

Love as a Tool of Change between Tradition and Modernism: A Case Study of Femi Osofisan's *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*

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Abstract

Traditionally, Love is as old as man. Its practice is given the very sacrosanct it deserves within the various African societal set up. The various norms, values, ethics of the African societies cannot be overemphasized. They form the basic guiding principles in the daily dealings of an ordinary African man. The advent of civilization these days has partially (if not totally) eroded the values of traditional beliefs in African setting. This paper reveals the clash of interest between traditional beliefs and the modern influences on Love. It could be seen that Love transcends any belief be it traditional or modern while the influence of modernity (civilization) on Love affairs overrides the tenacity of the old (ancient) order.

Keywords: Love, Society, Principles, Civilization, Belief, Influence

1. Introduction

Change, according to the BBC English Dictionary (1992) is defined as the replacement of something with a new one or a different one entirely. Hellen Fisher (2004) sees Love as:

“part of the survival instinct, a function to keep human beings together against menaces and to facilitate the continuation of the species”.

The word “Love” can have a variety of related but distinct meanings in different contexts. Fisher (2004) being a leading expert in the topic of love, divides the experience of love into three partly overlapping stages: lust, attraction and attachment.

She sees lust as the feeling of sexual desire; romantic attraction determines what partners mates find attractive and pursue, conserving time and energy by choosing; and attachment involves sharing a home, parental duties mutual defence, and in humans involves feelings of safety and security.

Fronm (2000) a psychologist in his book, *The Art of Loving* says:

Love is not merely a feeling but is also actions, and that in fact, the ‘feeling’ of love is superficial in comparison to ones committed to love via a series of living actions over time.

Ojuwuro (2008) opines that what many people call love today is neither agape nor philos. He is of the view that young ones get involved in relationships under whatever guise; soon sex becomes their ultimate goal. It could be seen that some manage to swim through this pool of sexual sin into marriage; some others break up to start new sinful life with someone else and the trend continues. In a nutshell, love, in its various forms acts as a major facilitator of interpersonal relationships and, owing to its importance, is one of the most common themes in the creative arts.

1.1. Osofisan's Drama in Relation to Brechtian Theatre

Osofisan's theatre has a lot to share in relation to Bertolt Brecht. Brecht aligns himself with some ancient theatrical conventions. Before Brecht's writings started seeing the light of the day, theatre performance was in the naturalistic form, thus creating “theatre of illusion”. He kicked against the theatre of illusion. Also, Osofisan takes after Brecht jettison “theatre of illusion” showing his dislike for the orthodox theatre.

2. Textual Analysis of the Topic

The drama piece, *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage* according to the playwright says that it is a response to the 1970s Biafran-Nigerian war, he sees it as a plea for forgiveness, and for reconciliation; and particularly for a renewal among the young. The drama piece succinctly reveals the influence of civilization over the traditional beliefs and ways of life of the African people particularly Nigerians. The two major characters in the play Akanbi and Olabisi – the “lovebirds”, shun all objections and oppositions to their relationship until they succeed, eventually, in quelling the enmity between the two warring families.

It should be recalled that within the African setting, people have wide beliefs in tradition. Most dealings are conducted or done in traditional forms. Akanbi and Olabisi had been in love dated back to when they were still in the village before they left for Lagos. They returned home to find ways of cementing their love through the consents of their parents. Akanbi first told Olabisi his encounter with his uncle, Adigun and his disposition towards their marriage.

Akanbi: We left Lagos yesterday, and returned here, where we were born, only for one purpose which

is to seek our parents' consent for our marriage I wish now we'd never come. Yesterday was our last meeting point. For there, in Lagos, we left happiness behind (6).

Olabisi: Our happiness is here and now,
Where you stand, where I can reach you
Nothing can take that away (6).

Akanbi: Nothing.
Except the past, except memories
Which cling fast and will not die (6).

Olabisi: I don't understand (6).

The two lovers shared their feelings and affection but Akanbi was disturbed because of his uncle's disposition to their marriage. He was of the view that both of them are woven like threads into a web of hate, and blood.

Akanbi: Your dead father
And mine, with their lives
Wore the tedious patterns and we,
Poor children are eternally doomed
Like two distant rivers,
To flow apart and never meet (6).

The many entreaties made by Akanbi to his uncle (Adigun) to see reasons why he should give his blessings to the proposed marriage hit the brickwall. His uncle took him back to memory lane invoking the spirits of the forebears.

Akanbi: No, Adigun, this time, my words
Are – the handle of an axe – solid
If I said I loved before,
I lied, for I have just known
What love is, and her name is Olabisi
I want to marry her, and I want
Your consent, my dear uncle, my father (10).

Adigun: My consent? Akanbi
You remember Iloto? (10)

Akanbi: The dark forest ... forbidding shadows ...
Great roots and trunks ... shrines ...

Adigun: And your father, how did he die?

Akanbi: I don't know. I don't remember.

Adigun: Listen to me. You cannot
Marry that girl.

Akanbi: But why?

Adigun: Because I say so.

Akanbi: But you must have reasons ...
And his reasons are his words (11).

Traditionalwise, it could be seen how authoritarian Akanbi's uncle was. The African elders will not for once allow the younger ones to question their authorities. They believe that things should be done in their own way forgetting that civilization has overshadowed most traditional dealings. Akanbi found means of letting his uncle change his mind but to no avail. He has this to say:

Akanbi: This girl has been very kind to me
In the city once, I lost my way
Like many unwary young men. I did things
I should be ashamed now to admit
But Olabisi cleansed me. From the gutters
She pulled me, and saved my life ...

Adigun: And to repay her?

Akanbi: To give myself is the least
I can do for her love. I wish
I had more to give, for I have promised.

Adigun: Promised what?

Akanbi: More than that. I have vowed
To love her for ever.

Adigun: You will love her as you like, Akanbi
But from a distance.

Culturally, Akanbi could not look at his uncle in the eye but found ways of convincing him. He still stood his

ground thereby hitting the nail on the head telling him that Olabisi's father was instrumental to the death of Akanbi's father thus:

Adigun: Adigun will not have her as daughter
In this house, because our family
Rejects intimacy with serpents
Well, I'll talk, since you seem
To have forgotten. Bisi is the daughter
Of Atanda, Atanda killed your father (13).

The love Akanbi has for Olabisi has beclouded him to the extent that he could not believe his uncle but he still accord him the due respect and in accordance to tradition. He later believes his uncle and has this to say:

Akanbi: Forgive me. Only the old hunters
Never lost their way. The young ones
Still succumb to whispers in the bush.
Adigun: Perhaps I grow old ...
Akanbi: And Atanda? What happened to him?
Adigun: I killed him.
Akanbi: Did he confess?
Adigun: It was not necessary. I killed
Him, that was proof enough. Well,
Swear to me now, so I can sleep in peace
When next the sunset falls
Swear so I can ride the beat in calm weather (15).
Akanbi: Swear?
Adigun: Swear to forget this girl
You'll find another some day (15).

Akanbi related to Olabisi what his uncle told him that their marriage cannot be cemented. But Olabisi was confident and has this to say:

Olabisi: Don't listen to old man,
We have our own lives to lead
We must not inherit the hate
Of our fathers (16).

Akanbi: I hear your voice ...

Olabisi: Your father is dead
My own father is dead too
Surely that is enough dying ...
Akanbi, wait for you,
I shall always be waiting ...
Akanbi: Bisi, your father killed my father
Olabisi: Akanbi, your uncle killed my father
Akanbi: The link is broken ...
Olabisi: The link can be rewoven.
Akanbi: And the scars, the tears
That are sirens on the memory ...
Olabisi: They will be silenced with love
Akanbi: And the barrier of hate
Which our fathers built between us?
Olabisi: We shall crumble it with laughter
With weapons fashioned out of
Tenderness. There is no war yet so hard
That men cannot forget. And then
We shall reach each other again.

From the discussion above, it could be seen that both lovers have true love for each other but events of tradition seem to partially gag them but they still have hope that their love will certainly be cemented once the "old order" is put behind them and live a new life of theirs.

Olabisi, having listened to the story of Akanbi then poured out her mind to Akanbi on the discussion she had with her mother shortly on their return from Lagos. Her mother was in high spirit seeing her daughter and described her thus:

Titi: You have changed, Bisi
Olabisi: Have I?

Titi: A lot. I mean, look at you!
I could have taken you
For some kings' daughter
Come from the palace. You've grown
More womanly, more beautiful.

Bisi told her mother that the city has been kind to her and described herself as the rising sun while her mother as the setting one. Her mother was disturbed that she didn't tell her about any suitor which she later told her thus:

Olabisi: Mother,
I have already found him
I've already found the man
I want for husband

Having told her mother of her husband to be, her mother was disturbed saying that Olabisi's talk "stabs painfully into the rib of forgotten things" (41). Her mother did not open the can of worms for her but assured her that the herbalist named Baba Soye would tell her the reasons behind her not equally consenting to the marriage. The herbalist came and spoke to Olabisi in parables (proverbs) the reasons why the marriage may not work.

Baba Soye: If what your mother told me
Is true, the fault is not
In your loving, but in your choice (42)

Olabisi: Love is not a matter of choice...

Baba Soye: But a matter of sense

Olabisi: My heart beat like festive drums
At the sound of his voice, and then
I was lost in his love. What do you
Have against him? Is Orunmila
Enemy to human love?

Baba Soye: Yes, when human love
Is enemy to man himself. Listen,
Your mother opposes your choice
A hen must know where her chicks
Can feed. Your mother ... (43)

Olabisi: Mother has never met him

Baba Soye: Does it matter? His
Family is not unknown here ... (43)

Olabisi: I love him, not his family

Baba Soye: A leopard's son, remember
Will also have spots ... (43)

Olabisi: When love hides in a shell
Baba Soye, now words can reach it
Except the words of affection... (43)

From the discussion above, it could be seen that Baba Soye, in conjunction with Olabisi's mother were against the union of both lovers because of the rules of tradition. Baba Soye decided to tell Olabisi a story (fable) in order to convince her not to marry Akanbi. The story was told and Olabisi was perturbed and has this to say:

Olabisi: Horrible stop it, stop it!
I don't want to hear any more. (50)

Baba Soye: Do you find it horrible? ...
You have been warned. Good day
When Ifa speaks to the young
He discards incantations. But,
Careful! The voice of the oracle
Even in fable, is still a kernel ...
Good day. Do not say now
That you have not been warned,
Greet your mother for me. (50)

Her mother corroborated the sayings of Baba Soye and told her how her father was killed by Adigun, the uncle of Akanbi, her husband to be. Olabisi could not believe what her mother said and retorted thus:

Olabisi: Never, mother. I shall
Never marry him now. Never!

Olabisi later went into a state of illusion and dreamt of Akanbi and seeing herself not belonging to the blood of the past but the world of the present. That her life could not believe for this one's sake or that one's but for

herself and for her happiness.

Olabisi: My heart rules my will

And my heart belongs to him.

The mother was disturbed and couldn't believe what her daughter said.

Titi: I don't understand.

Olabisi: Look at those birds, mother

A new season has come (59)

Titi: (with painful understanding)

And the old birds?

Those of last season? (59)

Olabisi: hey are asleep

Their night has come. But not

For the young. For them, look,

Now is when the sun rises! (59)

Titi: I begin to understand

Love is on wings.

Olabisi: Love owns the afternoon.

Hate is for the old season. (59)

Titi: Then you love him so much?

Olabisi: He is my life, mother

Titi: And the past?

Olabisi: Let it be buried because

Of us. You taught me love, mother

I learnt the word on your knees.

The same thing has possessed me

Akanbi is not guilty of the sins

His parents committed. He is not

Like them, He is different. Mother.

Why not come and see him? (59)

Both lovebirds put their destinies in their hands by warding off the ancient traditional beliefs of their parents and rebelled against their families as Akanbi has this to say:

Akanbi: We are going away

Together, and this time, for ever

Farewell to you, farewell to Ilo

Farewell to hate and warring (62)

Both Titi and Adigun had resigned to fate thus:

Titi: Our night. Their dawn

Dew is upon us. (67)

In the end, Adigun committed suicide to give way for the new breed and Titi has this to say:

Titi: The night has caught up with him

Alas! Poor old man

He was trapped in a cannibal rage (69)

Both Dotun and Titi (mothers of Akanbi and Olabisi) promised to give a befitting burial to Adigun for dying gallantry while Akanbi and Olabisi promised to stay to bury the dead.

Olabisi: No, we shall stay to bury the dead with you

It's the only way we can say a proper

Farewell to Ilo. (70)

Akanbi: Yes, farewell to Ilo,

Farewell to a cannibal rage. (70)

3. Conclusion

Taking a cursory look at the facts discussed above, Osofisan's *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage* has succinctly revealed the dramatic dominance of civilization over our traditional settings through the various characters used in the text. Civilization has partially eroded our traditional beliefs in various forms. In the play, 'love' has served as agent of change whereby African children can decide for themselves rather than being tied to the apron of their parents. Detoun, Titi, Adigun and Baba Soye all belong to the 'old order' while Akanbi and Olabisi symbolized modern age or the "new order". A dramatic reference could be seen in *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngugi Wa Thiong'O and Micere Mugo where the protagonist Dedan Kimathi and woman represented the 'old order' (old Kenya) while Boy and Girl represented the "new order" in modern Kenya.

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