back in fear. An animal with its "tail between its legs" is scared and defeated. And to "fart" is a crude, undignified, bodily function that everyone does, but nobody talks about. By using this language, Ofeimun is dragging the mighty "Bigman" down to the most animalistic level. He is saying, "You were so great and powerful, but when you faced death, you were just a scared animal, losing control of your own body. You were not a god; you were just a fragile creature."

The Final Irony: He Was Mortal After All

In the final part of the poem, Ofeimun emphasizes the biggest irony of all: the Bigman was just a human being.

"Like all of us (he was like all of us?) the millions
 whom he counted only as fodder for the profit
 motive...
 Like his factory hands who never got a raise..."

The poet asks a sarcastic question: "he was like all of us?" This is ironic because the Bigman spent his whole life acting like he was better than everyone, treating people like "fodder" (food for animals). He didn't give his factory workers a raise because he needed the money for "another bachanal, another carousal..."—which means another wild, drunken party.

"like all mortals (so he was mortal?) who did not hear
 the thud of loot in their abject backyards"

Again, Ofeimun asks sarcastically, "so he was mortal?" He points out that while the poor never heard the "thud of loot" (the sound of stolen wealth landing in their yards), the Bigman, who had all the loot, could not escape the one thing the poor also have: mortality. He died "under the nose of his henchmen, his thugs, his talking drums and his praise singers." All his security, his spies, and the people who sang his praises could not save him from death. They were useless.

The poem ends with a final, powerful statement:

"So he too owed the earth this last prostration

he too owed the earth this last prostration....."

"Prostration" means to lie flat on the ground face-down, in a position of complete surrender or respect. The Bigman spent his life standing tall, looking down on everyone, and trampling the earth. But in death, he finally had to lie down flat. He finally had to show respect to the very earth he had spent his life destroying. Ofeimun repeats the line to make it sound like a final, inescapable judgement. The Bigman "owed" this to the earth. It was a debt he had to pay. All the destruction, all the pain he caused, was finally balanced by this one act: his death and his return to the soil. His "empire" is now left "to the blitz of chance and locust"—meaning it will be destroyed by random events and pests, showing that his legacy is not permanent, but fragile and temporary.

In "After the News," Odia Ofeimun delivers his most powerful satirical blow against the privileged class. With this poem, Ofeimun completes his satirical mission. He has critiqued the clergy, the politicians for their empty promises, and now, the privileged elite for their brutal and futile greed. He proves that no amount of power can save a person from the common human fate, and that a life spent hurting others is a life that ends in shame and emptiness, not glory.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This essay began with a simple but powerful goal: to establish the Nigerian poet Odia Ofeimun as a master satirist. We set out to prove that he uses his poetry not just for beauty, but as a sharp weapon to criticize and expose the serious problems in his society. We argued that he directs this satirical weapon at three of the most powerful groups in any society: the clergy, the politicians, and the privileged elite.

To guide our journey, we used the sociological theory of literature from René Wellek and Austin Warren, which tells us that literature is like a mirror that reflects the society in which it is written. We also used definitions of satire from scholars like David Worcester and M.H. Abrams, who describe satire as a controlled and artistic form of criticism that attacks folly and vice.

Now, after a detailed journey through four chapters and several of his poems, we have reached the end. In this final chapter, we will not introduce any new poems. Instead, we will look back at the path we have travelled. We will gather all the evidence from our analyses and show, without a doubt, how they all come together to prove our main point: that Odia Ofeimun is indeed a brave, insightful, and consummate satirist whose poetry holds a powerful mirror up to the failings of post-colonial Nigerian society.

Let us take a moment to briefly remember the powerful pictures Ofeimun painted for us in each chapter.

In Chapter Two (Satire Against the Clergy), we studied the poem "Paradise for the Aladuras." We saw how Ofeimun criticized religious leaders and their followers for creating a faith based on empty performance and emotional frenzy. He showed us worshippers who were not seeking God, but were trying to escape from their fears and the difficulties of the real world. Their "paradise" was not a place of peace, but a place to hide. He exposed the clergy for promoting a religion of escapism that fails to provide any real moral guidance or solve people's actual problems.

In Chapter Three (Satire Against Political Hypocrisy), we delved into two powerful poems: "A Serious Matter" and "The Messiahs." In "A Serious Matter," we met the politicians who denied the existence of hunger while riding on the votes of the hungry. We felt the pain of the mother who returned from a political rally to an empty kitchen, a powerful symbol of the government's broken promises. In "The Messiahs," we saw politicians presenting themselves as saviors while actually being oppressors. We saw them performing empty "miracles" like celebrating with gun salutes instead of providing food, and forcing the people to dance and sing their praises while suffering in silence. Together, these poems exposed politicians as hypocrites, liars, and false messiahs who are completely disconnected from the suffering of the people they claim to represent.

In Chapter Four (Satire Against the Privileged Elite), we analyzed the poem "After the News." This was a scathing attack on the rich and powerful "Bigman." We saw

how his wealth was built on violence and the destruction of both people and the environment. The poem celebrated his death not with sadness, but with mocking relief, showing that despite all his power, he was just a mortal man who died a humiliating death and could not take his ill-gotten wealth with him. Ofeimun presented death as the great judge that finally humbles the arrogant.

Now, let's look at how Ofeimun achieved all this. What are the common tools and techniques he used across all these poems to make his satire so effective? We can identify four major techniques:

1. The Use of Powerful and Simple Metaphors: Ofeimun has a genius for creating simple images that anyone can understand, but which carry a deep meaning.

- He compared useless worship to a "lame camel."
- He compared the political campaign to riding "kites of ballot paper," making it seem like a childish game.
- He described empty government promises as "air-conditioned arguments."
- He portrayed the greedy elite as having "gory fingers" from tearing apart the earth.

These metaphors make complex criticisms easy to visualize and feel.

2. The Weapon of Irony and Sarcasm: Ofeimun often says the exact opposite of what he means to highlight the absurdity of a situation.

- He repeatedly claimed the politicians were "not doing a bad job" in "The Messiahs" while describing their terrible actions.

- He sarcastically asked if the dying Bigman was "like all of us?" and "mortal?" when the man spent his life acting like a god.

This technique makes the reader actively understand the hypocrisy.

3. Focusing on the Human Cost: Ofeimun's satire is not just abstract. He always brings it down to a human level to show the real impact of these social problems.

- We feel the desperation of the mother in "A Serious Matter" searching for a "morsel" for her children.

- We hear the terrified voice of the worshipper in "Paradise for the Aladuras" crying, "save me from myself."

- We see the broken skulls of the people the Bigman crushed in "After the News."

This makes his criticism emotional and powerful, not just intellectual.

4. Dehumanization of the Powerful: To break down the aura of importance around the powerful, Ofeimun often describes them as less than human.

- The worshippers are called "trolls" and "harpstrings."

- The politician is compared to a "bulldozer" and a "rhino."

- The dying Bigman is shown "cowering" and "farting" like a scared animal.

This technique strips them of their false dignity and reveals their true, often brutal, nature.

After such a long analysis, a reader might ask, "So what? Why does this matter?" The answer is that Ofeimun's work is much more than just criticism. It has a deeper purpose.

He is a Cultural Mirror: Ofeimun's poetry is a perfect example of literature acting as a social mirror. His poems vividly reflect the specific realities of post-colonial Nigeria: the rise of charismatic churches, the failure of political leadership after independence, and the corruption of a new wealthy class. He captures the disappointment, anger, and frustration of a generation that saw the bright promises of independence turn into the dark realities of civil war, corruption, and inequality.

He is a Voice for the Voiceless: Ofeimun uses his platform as a poet to speak for the ordinary people who cannot speak for themselves. He gives a voice to the hungry mother, the exploited factory worker, and the confused worshipper. In doing so, he fulfills the role of the writer in society: to be a witness to truth and a champion for justice.

He is a Defender of Humanity: At its core, Ofeimun's satire is a fight for what it means to be human. He attacks the clergy for promoting a faith that makes people less human (fearful and escapist). He attacks politicians for a governance that dehumanizes the people (treating them as numbers, not humans). He attacks the elite for a greed that destroys humanity (in themselves and their victims). His work is a passionate call for a society built on genuine spirituality, true leadership, and shared humanity.

In the very beginning, we set out to prove that Odia Ofeimun is a consummate satirist. The word "consummate" means complete, perfect, and of the highest skill. After our long and detailed journey through his poetry, we can now confidently say that he has earned this title. He is a brave satirist because he does not shy away from criticizing the most powerful and sacred institutions in society.

He is a skilled satirist because he uses a powerful toolbox of metaphors, irony, and imagery to make his criticism sharp, memorable, and effective. He is a relevant satirist because the issues he wrote about decades ago—religious hypocrisy, political corruption, and economic inequality—are still painfully relevant in Nigeria and many parts of the world today.

Through his powerful collection *The Poet Lied*, Odia Ofeimun has left us with a lasting legacy. He is not a poet who lied; he is a poet who told the painful truth. He held up a clear, unflinching mirror to his society and forced it to look at its own reflection. He did not just describe the problems; he analyzed, criticized, and mocked them with the controlled anger and sharp wit of a true satirical artist.

To conclude, this project has successfully shown that Odia Ofeimun uses his poetry as a mighty satirical sword, and with it, he strikes fiercely and accurately at the clergy, the political class, and the privileged elite, establishing himself forever as a courageous and consummate voice in African literature.

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