Satire as a Social Art
The Comparative Study of Ola Rotimi’s Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again and Osofisan’s Midnight Hotel

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ABSTRACT
This essay aims at exploring satire as a social art. The satirist, like other artists uses his creative work to entertain and instruct his audience. Instruction in this context is in the form of criticism which aims at restoring order in the society.

Rotimi’s Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again and Osofisan’s Midnight Hotel will be the focus of this essay, although there would be cross references to other writers who have used satire to mock or deride societal ills with the main purpose of sanitizing it. The two Nigerian playwrights have written a great deal of works whose thematic preoccupations are of tremendous literary and social significance. They have contributed immensely to the development of African literature especially in the areas of African drama and theatre and a lot of critical attention has been paid to their works by African and European critics. However, little is said about those playwrights as great satirist in Nigeria. In other words their satric plays have been given scant attention thereby relegating them to the background. I have deliberately chosen the two plays mentioned above, in order to examine the satric themes treated by Rotimi and Osofisan in order to highlight the social perception involved in those plays.

This work therefore concerns itself with the etymology of satire, its types as well as the stylistic analysis. Finally, there is a comparative analysis of the two plays and their stylistic approach which is followed by a conclusion.

INTRODUCTION
The artist undoubtedly remains a socio, political force in any social formation. Apart from playing the role of an entertainer, the artist uses his artistic creation to instill truth into people’s consciousness in any given age. It is also true that when anomalies and contradictions become too glaring in any society the literary artist feels called upon to rectify such anomalies found in the society using art as a weapon.

The artist’s mode of assessing an existing socio-political system, the people’s attitude etc. in a society,
is satire – a form of writing which makes fun of the evil or foolish behaviour of people, institutions or society in general. The literary artist is known to have used satire from the beginning of literary history. The Greeks and the Romans extensively employed it as a weapon of attack on their respective societies as far back as the 7th century B.C. The poet Archilochnus for example is said to be the first Greek literary artist during this period. Among the ancient Romans, there were such names as Horace, Juvenal, etc., whose satiric works and ideas have continued to shape and influence the minds of contemporary satirists.

Apart from the Greeks and Romans, we also had great writers in the middle ages who were using their writings in criticizing the actions of men and the shortcomings in the society as a whole, a good example is Chaucer. From the 18th century to the present, such names as Pope, Spencer, Swift, Soyinka and Armah readily come to mind when we consider artists who have used their creative works to expose the ills in their respective societies.

Satiric usages are not confined to contemporary writers alone. In traditional African societies, the people used satire to attack people who show negative tendencies in their characters. Societies as a whole ridiculed people through songs, proverbs, folk tales and other verbal arts.

Rotimi, Osofisan and other writers are using satire as an artistic mode of expressing the social reality in contemporary Nigeria. The Nigerian society for them is obviously a chaotic one where dreams and aspirations of people remain unrealized. They have all seen with shock and unbelief the endemic corruption, moral decay and political morass, that have become part and parcel of the society. Their main aim in writing these satiric plays therefore, is to attack the aforementioned ills in the society. They have committed themselves as writers who are to restore order in the society which is so much engulfed in a mirage of socio-political, cultural and economic problems.

DEFINITION OF SATIRE

There is no generally accepted definition of satire. It signifies at one level, a kind of literature and on the other, a satire or tone which clearly expresses itself in many literary genres. Abraham (1981:167) however defines satire as:

…the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it, an attitude of amusement, contempt, indignation or scorn. It differs from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself, while satire derides, that is, it uses laughter as a weapon and against a butt existing outside the work itself.

Moody on his part defines a satire as “any form or piece of writing which is deliberately and humorously critical in intention” (Moody 1968:208) while Barnet and Co. (1976:2669) contend that “satire is a work ridiculing aspects of human behaviour and seeking to arouse in the audience contempt for its object”. In the same vein Charles E. May says that Satire is a work which ridicules or holds up to scorn the vices, crimes and absurdities of men and individuals, of class and organizations of societies and civilizations.

The above definitions of “Satire” are by no means exhaustive since different writers continue to define it the way it suits their purpose. Vaughn for example defines satire by saying:

In general a mode of writing that utilizes wit and humour to criticize or ridicule human institutions and behaviour with a view to correction or improvement (Jack, A. Vaughn 1935:174).

On the whole however, in terms of its semantic implication, there is no generally accepted and all-embracing definition of “Satire.” Each writer and critic sees and defines it the way that suits his mind.

Etymologically, the word “satire” has its root in Latin, it was initially called “Satirca.” Later it became “Satura” meaning ‘medley’ or mixture. According to literary history, satirical usages were part and parcel of folk culture in many ancient communities in which the art flourished, especially in Greek culture where it was said that satirical usages were specifically located in Grecian fertility rites.

Literary history also indicates that it was in Greece (7th century B.C.) that satire recorded its first victim. The satirist was Archilochnus and his targets were his defaulting bride to be and his prospective father-in-law.

The satirist, from time immemorial has seen the world as the battle field for the continuing war between good and evil. Whether he posed as a down to earth realist speaking to his deaf fellows or as a divine despairing of man and society, he views the world as chaotic and self destructive. His goal on one level is to attack evil, and on the other, to restore order. His traditional targets have been topical and immediate, his solutions symbolic and far reaching. It is a fact that satirists who attack vulgarity and destructive pride are not overly tolerant of such weaknesses in man and have sought to destroy rather than understand them. The satirist at times evokes and takes part in laughter – the laughter being simultaneously a joy and a weapon against evil. A typical satirist is a proud, fiery, intolerant and irascible personality, and the degree of indignation he displays in respect of societal ills and the vulgarity of many vary with man and the satiric convention of his time.

All said, the satirist exposes vice and folly both in man as well as in society as a whole. In doing so, he can effectively use a number of literary and rhetoric devices, which range from dramatic incidents, beast fables, sarcasm, irony, mockery or anything that would make the object of attack disgusting, distasteful or ridiculous.

For some people, satire has some therapeutic qualities. Bernard Shaw for instance, in a statement
lends credence to the therapeutic nature of satire. Shaw says (culled from Barnet and Co. 1972:669):

“If I make you to laugh at yourself remember.
That my business as a classical writer of comedy Is
to chasten morals with ridicule, and if I sometimes
make you feel like a fool, remember. That I have by
the same action cured your folly.

There are two approaches to satire, named from
their classical practitioners. Horacian satire which
is gentle, smiling and fairly sympathetic and Juvena-
lian satire biting, angry and bitterly contemptuous
of corruption.

Critics have categorized satire into two: Direct
and Informal or Indirect Satire. In the formal satire
according to M. H. Abrams, the satiric voice speaks
out in the first person, using “I” in his description of
both the Horacian and Junenalian satires. Roland
Paul, asserts that Horace’s work is inhabited by
fools whose folly are signified in that they bring
punishment down upon their own heads. For that of
Juvenal, he maintains, is inhabited by Knaves and
Crooks whose knavery consists in the damage they
do to others.

In opposition to the harshness of Juvenal,
Horace feels that the satiric tone should be less harsh.
He chooses mild mockery and playful wit as a means
to an end. He says:

Although I portray examples of folly, I am not a
prosecutor and I do not like to give pain, if I laugh at
the nonsense I see about me, I am not motivated by
malice (New Encyclopedia Britannica vol. 23, 5th ed.
1985:182)

The satiric verse he says should reflect the
attitude. It should be easy and unpretentious, sharp
when necessary, but flexible enough to vary from
gay to grave. The nature of the satirist as projected
by Horace is that of an urban man of the world,
concerned about folly which he sees everywhere,
but not moved by rage but by laughter. Roman
Seldom writes approvingly in support of Horatian
satire by saying:

Horace’s satires are full of self revelations, self
scrutiny and self irony. He does not pretend himself
as a remote and self righteous preacher, but rather
as a familiar and fallible. (Roman Seldons 1978:16).

In Juvenal satire however, the character of the
speaker is that of a serious moralist who uses
dignified and public style of utterance to decry
modes of vice and error which are no less dangerous
because they are ridiculous, and who undertake to
evoke contempt, moral indignation and hatred at the
aberration of men. Again while Horace’s benign
and undogmatic satire is founded upon a sense of
achieved social order and personal satisfaction,
one can suggest that Juvenal’s indignant and
authoritarian satire is based upon a sense of social
disorder and personal dissatisfaction.

SATIRE AS A SOCIAL ART

Satire – “the art of laughter with knives” is
certainly a social art, because the satirist mocks,
attacks and ridicules actions of men and societal ills
in order to sanitize society. This art form has been
used by artists for a long time. Even in traditional
societies, people often use proverbs and folktales, to
ridicule and attack unwholesome attitudes of men
and society as a whole.

Let us digress a bit, to examine some creative
works both in prose, poetry and drama in which the
writers have employed satire as a weapon to ridicule
and attack ideas and people’s ways of life and
societies. Our foray in literary works will span
European and African Literatures. In European
literature for example, Aristophanes’ “The Birds;
Moliere’s The Misanthrope (a play) Shaw’s Arms
and the Man (a play), Chaucer’s The Cantabury
Tale, (a collection of narrative poems) Jonathan
Swifts Gulliver’s Travel (a novel), are creative
works which are satiric in tone and intention. In
African literature, Ayikwei Armah’s The Beautiful
Ones are not yet born (prose), Mongo Betis’ The
Poor Christ of Bemba (prose), Fedinand Oyono’s
The House Boy (prose), Soyinka’s Trials of Brother
Jero, and The Lion and the Jewel (all plays),
Rotimi’s Holding Talks (a play) are satiric in one
form or another.

SATIRE IN ROTIMI’S OUR HUSBAND HAS GONE MAD AGAIN AND OSOFIN’S MID-
NIGHT HOTEL

The angle from which reality is perceived varies
from one writer to another. The literary artist may be
so disenchanted by the contradictions in a society
that he may use art as an instrument to recon-
struct, readjust and rectify the anomalies in the
society. The literary artist might show his dis-
pleasure with society by becoming a ‘rebel’ using
art as an instrument for effecting social change. A
writer can as well criticize the mannerisms and
idiosyncracies of men which he feels are not in
conformity with the ethics of civilized behaviour.
More than anything else, the artist can use satire as
a weapon.

When we talk of satire, it is clear that each
age produces its own abuse and its own corrective
satire. Generally, the most angry satire is that
which is directed against individuals and groups
whose conduct shows a marked departure from the
norms of the society. In the Middle Ages, for
instance, some of the targets of satiric attacks
were the monks and friars who failed to uphold
the ideals of poverty, obedience and humanitarian
services.
Let’s now examine the satiric themes explored in *Our husband* and *Mid Night Hotel*. Ola Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* falls under the Horacian tradition of satire, because Rotimi, though critical of the ills in the Nigerian society, is not harsh in condemning them. It is a comic or mild satire because the events characterized and the actions of some of the characters in the play make us laugh. Individuals, institutions and the society as a whole are ridiculed. However, the major object or subject of attack and derision in the play is Lejoka-Brown (the hero). In making fun of his hero, Rotimi is indirectly mocking the Nigerian society as a whole.

The playwright lampoons his hero’s idea about politics. In the discussion between Lejoka-Brown and Okonkwo, the former has this to say why he takes to politics:

> Are you there…? Politics is the thing, no in Nigeria mate, you want to be famous? Politics. You want to chop life? No, no… you want to chop a big slice of the national cake? Na politics (*Our Husband*, p. 4).

Lejoka-Brown’s motive in joining politics is not dictated by his sense of patriotism and service but he sees politics as a means to an end. He is certainly myopic, ideologically barren and too ridiculous to be a leader of nation. In exposing Lejoka-Brown’s motive, Rotimi is subtly indicting the decadent Nigerian political activist. By making jest of Lejoka-Brown, Rotimi is indirectly attacking our greedy, selfish and pleasure seeking leaders in Nigerian society. Hear Lejoka-Brown:

> It is a war, politics is war. Ooo I am not taking no chance this time I took things slow and easy and what happened? I lost a bye election to a small crab. (*Our Husband*, p. 7)

Certainly, Lejokja-Brown’s statement evokes laughter in us. Yet, it goes to show how crude and ruthless he is. If Lejoka-Brown is taken as a symbolic representation of Nigerian leaders, one can then say that the playwright is criticizing Nigerian leader’s use of brute force to achieve political ambitions.

Lejoka-Brown’s surprise and attack campaign strategy elicits the playwright’s mockery. Although Lejoka rigorously explained to his party members the nature of his military strategy, he only succeeded in dramatizing his hollow mentality. He says:

> Gentlemen, our election campaign plan must follow a platform of military strategy known as surprise and attack…(*Our Husband*, p. 50)

From Lejoka’s campaign plan, he exposes the fact that he is incredibly ridiculous. Rotimi portrays him as a man who fails to understand the difference between a politician and a soldier.

Polygamy – a system of marriage in Nigeria did not escape Rotimi’s ridicule. The playwright dramatizes the incessant quarrels and arguments between Sikira and her co-wife Liza, live a dog and cat’s life, constantly fighting one another. Sikira and Liza’s relationship is that of fear and mutual suspicion. Sikira fears that Liza being more educated than herself would make the latter more domineering and overbearing than herself. In order to forestall such a situation, Sikira picks quarrel with Liza at the least provocation. Lejoka-Brown’s household is in reality a fictional representation of what actually happens in most polygamous families. In directing his satire at such a home, Rotimi is indirectly cautioning prospective polygamists of the consequences of such a marriage.

**SATIRE IN FEMI OSOFISAN’S MIDNIGHT HOTEL**

Osofisan is a playwright critical of a Plethora of social vices in contemporary Nigeria. *Midnight Hotel* is a work of satire which concerns corruption and decadent political culture. It questions the credibility of our law makers and touches on political intolerance and religious charlatans in the society. The prevailing immorality, hypocrisy and flirtatious tendencies of highly placed persons are aspects of the national psyche which he subjects to criticism. Femi Osofisan is of the view that nepotism, corruption and favouritism have gotten deep into our political system.

The point of corruption is driven home when Awero, the only female Member of Parliament decides to take Pastor Suuru to a hotel so that she could “sample” him before he is given a contract since, according to her; male MPS do this to the opposite sex. But when Suuru does not compromise with her she says:

> For Christ’s sake, what’s wrong with you? I’m telling you its regular practice in parliament. All the male MPS are doing it even to their own nieces and cousins: every one in our contracts and award committee is taking some member of the opposite sex somewhere or the other before jobs are given out. They call it “sampling” the goods… (*Midnight Hotel*, p. 13.)

In response to Suuru’s question Awero says,

> Why not? Once you cooperate and I sample… once you stop making a fool of yourself: and not only Abuja the new capital, I assure you. Depending on you, your company can bag ten, fifteen contracts in a week: our committee has far ranging powers over contracts from Aladja to Ajaokuta, to Warri to Apapa you name It (*Midnight Hotel*, p. 19).

The picture painted reveals that our leaders are politically myopic ideologically visionless and morally bankrupt. For Osofisan, Nigerian leaders subordinate the common man’s welfare to their selfish; avaricious and hedonistic tendencies.
Apart from his attack on the political system and its operators, Osofisan also criticizes political intolerance and victimization of political opponents. Political opponents in Nigeria are perceived as enemies. The government in power victimizes members of the opposition and denies their communities basic amenities.

Victimisation in Nigeria is forcefully demonstrated in *Midnight Hotel* when the headmaster (Alatise) who also lost the governorship election as well as his school to the winning party. This led to Alatise’s impoverishment and his subsequent search for refuge with his daughter in Lagos, listen to Alatise as he narrates his ugly experience to Awero:

> You know, since the new government came in, it’s been hell for me. They took over my school, my land and here I am, jobless, homeless, and hungry. (*Midnight Hotel*, p. 34).

Femi Osofisan criticizes and condemns this “winner take all” syndrome, in Nigeria’s political system which negates the democratic principle. For him, winners should be magnanimous in victory, while losers should accept defeat and work in partnership with the winner in order to ensure a harmonious co-existence in the society.

Osofisan’s search light in the paly is also directed at prostitution, another social malady. Immorality and sexual perversion is another subject of attack because of its effect on our national psyche. Although he is quite critical of prostitution among the women in the society, Osofisan attributes the persistence of prostitution to people’s avarice and desire to get money at all cost.

The playwright was unrelenting in his attack on religious leaders’ whom he regards as charlatans and hypocrites. In *Midnight Hotel*, Osofisan takes a swipe at these religious leader’s clandestine activities, their moral filth, their deceitful pronouncements which run counter to their divine calling. The character that embodies this negative aspect of the men of God is Pastor Suuru who shamelessly allows himself to be “sampled” in a hotel by Awero. Suuru is also a liar having falsely claimed to have been robbed by armed robbers. Osofisan therefore criticizes religious leaders for their failings and castigates them for misleading their followers.

Commercialisation of chieftaincy titles in communities did not escape Osofisan’s criticism and denigration. In traditional Nigerian society’s chieftaincy titles were conferred on people of proven integrity. It was not for sale as is the case nowadays. Presently, fraudster and the so-called philanthropists who have money and the wherewithal to “buy” the title. This has resulted in the bastardization and commercialization of traditional institutions in Nigeria. This situation is driven home as Osofisan ‘tells’ (reveals) how one Junoh is made an Asiwaju of Ifoko for his humanitarian services. Junoh sells his belongings to earn that chieftaincy title. What a shame.

On the whole, Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and Osofisan’s *Midnight Hotel* are satirical works which explored situations and incidents that make us laugh. The playwrights in one form or another ridicule Nigeria’s political culture, religious leaders, their leadership styles, and other social vices.

Although both laugh at and also make us laugh at society’s failings, the laughter for them is a means to an end not an end in itself.

By attacking and mocking the Nigerian society, Rotimi and Osofisan are using their artistic creation to bring about social change.

**COMPARATIVE STUDY AND ANALYSIS OF ROTIMI’S *OUR HUSBAND HAS GONE MAD AGAIN* AND OSOFISAN’S *MIDNIGHT HOTEL***

Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and Osofisan’s *MidNight Hotel* share a lot of things in common in terms of the satiric mode explored in them as well as the style and characterization.

First, the two plays under consideration fall under the Horacian tradition vis-à-vis their satiric vision, because the two playwrights used mild mockery to deride and ridicule the ills in the society. The reader is not meant to hate the characters who display human failings. The idiotic and infantile attitude of Lejoka-Brown, for example, merely evoke laughter in us, so does the naive personality of Awero. The personality of Liza, despite her excessive xenomania, does not arouse contempt in the reader. Suuru’s pretentious and hypocritical nature only makes him a funny character, but not a detestable person. Both playwrights do not poison the minds of the readers towards the characters and situations dramatized in the works, rather the reader is made to see these characters as mere human beings who are imperfect and liable to err.

Secondly, the stylistic features of the two plays are also similar from the point of view of the lexical items; both playwrights have used more of simple words as opposed to complex and difficult ones. They equally use Yoruba, Arabic and Pidging expressions in their respective works. Paralinguistic devices such as songs and proverbs also feature prominently in the two plays under review. The overall purpose of such a style is to domesticate the medium of communication to give it a Nigerian or African look.

There is also a great element of verisimilitude in the two plays as far as characterization is concerned. The characters in the plays represent either a class or social group in the country. For instance, there are characters whose names suggest that they are either from the Northern, Eastern or Western part of the country. This method of characterization gives the plays a national outlook in terms of their thematic preoccupations. Apart from this, the two major religions in the country -
Christianity and Islam - are also represented in the plays through the characters. Lejoka-Brown, Mustapha, Sikira, mama R.Ashida etc, all are Muslims in Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, while Liza, Okonkwo, are all Christians. In *Midnight Hotel*, Suuru is a Christian, while Asibong is a Muslim. By having both Christians and Muslim characters in their respective plays, both writers are indirectly addressing another fundamental issue in the society – the need for religious tolerance amongst the various segments of society.

Despite these similarities identified in the plays, there are still differences since no two writers can write the same way, using the same style, the same method and characterization.

First, the style. Although both Ola Rotimi and Osofisan used simple words, Yoruba, Arabic and pidgin expressions, one notices that Osofisan’s diction as opposed to Rotimi’s, is more official, thus making him appear pedantic. This could be largely due to his ideological inclination as a Marxist. The Marxist scholar is at times seen to be more pedantic in terms of his style of writing. In his satiric play, *The Chaltering and the Song* in which he attacks the Nigerian society as he does in *Midnight Hotel*, that pedantic nature of his style is noticeable. The diction in this particular play is turgid and dense, thus hindering the fluidity of communication in the work.

The use of songs and proverbs in both plays marks another point of difference in the two works under review. In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* the songs are rendered by several characters and not by a single individual or group as is the case with Osofisan’s *Midnight Hotel*. The same goes for the proverbs. Before the play starts we meet the supporters of N.L.P party singing and going about with banners bearing all kinds of slogans. When the play actually starts, we encounter Lejoka-Brown singing a military song. We also see Sikira singing too, when Liza tells her that she (Liza) married Lejoka-Brown before any other person in the household. Several characters are also seen using proverbs in the play. Osagie, Mustapha, Ajanaku, are all characters who use proverbs to express their views in the play. But the situation is different in Osofisan’s play where songs are only rendered by the song master and his group. This method reminds us of the chorus in Greek drama in which the chorus usually commented on what was happening to important people in the play or commented on the happenings in the society. Osofisan’s use of proverbs in this play is also unique in that it is Alatise who is found to be using them. This method appears to be unusual when viewed against the back-ground of how proverbs are used in the society. Proverbs are not used only by a single person, or by a group of individuals alone in any society, neither could a single individual claim the invention of any in the society. However, in making just a character to be using proverbs in the play, Osofisan seems to imply that proverbs could only be used more effectively by a single individual in a society. Such a position is wrong and contentious. In this regard, Rotimi’s use of proverbs in the play is more effective, more acceptable, and more natural as opposed to Osofisan’s method.

Another noticeable difference in style is in the use of language, especially the pidgin English. It appears that Rotimi has a fuller understanding of the pidgin language in terms of its grammar, spelling, syntax and semantic, much more than Osofisan. The latter does not quite master the craft of its use. This is evident in many of the instances in his play in which he attempts to use pidgin as a medium of communication. Hear Bicycles statement in this instance:

> Ah, you be good man, sir! But na true talk. Except oh. Yes, of course, we get one room, one big room if you go manage. (Midnight Hotel, p. 30)

The above statement does not clearly reflect the way pidgin is spoken in our society, because expressions such as ‘of course’, as used above mostly feature in formal English and not in pidgin. Consider another statement below:

> You see, no be say the room bad, he just no get Light, dass all, evenself, Chief Junoh tell us say the Obi of Echeta Amula na here he stay las week wit him harem when he come Lagos. And he get two toilets self. Come look (p. 31)

When the above statements are considered, it becomes clear that Osofisan does not fully grasp the grammar of pidgin language as Rotimi does. First, his use of ‘the’ in the above statement is ambiguous, because there is no difference between the ‘he’ used in the first line of quotation and the ‘he’ found in the second to the last line. The intended meaning in the above statement becomes unclear as a result of faulty use of the word. Secondly the phrase ‘evenself’ as used above is unacceptable as far as pidgin language grammar is concerned. The letter ‘L’ should be dropped from “self” to make the phrase read “even self”. The use of pidgin in the play is seen in the way Osofisan uses the article ‘the’. In pidgin English the definite article ‘the’ is normally spelt ‘di’. An instance of this misuse of pidgin expression and words in standard English is found in the third line of this statement cited above. Osofisan erroneously spelt the definite article in pidgin English ‘di’ as ‘the’ as if he was writing the above statement in Standard English.

Lets now compare Ajanaku’s statement in Rotimi’s *Our Husband* to those we have seen in Osofisan’s play to see the logic in our argument.

Ehn Agbarikaka man say: di cow wey no get tail for nyash, na God na him de help am drive fly commot. No more no less. Ehn… me I no sabi grammar o, me and book no be one mama – one papa but God help me, I know di worl dey turn and me too sabi turn am, gaan so when I talk, I know wetin I dey talk. (Rotimi: 1977:66)
Rotimi’s control of Pidgin language in the play as we have seen in the above example, and also in other situations in the play is much higher than Osofisan’s. Rotimi is more fluent than Osofisan. He does not mix formal and rare English words with Pidgin as the medium of communication. This certainly makes his more sublime, majestic, fluid and graceful against Osofisan’s clumsy and unusual usage.

Rotimi’s Our Husband And Osofisan’s Midnight Hotel also very in their structures. Our Husband is divided into two Acts. Act 1 is further subdivided into five scenes. Scenes I, II, III and V take place in Lejoka’s house, while scene IV takes place in Lagos International Airport. Act Two (2) is divided into six scenes, scenes I, III, IV and IV take place in Lejoka’s house, while scenes II and V takes place in the Conference Hall of the National Liberation Party. All the incidents in the play take several days.

On the other hand, Osofisan’s play is not divided into Acts and Scenes. The play merely commenced after the manager of the hotel had given a brief history of the hotel. Apart from this, all the incidents in the play take place in one location – the hotel. Thirdly, in terms of its duration Midnight Hotel does not exceed twenty-four hours vis-à-vis the incidents dramatized in it.

Besides, the style and structure where the two works have been found to be at variance, we could also see differences in respect of their mode of characterization. This is seen in the nature of the characters portrayed in the two plays. Rotimi’s characters are more dynamic, more surprising and exciting against Osofisan’s static characters. Rotimi’s characters develop as the story unfolds itself. But this is not the case with Osofisan’s characters. For example, Rotimi hero (Lekoja) is presented as an autocratic, ill mannered and erratic personality at the beginning of the play. He is also portrayed as an unrealistic and idiotic character in terms of his political ambition. But at the end of the play, we see him as a slightly realistic and mature individual when he realizes that he could not change the decision of the party members who are determined to reject his leadership. He tells Liza that he would quit politics. Liza Sikira and Mama Rashida undergo some changes as well. Liza who initially treated African values with scorn changes her attitude as the play progresses. She becomes even more tolerant of Lejoka’s bossy and over-bearing nature and surprisingly decides to remain with him when she realizes that he has been rejected by his friends and his other wives as well. The bellicose, aggressive, and insulting attitude of Sikira also give way to a more mature, tolerant and disciplined one towards the end of the play. Sikira who at first appears saucy and indecorous surprises every one by becoming the leader of the party, due to her changed character.

On the other hand, Osofisan’s characters are static. Awero never changed in her attitude, actions and ways. Suuru remains the hypocrite he was till the end of the play. Alatise never remained the patient and enduring personality throughout the duration of the play. We do not notice psychological, intellectual or moral changes in Osofisan’s characters. They lack that vitality and vibrancy which make Rotimi’s characters more exciting, more captivating and more interesting.

Babafemi Osofisan belongs to a new class of Nigerian writers that addresses itself to the totality of the contemporary Nigerian situation. According to Essiet Imo Ben, Osofisan’s social perceptions are imbued with the thoughts, rhythms and view-points of the broad mass of the people. As a Marxist, Osofisan’s dramatic sensibility belongs to a formidable, ardent and vocal group of radical writers and critics who have surfaced in the Nigerian literary scene. In their works they question the entire gamut of the socio-economic status in the society and further probe into the forces of attrition and malaise that circumscribe the lives of the ordinary people to an endless life of misery and disillusionment. In his drama, Osofisan clearly displays his belief in literature as “a catalytic element in society’s strategies of being” (Osofisan 1973:1731).

On the other hand, Rotimi is a liberal reformist as far as his philosophy of social change is concerned. A reformer does not call for a revolution to effect changes in the society, instead, he may agitate for a gradual overthrowing of the existing socio-political and economic system if there are obvious cases of contradiction. The above philosophy characterizes his play Our Husband... Rotimi does not at any point in the play call for a radical change in the society. He locates and anchors the enormous problems in the society in our inability to produce dynamic leaders.

The peaceful way of changing the status quo in the society, whether political, social etc., is seen in a manner Lejoka was removed as the leader of NLF party and in his place Sikira was chosen. Consensus and dialogue are used by the people to settle their problems. But this is not the case with Osofisan’s characters. They usually revolt, or call for revolution in the society to bring about change in the existing socio-political realities. In his political drama If... this liberal reformist ideology is extensively explored by Rotimi. Based on the incidents dramatized, and the statements made by the characters in the play, Rotimi seems to say that a common man can bring about positive change in the society, if the ballot box can be effectively used.

From our discussion of Rotimi and Osofisan’s plays, it is clear that the two plays-Our Husband and Midnight Hotel — share certain things in common and also vary in some areas as well. In terms of style, characterization and satiric vision, explored in them, the two plays could be said to be similar in structure. They are diametrically opposed to each other in the method they employed to criticize social problems. The same could be said
about the playwright’s vision of social change. While Rotimi desires a gradual social change, Osofisan believes in drastic radical and revolutionary changes in the society.

CONCLUSION

Satire as a vehicle for literary expression is a social art. It concerns itself with attacking the ills in society, in order to sanitise it. The use of satire as an artistic weapon is an age-old phenomenon, because the ancient Greeks employed it in deriding unwholesome tendencies in humans. In the Roman Empire also writers like Virgil, Horace, Juvenal and others employed it as a medium of satiric attack on the emperor’s excesses. People in traditional societies use folktale songs proverbs and verbal art to comment and ridicule human failings and also to attack prevalent social vices.

Our Husband… and Midnight Hotel as works of satire are of great socio-political relevance for the playwrights carefully recorded Nigeria’s societal problems in one form or another. The two plays could be seen as “problem plays” because both writers graphically explored the leadership and other problems confronting the nation. Both Rotimi and Osofisan are certainly uneasy about the endemic problems of corruption, immorality, hypocrisy, political violence etc, which have become an integral part of our existence. As writers of imaginative literature, art becomes a tool with which they sought to restore normalcy in a society that is apparently disintegrating everyday.

Our Husband… and Midnight Hotel are successful works of satire in the Horacian tradition, through the deliberate portrayal of farcical, naïve, idiotic and sometimes erratic personalities, in making us laugh not only at those ridiculous personalities, but also at their actions, deeds, ideas as well as the society which they personify. Laughter is not only a feature of the Horacian satire, but also a means to an end. In this regard Rotimi and Osofisan could be said to have succeeded in exposing the idiocy, ignorance, and naivety of our leaders, in order to ridicule them.

Secondly, the two works could be seen as artistic successes because with the simplicity of the overall style, the playwrights are able to convey the message to the reader with ease.

In conclusion, we are reminded of memorable quotes, which say, “many a truth is told in jest” Rotimi and Osofisan have told us a bitter, but avoidable truth about ourselves and about our social, political, economic and cultural problems.

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