Creative Writing and Digital Production: Constraining and Expanding Nigeria's Literary Production in the 21st Century

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Abstract— This study aims at examining the continuity and disruption of criticism, creative writing, and digital production in Nigeria's literary Production in the 21st Century. Drawing insight from theory of remediation, data were purposively extracted from 30 social media handles such as: Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok, blogs. In each of mentioned social media, 5 creative works were extracted and subjected to literary analysis. Some data were gotten from interviews which were conducted on final years students of the department of English and Literary studies. Between 2017 and 2022 the sample size was 100 students and 50 for each year. In 2017, 75-80% of the students seemed to be comfortable with writing poems and short stories and publishing on Facebook. While in 2022 80-90% students published their creative compositions across multiple social media platforms and providing hyperlinks to their various texts while also using emojis as symbolic language in their creative compositions and other forms of multimodality. Using the said institution as a hypothesis, most of the students seem to be voluntarily interested in literary forms on cyberspace against the print literature. The study advocates for the need to break the barriers to the study of digital literature and the need for new criticisms in the university.

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars are preoccupied with the disruptive benefits of digital technology. Betiang and Akpan, (2018) are concerned with the disruptive nature of technology and digitalization without paying attention to Nigerian digital-born narratives and how netizens are producing literature by the power of the screen in social media and through code far from the traditional perception of creativity (Inyang & Ave, 2022). They feel threatened that the Global South is excluded from benefiting from the innovations of digital technology. Their concerns are well received as a result of their failure to engage netizens' digitally born narratives which are produced on social media and other coded platforms using hyperlinks and hypertext. These netizens' social media and digital narratives are not produced for commercial purposes and do not need the consent of western big publishing houses to make a case for their literature which is digitally born.

Abati (2016) takes a personal attack on netizens' narratives on social media without indicating a possibility of difference like Eurocentric western critics when they pontificate that literature must be written and there is no literature in orality. Abati submits that; "This new group of English users does not know the difference between a comma, and a colon. They have no regard for punctuation. They mix up pronouns, cannibalize verbs and adverbs, ignore punctuation; and violate all rules of lexis and syntax. They seem to rely more on sound than formal meaning. My fear is that a generation being brought on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp English is showing a lack of capacity to write meaningful prose, or communicate properly or even think correctly." Abati takes a blow on a generation of netizens and assumes that his worst experience is a representation of all that is produced by Nigerian netizens on social media spaces. He uses the lens of his past which is what Marc Prensky refers to as an "immigrant accent" to make a case against netizens' social media production, he further argues that; "To an older generation who had to go through the rigour of being told to write proper English, and getting punished severely for speaking pidgin or vernacular or for making careless mistakes of grammar and punctuation, the kind of meta-English now being written by young people can be utterly confusing. The irony is that it makes sense to the young ones, and they can conduct long conversations in the strange version of the English language. I'd not be surprised if someday a novel gets written in this new English, which seems like a complete bastardization."

Abati does not under the meta-English used by Nigerian Netizens on the social media space but feels strong enough to form an opinion about their contribution to the development of the English language. Abati did not understand that the English language is paying a price and Achebe (1981) captures this price by saying; "The price a

world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use" (61). And Nigerian netizens are subjecting the language to such creative usage and this was first done by Achebe (1981) when he states that; "…I feel that the English Language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will be a new English…" (62). This new English is a national English for digital natives. Achebe (1981) accounting for national language in literature observes; "A national literature is one that takes the whole nation for its province and has a realized or potential audience throughout its territory. In other word a literature that is written in the national language" (56). Abati is not a digital national and as such does not understand the function of meta-English used in the communication of experiences by netizens in the digital space and their "national territory". Abati went further to describe netizens use of meta- English thus; "You may have come across the meta-English that I am trying to describe. It is English in sound, but in appearance it has been subjected to the punishment of excessive abbreviation, compression, and modification. Hence, in the place of the word "for", you are likely to see "4", and so the word "forget" becomes "4get" or "4git", "fortune" is written as "4tune", "forever" as "4eva". The word "see" has been pruned down to a single alphabet "C", same with "you" now rendered as "u". In effect you are likely to read such strange things as "cu" or "cya" meaning "see you." Nigerian netizens feel indebted to Abati in his attempt to describe the changes netizens are making to the English language to enable the language to be able to carry their experiences.

The framework of the English language as a carrier of time-specific experiences is indicated in the changes the English language has undergone which are synonymous with the changing histories of its usage, words, and meaning. Baugh and Cable (2005) affirm the foregoing; thus, "The diversity of cultures that find expression in it is a reminder that the history of English is a story of cultures in contact during the past 1,500 years. It understates matters to say that political, economic, and social forces influence a language. These forces shape the language in every aspect, most obviously in the number and spread of its speakers, and in what is called "the sociology of language," but also in the meanings of words, in the accents of the spoken language, and even in the structures of the grammar" (13).

However, not all digital immigrants are confused about what netizens do in the digital space and an example of such is Ikheloa, I.R (2007) who observes that; "We must look also for fresh thinking in the new e-book thrilling us on that wondrous playground called the internet. The written essay of our childhood is now roaming free and happy out there, crackling free and fresh on the internet-in logs, websites, and Youtube. Our new thinkers are talking about Africa. No one is listening for now because we are still attached to the book. I propose that the astute reader should look to the new medium of ideas called the internet. The dream of Africa lurks quietly in e-places…" Ikheloa

understands the language of netizens in the space but he is just one of the critics aside from the hundreds who have issues with netizens' production in the digital space. Ikheoa I.R. (2014) affirms that: "Truth be told, I mostly read Twitter and Facebook the greatest books birthed by Africans." He reads Nigerian Digital Literature even in its national language which Abati frown at. Furthermore, the negative criticism is more than the positive one on Nigerian Digital Literature. For instance, Christopher (2014) and Ochi & Tony (2022) concentrates on digital publishing without paying attention to the existence of texts published by netizens on various social media sites and through the coding of texts. Most scholars have failed to account for the criticism of Nigerian Digital Literature which is digitally born and far from the site of digitalization on which many have focused their scholarship on. The approaches to writing are generational specific and this is indicated in the criticism of such literature. Uwasomba (2014) legislate on the new Nigeria's writing of the third generation and submits that, the writing lack deep imagination and symbolism. Uwasomba (2014) further observe that; "A cursory look at the literary culture of Nigeria shows that Nigerians writers have from the beginning of Nigeria's writing responded to issues of the moment" (37). What Uwasomba failed to acknowledge is that this "Nigeria's New Writing…." responds in terms of the structure of narrative and its form is determined by issues of the moment as it is foregrounded in the form of netizens' digital literature.

Every new form of creative literature calls for definition and classification as it is reminiscent of African written literature in English. This is indicated in the June 1952 Makerere Conference in Uganda, where Achebe and other African writers attempted a definition of African Literature and in what language it should be written. The focus of this study is not on the issue of the language question and what African Literature is and in which Nigerian creative imagination as a national consciousness is subsumed rather this study focuses on making a case for a kind of literary product cum practice in the twenty-first century and the strongest term possible "exclude" those who attempt to belittle netizens' literature by (un) consciously using the lens of old to read the product that has shifted from the pattern of their literary aesthetic which they might not be aware of. The foregoing is affirmed by Christy and Yusuf (2021) who observe that; "Modern technologies have created new perspectives…" (15), and this is clearly illustrated in Nigerian Netizens' texts in social media spaces, blogs, multimodal platforms, hypertext, and other coded digital environments. Opeibi, Ademola-Adeoye, and & Adedeji (2017) in theorizing on Digital humanities implicates Nigerian Digital Literature and its practices. Thus; "Digital humanities have been viewed as an emerging research tradition within the humanities which adopts computer-mediated methods and approaches as well as digital tools to investigate and analyse social, cultural and linguistic phenomena. It covers a wide range of concerns as a transdisciplinary framework in liberal arts and social sciences. Scholars in this cross-disciplinary research

space have been applying digital methods to uncover new findings on an existing body of phenomena in a cultural artefact, literary works, archival material, music, religious studies, gender, and computational methods for linguistic analysis. Application of digital research methodologies help to bring real-world objects -- text, image, sound, video -- into a digital space, and then employ digital tools to further explore and strengthen those objects" (173). The criticism of Nigerian Digital Literature requires computer-mediated methods as well as the use of digital tools to investigate what constitutes literature in a digital space.

Nigerian Netizens' literature is multimodal, and co-authored across social spaces in the case of Nigerian social media creative literature and Netizens are in the best position to make critical statements about their literature. De-Paiva-Franco (2013) corroborate-corroborates when he observes that; "Digital natives seem to present a cerebral architecture better equipped for the digital environment. Above all, their life experiences are molded by experiences with digital technologies. They are immersed in technology, and they use digital tools naturally, without contemplating how they work. Their brains switch spontaneously to the digital world. Digital technology comes naturally to this particular generation – not only to those with access to the latest digital media but also, surprisingly, to those disadvantaged children, the so-called 'technological have-nots"(644). The digital environment is natural to netizens as well as their perception of art and they must be consulted in the criticism of the art that is produced by them in the digital space.

This study attempts to attempts to propose the exclusion of traditional critics in Africa Digital Literature and trace the origins and development of the Nigerian Digital Literature. It accounts for the failure of patronising prevailing criticism on the Digital space and its impact on the act of Criticism in the Cyberspace. The Expanding Nature of Creative Literature in the Cyberspace, Criticism of African Digital Literature, and its inclusion into the Nigerian University Curriculum.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach based on well-established social media research techniques and is founded on social media analytics, talent semantic analysis, and a qualitative approach. Social media analytics is seen as a potent tool for not just informing but also revolutionising current practises in politics, marketing, product development, digital literature, entertainment, and news media. Utilizing social media analytics to analyse texts on Facebook and blogs requires a qualitative methodological framework, which has to do with the analysis from a discursive perspective. Data were elicited from interviews with students and personal observation, and data were also manually mined from social media such as Facebook, Whatsapp,

Instagram, Twitter, and blogs. This approach enables the researcher to critically examine the data by subjecting them to literary interpretation through the application of a literary theory. It enables the research to make a critical submission on how creative writing and digital production constrain literary production in the 21st century. Using remediation as a literary approach to textual analysis, this study accounts for the shift in literary composition and literary production in the twenty-first century and emphasises the need for new criticism.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

"Exclusion" of Nigerian Traditional Critics as Representation of Throwback Model

Social media literature is quite different from African oral and print literature because the materiality of social media production is different from the two forms of literature mentioned earlier. The social media and digital literature expand our definitions of what literature represents in the twenty-first century and, as such, constrain those who are not netizens with regards to the criticism of this "new literature" in the digital space. The need for exclusion of traditional critics becomes necessary as it is clearly highlighted in the throwback model of excluding critics who applied alien models in the criticism of African oral and written literature.

The start in the narrative of "exclusion" in literary creativity and criticism was first inaugurated by Chinua Achebe in his book *Things Fall Apart* 1958 when he through the text attempts cultural reconstruction and reaffirmation in the African Novel. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is in response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Carry's *Mister Johnson* which Achebe through his work attempt to resist and question how one judge a man whose language he cannot speak. Achebe indicates that literary products are cultural production when he observes in his essay collections *Morning Yet On Creation* (1981) that; "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the one I set in the past) did no more than to teach my readers that their past with all its impaction-was not one long night of savagery which the Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them"(45) This is an attempt to teach Africans about their past far from the darkness which Western narratives present and is suggestive of a chastising response to Achebe's essay, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*".

However, Chinwezie, Jemie, and Madubuike (1980) were fiercer in their articulation of criticism of Nigerian Literature. They submit; "...probing the ways and means whereby Western imperialism has maintained its hegemony upon the literary arts of contemporary Africa. We observe that there are vaster issues to be examined and rectified if African literature is to cure itself of its colonial hangover…." (x). Just as Chinwezie et al and his generation wrestled with Western critics for the survival of African literature with regards to their critical submission, the same scholarly wrestle is

called for if Nigerian Digital Literature would survive harsh criticism of the twenty first century by digital immigrants who are criticism gatekeepers of the Nigerian University system. "Larson, Palmer and Company" were courageous enough to document their dissatisfactions with Nigerian earliest writings providing a reference for their submission to be engaged but most Nigerian Traditional Critics have failed to document their dissatisfactions with such creative production rather they resist any attempt to study and research into Nigerian Digital Literature.

The start in making a case for African literature started in June 1952 at the gathering of writers at the Makerere conference in Kampala Uganda where writers between the ages of 25 to 40 attempted a definition of African literature and tried to be prescriptive on what language it should be written and this attempt was greeted with so much disagreement which made Achebe (1952) to say that African literature should be "allowed to develop and when it does it will define itself"(20). Consequently, African literature has grown and continued growing, African literature has defined itself and it is in search of continuous redefinition because just as human society is not static, African literature as a product of complex changing imagination must acquire such complexities in its nature and definition. Nigerian Digital Literature is an aspect of African Literature and this "Nigerian Digital Literature" requires new definitions and criticism which is the focus of this research. The writers of Nigerian digital literature should be the ones who must stand up to define their literature in cyberspace like Achebe and his generations of writers did for African written literature and, Nigerian Cyberspace writers must provide this description and criticism in "exclusion" of Nigerian established literary critics. They must take this liberty if their literature in the digital space must survive the tyranny of established criticism. Yeku (2016) observe that; "New media technologies in many African countries require new scholarly engagements with new forms and sites of cultural representations…"(245).

The young academic netizens are in the best position to provide these scholarly engagements of Nigerian Digital literature. In this scholarly engagement, Nigerian Young Academics must "exclude" African traditional critics from the literature of their time, if they must participate then they should come with the humility of learners of a culture, to relearn what literature represent to netizens in the twenty-first century. Raji-Oyelade (2014) writes about literacy in the digital space, the digital texts and observes that; "…there is a rapid shift of perspectives and definitions of what constitutes a text, or rather how a text, writing, can be composed in this age. The text is not only definable by its alphabetic status; the text is also imagistic, determined by other symbols systems, visual as well as tactile" (2). Nigerian Digital literature shares in the shift of text and as such requires a new form of criticism which is different from the one practised by "traditional critics" on print literature. Olufemi and Olubunmi (2014), the foregoing;

"The idea of the literary text in Africa is now being re-conceptualized in response to the revolution that digitalization is inspiring" (389). Olufemi and Olubunmi focus on digitalization without paying attention to the innovation of digital-born and social media creative texts which through their forms perception of what literature represents in the twenty-first century.

Traditional critics cannot provide the needed criticism for Nigerian Digital literature because as Prensky (2001) observes; "The import of the distinction is this: As Digital Immigrants learn-like all immigrants, some better others- to adapt to their eadaptnment, they always retain, to some degree, their "accent", that is their foot in the past. The "digital immigrant accent" can be seen in such things as turning to the Internet for information second rather than first, or in reading the manual for a program rather than assuming that the program itself will teach us to use it. Today's older folk were "socialized" differently from their kids, and are now in the process of learning a new language. And a language learned later in life, scientists tell us, goes into a different part of the brain" (2). African Traditional Critics who attempt to engage Nigerian Digital Literature always approaches it with the "accent" of the past and dismisses Nigerian Netizens Literature because of their past socialization with print literature. However, what is "unfortunate" is that these traditional critics are the most powerful gatekeepers of literary studies in Nigerian universities. Prensky (2001) further corroborates the foregoing; "But this is not just a joke. It's very serious because the single biggest problem facing education today is that our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language" (1).The forgoing highlight effect of Traditional Criticism on Nigerian Digital Literature where a "generation" uses "outdated" tools and moralist lens to analysis Nigerian Netizens' Literature. Most Traditional Critics are not used to what Kress (2003) refers to as Literacy in the new media age and even if they are aware the "accent" would make them resist what netizens consider as the great literary output of their generation. As a result of Traditional critics not understanding what Odutola(2012) refers to as cyberframing in the composition of Nigerian Netizens' literature, they make critical dismissive comments backed by immigrated accented past as "facts" on the literature of Netizens.

African Written Literature ensures patronizing reviews to enable it to settle and the same demand is made for Nigerian Digital Literature. Palmer (1982) foregrounds the demand made for Nigerian Digital Literature was theoretically made for Nigerian written literature when he observes that; "…reviewers often praised inferior work which would almost certainly have been condemned had it been written by a Western author. For a variety of reasons critics have been reluctant to relegate bad or mediocre African works to the limbo to which they belong" (i). The first of Nigerian cyberspace

digital criticism should be descriptive at this point in its development, writers, and consumers of this form of literature must drop their preconceived notion of what literature represents in their generation and describe what is read and heard of what literature represents in this age and time in the digital space. Prensky (2001) further corroborate the foregoing; thus, "Smart adult immigrants accept that they don't know about their new world and take advantage of their kids to help them learn and integrate. Not-so-smart (or not-so-flexible) immigrants spend most of their time grousing about how good things were in the "old country" (3). Smart adult critics of immigrants must accept that they do not know what Nigerian Digital literature represents in all its forms and must be flexible in their attempt to learn about the netizens' literature and by doing this they all the literature to "settle".

Palmer (1982) in writing about how literature settles submit that; "African fiction has been given time to settle, it is proliferating, and finding its way into the curricula of African, European and American schools and universities…" (i). Nigerian Digital Literature has not settled, and it is hardly even studied in most Nigerian universities and even in some universities that it is studied it is being resisted by traditional critics. This appeal is to allow Nigerian Digital literature to settle, is in line with the concessions made for African earliest written literature in practice as highlighted by Larson (1971) observes; "The critics of African Literature, in short, have praised African writers without making any serious attempt to tell us why this praise is justified" (10). The Nigerian Digital Literature should be allowed to develop through "positive engagements".

Furthermore, it is after the descriptive era that we must get to prescriptive criticism, where the writers are told what to do and how they have failed to a certain extent. In the light of the foregoing, Bolter and Gruson (2000), observe that "No medium today, and certainly no single media…seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in from other social and economic forces. What is new about (remediation) new media comes from the way in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media" (15). The new media is a refashioning of the old media in terms of its content and form; therefore, the criticism of African digital literature must first take a descriptive approach before it takes a prescriptive form of criticism of how the writers should write and if commitment is necessary for their time (Ochi, et l., 2022). The present age of writers and its critics should give an insight into the literature and who they invite into the critiquing of the emerging canon of African Digital literature. As illustrated by the past debates on the language question and the definition of African Literature, the writers were the first to make a case officially for the kind of literature they produce and in what language it should best be realised. Nigeria's digital creative

composition is expanding the space of criticism in the twenty-first century and demanding that most pieces of literature that are realised in cyberspace in various electronic formats are the new form of literature that must be accounted for within the context of technological interface and literary aesthetics. The patronizing criticizes of African Literature allows for the literature to settle and it is not a difficult request to appeal to traditional critics to allow Nigerian Digital Literature to settle after which in the word of Palmer (1982), the time would have come "… to establish certain principles of criticism, and to initiate discussion on the relative merits of the various…" (i),Nigerian Digital Literature.

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NIGERIAN DIGITAL LITERATURE

The history of Digital Literature is linked to the ownership of personal computers in the 1960s and 1970s and it saw the development of various electronic formats such as audiobooks, programmed text, the collage of genres which is realised in the mixture of sound, letters, cinematography, etc (Nyong, et al., 2022). Onuoha (2020) in *African Digital Literature* observes, that Nigerian Digital Literature emanates from the list-Serve activities of Pa Ikhide, Wole Soyinka etc. which was used to fight the totalitarian government of Sani Abacha's regime and in this platform (mail correspondence of subscribed users) they composed poetry in the sense in which Plato first made use of it. This List-Serve later metamorphosed into Naijanet and Krazitivity etc. Furthermore, Nigerian Digital literature is a product of a generation that realised their reality in cyberspace and this product suffers from the hand of the mainstream establishment of critics and literary scholars whose functions are to interpret literature. Most traditional scholars are not "educated" in the use of digital technology and, consequently cannot critique the interface that technology is imposing on the form and the production of Nigerian literature and as such, have decided to shy away and classified such corpus of Nigerian literature on the cyberspace on derogatory terms and as a footnote to illustrate the glories of print literature of their generation which they seem to suggest that Nigerian Digital Literature is devoid of. Azuike (2014), in establishing a premise for "traditional" scholars to participate in digital production observes that; "…to first equip themselves with an appreciable breadth of Information Communication Technology savviness that can enable them to drive multimodal literacy of global proportion…." For traditional scholars to participate in Nigerian Digital Literature Criticism, they should equip themselves with the literacy of social media and digital technology to understand what Nigerian netizens' literature represents in the twenty-first century.

Palmer (2000), is of the view that literature should not be measured by an alien yardstick of an older generation. The foregoing affirms the need for a new form of

criticism of Nigerian Digital Literature. As postulated by Warner (2008) and quoted by Raji-Oyelade, A. (2014) observes that; "Literacy is no longer a matter of competence in writing in a particular language, (a la the 3Rs); it is about the competent cognition of the sign. In this age, literacy must be imagined practically as the acquisition of "competence" with both expiry and extension dates. This is the century where the definition of literacy has become collapsed, wrapped in a flux, proliferated and constantly challenged, that we can speak of the end of conventional literacy"(8). The same case made for language and communication is sufficient for Nigerian Digital Literature and criticism. The consumers of digital literature in tertiary institutions are to be allowed to teach and make critical comments concerning the literature that is produced in their time without further resistance and derogatory comments from "traditional mainstream" critics. Palmer (2000) Nigerian netizens' digital Literature fulfils Palmer's affirmation that; "The African writer's unique experience may lead him to evolve new form…." (x).This need for new form finds expression and fulfilment in Nigerian Digital Literature.

The pertinent question to ask at this juncture is, what is Nigerian Digital literature? Nigerian Digital Literature is a literary composition that blends literary aesthetics and technological environment as part of a literary form. The Nigerian Digital Literature is "ethnic" digital-native and migrant narratives that are a product of African nurtured literary experience which is imaginatively and non-fictionally coded, exists in multimodal formats, is published on social media, blogs, and other electronic apps, and makes use of hyperlinks, hypertext, emojis, the verbal visual mood that give the possibility of global exchange of cognitive experience. Nigerian Digital Literature exists in a multimodal format such as verbal-visual, info graphical narratives, etc. African Literature is the building block of the development of Nigerian Digital Literature in the twenty-first century. Nigerian Digital Literature like African Digital Literature is a ubiquitous feature of "modern" African Literature and it allows its writers to connect across globes and beyond physical geographical borders. This is affirmed by Taiwe et al (2014) thus; "The Internet as a modern social space is opening up alternative avenues for networking. It provides a new context for social relaxation and communal bonding. The presence of several community and media sharing websites, which can best be described as social participation technologies …"(243). Nigerian social media literature is an aspect of Nigerian Digital Literature. Nigerian Social Media Literature is imaginative and non-fictionally that are composed and realized within social apps and the contexts of relaxation in media and as a process of bonding. The emergence of digital technology, social media and its appropriation in the production and consumption of literary materials have imposed on us to re-elevate our perception of literature and its criticism in the twenty-first century.

Nigerian Digital Literature owes a great debt to African Literature, an African organic and metaphysical environment which houses both oral and print kinds of literature. These oral and print kinds of literature impose certain characteristics of their forms on the literature that are produced by Nigerians in the digital space, not excluding the effect of the organic environment in which the artist lives in synthesis with the virtual. The advancement in Internet technology and liberation of the Internet in emphasis on open access to telecommunication and the Internet prepared the ground for the emergence of Nigerian literature in the digital space. In recent times, Nigerian Digital Literature's emergence is linked to the deregulation of Nigerian telecommunications services in 1992 which saw the establishment of a private telecommunication service provider. This innovation saw the birth of the use of mobile phones that have internet access by a lot of people and this gave rise to the emergence of digital demography which is not constrained by the physical space and these persons did a myriad of things on these spaces including the composition and consumption of creative literature as it is a reminiscence of African oral environment.

FAILURE OF PATRONISING PREVAILING CRITICISM ON THE DIGITAL SPACE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ACT OF CRITICISM IN THE CYBERSPACE

Nigerian digital literature makes new demands on the criticism of African Literature, which is a sub-strand. Nigerian Digital Literature imposes new forms on African Literature as a result of the synergy between Nigerian creative writing with the technological environment. The Nigerian Digital literature has vast forms that do not have its complete background in print but is a remediation of the existing print and oral forms. Nigerian Digital literature is a departure from the traditional ways of literary forms and requires a new method of digital criticism embodying the techniques of both oral and print literary criticism.

It is a fact that criticism cannot exist without literary texts. As clearly illustrated by Plato's intention of excommunicating poets, his claims were premised on existing literary texts. Likewise, patronising criticism exists in the digital space and this is to allow for a "peaceful" emergence of a canon of Nigerian Digital Literature before the start of aggressive separation and classification of serious literature in social media, blogs and other coded digital spaces would be classified and made demands on. Social media were a space for social interactions and entertainment but as time went by, the Nigerian netizens appropriate the space as a creative space for the composition of literature as a form of entertainment. Within this space and the component of each of those social media spaces were formed based on common economic, political, religious and social interest. In the digital space, art is perceived to be active or passive depending on the ideologies of the individuals within this space amidst other "serious"

activities and literature is appreciated based on a certain sense of patronising criticism without attempting to teach the writer how to write. This "mind-set" gave birth to various types of creative literature in the digital space in the sense that as Onuoha(2018) observes "…digital literature …attempt to hew a space for free expressions which challenge pre-existing modes and forms of literacy of the hard text captured mainly in the features of spontaneity and immediacy (the notion of spontaneity and immediacy here is concerned with the element and tendency of on the spot publishing, which entails a deliberate short circuiting of conventional principles and processes of publishing"(1). This hewing a space for freedom of expression also gave rise to the Nigerian creative works seeking critical attention because many traditional critics are not conversant with digital critical tools and have resisted to migrate psychologically while those who chanced on such narratives did not see anything right with such art forms because they are still wearing the lenses of their generation at digital space.

Furthermore, "like" and "share" buttons and the use of emojis on social media space are forms of criticism on most published works on the social media and other digital spaces and this does not educate the writer. Onuoha (2018) further observes that, "The audience that exists in this platform responds either as passive audience or active audience. The participant in this platform use "share", "comments" "likes" and "emojis" symbols as a form of criticism which is not conventional approach to "traditional" form of literary criticism" (61). This form of criticism requires the input of "established" critical approach as a synergy between old and younger generation. As Chinweizue et-al (1980), rightly observes that "artistic commitment is a matter of orientation, a matter of perceiving social realities and making those perceptions available in art in order to help promote understanding…" (253). The "traditional" critics and digital writers and critics should come with their various orientations without any attempt to emphasize the superiority of one above the other. Prensky (2005), foregrounds the foregoing thus; "In the 21st century, so many of our old assumptions and strongly held ideas have been turned around— and so many more upheavals are on the way—that it is clearly a different place in which our kids are growing up. Two-thirds of the people on the planet have a cell phone. A new virtual (i.e., online) world has emerged out of the ether and become the focus of many of our kids' attention" (1). In this online association literature composed and consumed requires a new form of criticism.

Consequently, there seems to be more of a passive criticism in the cyberspace in terms of the use of Emojis, share, likes and comments as a form of criticism which is encapsulated in Bernth Lindfor (1999), submission that, "…any literature needs all the criticism it can get. Only by glimpsing truth from a variety of perspectives are we able to comprehend its complexities and ambiguities. Only by comparing different views of

the same subject can we arrive at a valid conception of what it really looks like" (54). And beyond this patronising criticism of Nigerian Digital Literature, we are seeking for further criticism of digital literature that incorporate technological interface in synergy with other traditional elements in literary criticism devoid of this collective derogatory classification of digital literature as fleshly and vulgar. The above would only happen when Nigerian Digital Literature has settled.

THE EXPANDING NATURE OF CREATIVE LITERATURE IN THE CYBERSPACE

The proliferation of computer programming and mobile apps impose certain forms of classification on African literature, in the sense that such technological innovation introduces digital characteristics that affect the forms of literatures that are published in the digital space. Furthermore, the coding of creative piece with certain programming elements as seen in the poetry of Waliya. (2019) titled "Letter to the African Union" and "Homosalus" published by the Electronic Literature Organization demands a new form of criticism. The criticism of this electronic poetry requires certain initiate of computer environment to account for the form and content of it, in that the digital environment is a form of graphological deviation achieved as a result of the interfacing of technology on literary aesthetics. The poems are interactive in nature and Leonard Flores review of the poetry notes that "I like how when you scroll down and move your mouse through the blank space, a new stanza in red font will appear and I thought that was really cool. The other ones were nice since most of them had a lot of moving words a very unique way which was really interesting for me". Flores, first, accounts for the environment, which is the form before going into the analysis of the work. This is a peculiar request that African Digital Literature is demanding of its criticism. The works of Blezzed Abraham, Daniel M. Haruna have threatened our perception of autobiographies in the twenty first century. These are writers who are creatively clicking on Facebook with their personal memories, which are a generational representation of the collective memory of their time. Gena Okotio Ekpo's *Consequence* challenges our perception of what the novel in Africa represents and this is a work of art that is published amidst other social media activities.

It is a work of art that narrates a peculiar story of the woman as represented by her victimhood personality in print novel but is transferred to the digital environment with the form becoming the distinguishing characteristics. Furthermore, Obina Udewen's *Holy Sex* which was serialized on Brittlepapers is a complete book sold on Amazon and other online platforms and this goes far to illustrate how the digital space has also influenced other spaces. The Nigerian creative literature on the cyberspace seems to be relocating back to the past in the use of various digital applications that enable sound and pictures given that there are cross genre representations of Nigerian stories on the

digital space. There seems to be the use of all art forms within a single anthology as it is reminiscence of some anthologies published on Brittlespaper etc.

The expanding nature of creative literature on the cyberspace is premised on the creative writer's ability to appropriate in bit and whole of digital knowledge to carry the weight of his or her literary experience. The emergence of various social media sites online provides publishing platforms for the creative writer to produce and export his or her art and such sites by virtue of the nature of their apps impose a kind of form on the literary content that is being produced. This new form also requires a new form of criticism, in the sense that most of this literature requires new skills of consumption, as it is reminiscent of Facebook and Tweet literature etc. The epistolary nature of Facebook novel as is clearly illustrated by Ekpo's *Consequence* published on Facebook is produced within other social media activities and the critic needs to understand location techniques so as to know how to locate the complete work on the social media site. This is also a footnote in the form of tweeter literature and how the completeness is assembled through the consumption of the fragmented parts. Through regional online magazine that is based on national geography is attached to some magazine such as: Saraba Magazine in Nigeria to Kenyan based collective Jalada to Afridiaspora and Kalahari Review of Botswana to Bakwa Magazine of Cameroon to Brittlepapers that publish various African narratives.

Today, storytelling podcasts have become a norm in African storytelling on digital space, as it is replica of *Valentine day story* etc. Ikheloa, R. I (2013) corroborate the foregoing thus; "The most popular African books that are being read voraciously today are Twitter and Facebook. A vast vibrant readership of African youths, perhaps equivalent to the population of a good size African country is on social media, transfixed by the drama, heartbreak, poetry, prose that is Twitter and Facebook. They read the equivalent of whole chapter of a book daily. Where many thinkers despair about what they see as addiction, others see an opportunity and are re-engineering their writing to fit the new dispensation that is the digital world." Nigerian netizens are producing literature that appeals to their audience of their national territory.

CRITICISM OF AFRICAN DIGITAL LITERATURE AND ITS INCLUSION INTO THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM

This paper makes a case for the institutionalization of digital literature in the curriculum of English and Literary Studies in Nigerian colleges and universities as a sine-qua non for understanding the creative impulses of this generation. Garba et-al (2013) observe that; "The influence of digital technology in society has made ICT literacy a basic requirement needed by all to survive the challenge of living in the 21st. The education industry is now faced with the challenge of helping learners to acquire

this literacy. Coping with this challenge requires breeding teachers with high level of proficiency in ICT literacy and competence"(35). The teacher of Nigerian Digital Literature must be ICT literate and must be willing to learn from netizens who have technology as part of their DNA. Nigerian critics should first study Nigeria Digital Literature without comment first as a process of initiation. Barbe(2007) observe that; "…canonical texts has blocked our view of the real historical processes at work in the emergence and spread of literary forms" (40). The criticism of Nigerian Digital Literature would enable us account for the emergence of new literary forms and its representation of a generation and its literary production. Thus; it was observed among the Students in the Department of English and Literary Studies in the University of Calabar, using the said institution as a hypothesis that most of the students seem to be voluntarily restricted to literature form that exists on the cyber space against the print literature requirement of their study. By virtue of enquiry, 75-80% of the students seemed to be comfortable with writing poems and short stories and posting on Facebook 2017.

While in 2022 80-90% published their creative compositions across multiple social media platforms and providing hyperlinks to their various texts while also using emojis as symbolic language in their creative compositions and other forms of multimodality. There has also been the case of students preferring to have their "textbooks" or even "novels" in PDF, e-books or even WPS formats as against the print literature. During an exercise, where students of the said department were asked to create online blogs to channel their artistic forms, it was realised that they expressed their creative prowess in creating these blogs as well as writing breath-taking stories that reflected on the cyber space. Some of these writers, in excitement regarding commendations to the works assigned, were quick to spread their stories on Facebook, posting hyperlinks on Instagram and Twitter and introducing people to reading their works, these people among their communal netizens or family on the cyber space. It contrasted heavily to those who wrote their stories in print form and had the struggles of converting these stories from print to the digital form. The amount of time these students spent and are still spending on the cyber space, dishing out narratives and entertaining their audience on the cyber space has proven with time the advantage of digital literature as a part of the curriculum. The 100 level students of the same department in the same University were assigned to write poems and tag their lecturer and this was not just to serve as an assessment but a means of bursting out their creativity at an early period in their academic lives. These students, with their many "friends" on social media such as: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok etc. as well as in a bid to impress their lecturer, came out and wrote amazing poems, using multimodal and the tools provided by these social media apps. In tagging these said "friends" and had these netizen "friends"

actively participate with the use of commendations as well as emojis in a bid to spur the students.

The foregoing is necessary because Literature in Europe has long ago left the "comfort zone" of printed form. It has taken the shape of digital born and digitalised literature as expressed by Plato in THE REPUBLIC X where he talks about an object taking a new form when immersed in water. Literature in Africa, on the other hand, is gradually waking up to the realisation of this new form that is digital born, in spite of the fact that virtually 50-60% of youths in Africa are active participants in the use of social media and other digital platforms. In Nigerian universities, unfortunately, the educational system still seems to be stuck with the conventional print literature, which is the use of textbooks in contrast with what the universities in Europe have done.

As said earlier, it has been observed that Nigerian students spend a maximum of at least 10 out of the 24 hours of the day on blogs, social media, whether it is on Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Skype or any other platform on the internet. This time spent on the internet gives these students the opportunity to mingle with other netizens with whom they share memories of themselves by virtue of pictures, words known as statuses, videos, audio recordings etc. and, these netizens actively respond by active participation when they click the "like" button or other forms of "emojis" that seem to express their feelings or reactions to whatever is posted. For the Nigerian student, the blogs and social media is seen as the avenue to sell himself/herself in whatever skill or trade they possess. For example, Ofemi Obi uses Instagram to promote his poems through the combination of lines and sound including visual, And Egbe uses Facebook as the platform for oral performances such as telling stories even though she is a medical intern. Aniekpeno Williams, who goes by the pseudo name of "William Stark", uses the same social media to entertain his family on the cyber space by using jokes, stories, images and other forms of entertainment. Some blogs like Yabaleft, InstagblogNaija, Naijaloaded, and PunchNg are making use of Facebook hyperlinks as a means of connectivity to their sites directly with eye-catching stories. For these blogs on Facebook, all it takes to access that story that catches the fancy of the reader is one click away. And even before the reader follows the link, he discovers that a lot of netizens have displayed their approval by making use of the emoticons and comments, which can help the user, decide whether the story is worth the use of his megabyte or not while other natizens sell their art on Fiverr to take care of themselves.

As Kennedy (2011) observe that: "Space is important in addressing the distinctions between online and offline for the contextualisation of social interactions. There is a need to identify and resolve the issue of online and offline division in the context of everyday." The foregoing is realized in the practice of students of Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria. Some students, who are active netizens on the cyberspace, realizing that this is a big

platform in promoting themselves, have taken to the art of creative writing. The concern is no longer about location of the individual, however obscure, or the academic qualification. As long as their over 1k plus friends on Facebook, 1.5k friends on Instagram and other means of accessing the social media to tell their stories, can read their creative minds, they feel fulfilled. They also make use of the "tag", a means of reaching a wider audience other than the ones they have. Thus if a user of Facebook posts a poem and tags another user, the poem reflects on the second user's wall and all the friends of the second user get to be part of the experience of the post of the first user. Imagine then what happens if a user posts a story or poem or a creative piece and tags 20 other users. Imagine how much of a wider audience that creative work could reach in seconds. As stated earlier, academic background is no hindrance to creative expressive abilities exhibited on social media. Funkekeme Akposeye is a native of Ojobo community in Delta State. All he has as a form of educational orientation is a Senior Secondary School Certificate. On a regular day basis, Funkekeme (Dream Weaver as he is fondly called by his peers) does menial jobs reminiscent of the riverine community where he resides. During his spare time, however, he spends time on Facebook writing breath-taking poems about nature as well as taking beautiful pictures of his environment. Mcneavets Chukwunonso is an intern with Department of Petroleum Resources. Outside his normal job as an intern, he spends time gracing his Whatsapp statuses with poems and beautiful pictures of locations in Lagos that has never been seen before like he makes you see them. This is an evidence of the fact that these individuals might not have strong educational background but social media have given them a platform to showcase their creative narratives, some that have birthed writers and poets like OfemUbi, ChinenyeVeralyn, Otosirieze Obi-Young, Ugochi Okafor, Klara Kalu etc. whose works have gone from just works that graced Facebook to works that made Brittlepaper anthologies. The foregoing is in line with Lankshear & Knobel (2008), "…digital literacy is a framework that brings together many sub-literacies, skills and any attempt to constitute an umbrella definition or overarching frame of digital literacy will necessarily involve reconciling the claims of myriad concepts of digital literacy, a veritable legion of digital literacies" (4). The writers mentioned above a digital literate and redomesticate their spaces through literary compositions.

This is not to say as long as there is the social media to give the individual the opportunity to showcase his talents, and then everything goes. This infers that sometimes when there is no proper criticism of works of literature on the cyberspace; it could give room for "bad literature". It is not enough to refer to these works in other academic papers like it is done in print literature. Criticism of cyberspace literature is seen as a form of evaluating the works that form part of the repertoire of the society. Print literature has always had guidelines or elements that should foster a growth in its

form. Such elements like plot structure, thematic preoccupation, settings, style, characterization etc. are very important in ensuring that this form of literature is accepted by its critics. Criticism moulds the art form of writing literature. It helps the author of literary works shape his ideas as well as make them holistically and significantly impressive. However, cyberspace literature has not been given enough evaluative criticism such that it helps shape the idea the authors of these creative works bring to the table. Thus, some authors on the cyberspace write willy-nilly, discarding the elements that have paved the way for the literature that exists in print. Though not all works of literature that exist on the cyberspace is bad, there is still the need to evaluate and critique these works so as to give the authors room to improve on their art. As it is in print literature where the writer gives his draft to the editor who effects changes, scraps some ideas and probably draws out another idea as against the already existing idea the writer has, fluidity of literary works on the cyberspace allows the materials posted by the author on the space to be reedited and re-corrected again. It has been observed that the authors of the literary works on the cyberspace might not take criticism very well and this might not help them improve their creativity. They may seem to be comfortable with the "likes", "love" and "amazing piece of art" comments they get when they post these works. For example, the issue of Queer literature is a growing phenomenon in the African society such that it is unavoidable literary baggage. It deals with a new society of Lesbians, Gay, Bisexuals, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) who seems to be coming out of the closet and is willing to be very expressive in their form.

Writers of literary works who would want to delve into this emerging field of discuss might be seen to be withholding some descriptive information for fear of being judged by the readers of their works or for fear of their religious background. Thus, these writers may choose to make use of less sensitive words in their narratives, depriving the general reading public the opportunity to be eye-opened to the realities that face them in the form of Queer literature. Also, writers of literature on the cyberspace seem to intentionally forego the literary elements such as characterization. They make use of characters but do not dwell so much on properly introducing the character to the reader in a bid not to bore the reader. They also seem to avoid the proper use of setting such that the story is told but where the events happen is seen as an obscure idea to the reader. Thus most readers of cyberspace literature are informed about the what and are oblivious to the when, the where and why the what takes place. Thus, necessitate the need for the emergence of criticism of literary works that exist on the cyberspace. Whether the motive for writing is to win a prize in poetry or other genres of literature, it is fundamental that these works, whether they exist as

programmed digital narratives, on Facebook, Whatsapp or on blogs, should be properly evaluated and criticized to ensure that it is worthy of readership.

It had been earlier opined in this paper that some young writers have made their mark in cyberspace literature inspite of the fact that they probably do not have a very solid educational background in the said field. But, just as formal education seemed to have relegated the oral artist who derived prominence either by the informal training or the formal training, and as literature has gone from oral to print to cyberspace literature, the art of writing poems, short stories, flash fictions and other evolving forms of literature has gone past the era of just being an offshoot of literature written in print form. It is in this light that this paper argues that Digital Literature be added into the University curriculum. Most students in the university, whether they are in the department of English and Literature or not, make use of these evolving genres of literature in their use of the internet, most times oblivious to the fact that they are, in a sense, creating new ways of encouraging writing. Whether they make use of Facebook to tell stories, share pictures that tell stories or even use emojis to speak in the language that only netizens understand, they set a certain standard in making themselves writers in their own way.

The introduction of Digital Literature into the University curriculum would give room for students, irrespective of the department they represent, to understand that they are an integral part of a growing community of cyber-netizens; and that they should be aware of the tasks they perform in promoting literature on the cyberspace. Gleason (2020) observe that; "Education is changing because the digital economy is shifting the skills and talents needed to lead a successful life and foster personal well-being. Talent gaps persist and are deepening around computer science and creativity. Learners need to be cognitively adaptive, and able to constantly learn new things and apply old knowledge to new contexts. Lifelong learning is the new normal" (4). Teachers are students must be deliberate in the use of digital tools. For instance, some students have taken to programming such that they convert gigantic textbooks into a simple 1.5mb pdf file such that a student's small phone might contain a library of over 300 books, something that would never fit into his school bag. The addition of Digital Literature has also seen the birth of a new generation of writers who use the tools in these apps to tell African stories. An experiment carried out in the University of Calabar, Cross River, Nigeria, where digital literature is gradually taking a pioneering form there, as early as in the first year, tested the students. They were assigned to create blogs of their own, post stories and ensure that they get a wide audience of readers to peruse their works. After the experiment, it was discovered that these students, who probably started out as novices especially in blog creation and carving out amazing

blog worthy stories, made use of these opportunity to create mind-blowing blogs as well as stories that were worth reading.

This experiment exposed the students' ability to make use of the Internet to carve a niche for themselves and create a writing identity for themselves. These students made use of the wide range of social media accessible to them to promote their stories, poems and flash fictions by making use of the hyperlinks that allowed them to connect from their blogs directly to Facebook, twitter, Instagram and even Whatsapp. This exercise also stipulated that the images used to cover these works were to be original and not pictures from the internet, and as such, these students made use of their mobile phones in creating pictures that told stories in a million words. Digital literature, for their level, exposed them to the use of flash fiction especially as seen in Twitliterature. And these students have held their own in making use of these blogs as a means of telling the world what African society feels like. Some of these blogs are visited by other foreign bloggers who read these stories and help to rebroadcast these stories. And since these writers were assigned to groups, they gave themselves multiple responsibilities by ensuring that their stories were read, corrected, reread, edited, typed and then posted, with original pictures. And as the fluidity of the cyberspace gives room for their works to undergo other forms of re-editing, it serves as a form of literary criticism and evaluation for these young budding writers. These writers made use of the society they found themselves, the technologically advanced society, tapped from the organic society and gave to a global audience that exist on the cyberspace. The addition of digital literature into the university curriculum will aid in moving Nigerian education to the level where the Western world is at the moment, slightly devoid of print literature. Digital literature is not out to kill print literature, but to give it a new form and give writers who cannot afford the financial obligations of having their works in print form, a platform to sell their stories. And for writers like Funkekeme and Nonso, having Digital literature added to the university curriculum might just give them an opportunity to formally harness their writing skills on social media as well as have a certificate to show for.

CONCLUSION

The study has accounted for the emergence of Nigerian Digital Literature and has attempted a definition of its practices and the need for a descriptive approach to its criticism. The study also emphasizes on the merging of literary theory with digital theory in the analysis of Nigeria Digital Literature. The study states that the interface between technology and the creative imagination of Nigerian writers led to the composition of newer texts different from the narratives of digital migrants. Nigerian Digital Literature is a continuation of other forms of Nigerian Literatures before it. The

study takes a survey around university of Calabar and students' consumption of digital products in general; and digital literature in particular and emphasizes the need for the introduction of Nigerian Digital Literature into the University curriculum, which would give room for students to understand the growing community of cyber-netizens. The study emphasizes the need for a synergy in the criticism of the Nigerian Digital Literature even to the "exclusion" of Traditional Critics. It observes that it would be a disservice to humanity to continue critiquing literature based on the binary of print and oral. It affirms the influence of the interface of technology on Nigerian Digital literature, a representation of a new form of Nigerian Literature, as a production of a digital generation. The study concludes that the introduction of the study of digital literature would enable students harness their skills with the benefits of digital production as an aspect of global culture.

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