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**Thematic Reinforcement in Poetry: An Analysis on the use of Biblical
Allusion as Stylistic Device in Oloruntoba-Oju's *Losses***

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Abstract

This study explores the thematic issues raised in Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju's poetry collection Losses. A total of nine data were selected from the poems Another Parable, Apata, the Rock; The new Commandments; Down the Throat of Pieter Botha and, Tell Them Mandela which were purposively selected from the poetry collection. These selected data from the poetry collection were analysed using Stylistics as the model for analysis. Specifically, Biblical allusion, as a stylistic device, is used for analysis. The Biblical allusions are elicited from the selected data. The aim of this study is achieved by exploring how the selected Biblical allusions reinforce the various themes in Losses. This study has revealed through the analysis that the use of Biblical allusions by the poet is not just a show of the poet's linguistic or stylistic dexterity but also as a potent tool to reinforce his message through the themes. The analysis has shown that the poet through Biblical allusion explores basically the themes of oppression, hardship, poverty and revolution. This study is unique in that apart from exploring the stylistic prowess of the poet through his use of Biblical allusions, it further explores how the allusions are important in the thematic construction of the poems. This study concludes that Oloruntoba-Oju is an ace stylistician who through stylistic devices is able to aptly communicate his message to readers.

Keywords: *Stylistics, Style, Allusion, Poetry and Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju.*

Introduction

Style simple means a method or manner in which something is done as different from others. It could also refer to a particular way of speaking which is peculiar to a particular person. Stylistics on the other hand is the formal study of style as a branch of Linguistics. Simpson (2004) opines that "to do stylistics is to explore language, and, more specifically, to explore creativity in language use". Creativity is a key concept in stylistics. Other levels of language provide choices which users could choose from in expressing themselves while in stylistics, the language users could do the 'abnormal' in order to communicate their message. This gives writers and speakers the freedom to use language as they wish so long as the message is passed to readers. Ayeleru (2012:126) says that "poetry is a work of literature which is characterised by the presence of imagination, emotion, truth, sense of expression and concrete language expressed rhythmically." Though rendered concisely, poetry is rich in meaning and open to multiple and diverse interpretations which make it interesting to study.

Oloruntoba-Oju's *Losses* is a collection of poems from which poems were selected for analysis in this study. From the selected poems for analysis, Biblical allusions inherent were elicited with the aim of unearthing how the passages alluded to are helpful in reinforcing the themes of the poems. Oloruntoba-Oju in his *Losses* explores various themes such as corruption, poverty, oppression and revolution. Interestingly, these themes are reinforced by the various Bible portions

alluded to hence, the aim of this study to investigate how this is achieved in the selected poems from the collection. Allusion being a literary stylistic device provides a theoretical framework (i.e. Literary Stylistics) for this study thus, bringing to the fore the Biblical allusions in the selected poems, this study investigates how the elicited allusions reinforce the themes of the poems. Though studies abound on (Biblical) allusions as stylistic device, the uniqueness of this study lies in its investigation of those allusions as reinforcements to the various themes in the poems.

This study contributes to existing literatures in the fields of Communication and Linguistics specifically in the area of Stylistics which explores creativity in language use. Thus, students and scholars in these fields will find it handy in one way or the other.

Methodology

The data for analysis were purposively selected from Oloruntoba-Oju's poetry collection, *Losses*. Stylistics is used as the theoretical framework by which the selected data were analysed. Specifically, Biblical allusion as a stylistic device in Oloruntoba-Oju's *Losses* is analysed in order to bring to the fore how it serves as reinforcement to the themes expressed in the selected data which is the aim of this study. This serves as tool or means which furthers or enhances the understanding of the readers. Thus, the allusions which the people are familiar with are applied to the poems for better understanding. The poems selected from the collection for analysis are: *Another Parable*, *Apata*, *the Rock*; *The new Commandments*; *Down the Throat of Pieter Botha* and, *Tell Them Mandela*.

Allusion

This is the act of making reference to people, historical objects or people, books like the Bible or the Quran, etc. in order to give weight to or corroborate a subject matter under discussion. M.H Abrams (2009 p.11) defines it as "a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage." Allusions help to give illustration or used to expand a given message. Allusion is a stylistic device which makes reference to prominent figures, places, objects etc. in order to emphasize a particular message. The aim is to mapped out certain traits from the person or object alluded to in order to enhance the understanding of the message being communicated. Though, according to Abrams (1999 p.12), "...allusions are not explicitly identified, they imply a fund of knowledge that is shared by an author and the audience for whom the author writes", they are not unrecognizable to readers and their message is accessible; the readers make a connection between the person or object being alluded to and the matter under discourse which enhances their understanding.

About Oloruntoba-Oju and *Losses*

Oloruntoba-oju is a lecturer in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. He is a researcher basically in areas of language, society and culture; language, ideology and class relations; urban and youth languages. Generally, he works within applied language. *Losses* is one of Oloruntoba-Oju's creative works. *Losses* is a collection of poems published in 1993 by Academia publications

The poems in the collection are as follows: Hawker; Another Parable: apata; the rock; Tolerance, Like a Wondrous Cuckold; Harassment; Oriki of an axe; the rod of tyranny; The Jailed Man's Plea; the new year; song of the lady giver; song of the jobless 'rascal'; the new commandments; hail artist, from naijaeria; my friend the killer editor; the enraged poet; highway poetics; the living fraternity; the mandate; on the mat; the new verse; the muddy pond; loco running shed; every yearning his agony; father was just; Losses; down the throat of Pieter Both; Tell them Mandela; O yanki yanki; Ode to my curtain; Ladun; who knows tomorrow?; once upon an African nuptial; valediction; Dekunle; iya oba laa.

The major themes in *Losses* are:

Theme of Loss: The author explores the theme of loss in 'Losses' by comparing the present to the past in which the present seems devoid of virtues such as happiness, hope, love, etc. which causes the author great concern. The society has lost happiness which the author once knew when growing up as he said in 'losses'

'...for today's bloodied riches only lose us
The ringing laughter of bye-gone moments.' (Stanza 4, p. 49)

Also in stanza 8, page 50, he says:

No longer at ease now, my friend
In this crowded lane of my lost "happiness".

Theme of Oppression and injustice: the author also explores the theme of oppression and injustice meted on the poor, less-privileged and the vulnerable in the society by those in authority who should exercise justice no matter whose ox is being gored. This is present in "Harassment" when he says:

Harassment is real, mark my words
When the shrill voice of reason
Is strangely tagged the name of treason
When the monstrous even-number decree strikes
At odd moments of peaceful night
And the lone crusader is borne on swift iron wings
Miles away from freedom's fringe (p.14)

Also, in "The jailed man's plea" the author highlights the injustice meted on the poor jailed man who is jailed for ten years for stealing some tubers of yam while those who siphon public funds for development and provision of basic necessities of life: good road, portable water, jobs, etc. go unpunished, saying:

Please O, my lord...ten years
Let it not be sometin wrong with my ear
I no rob, I no kill I no carry cocaine (p.20)

Theme of Mismanagement/Self Aggrandizement: The author explores the theme of self-aggrandizement mismanagement of public offices by the so-called leaders who abuse the trust of the people imposed on them by their selfish instincts which pushes them to amass wealth for themselves at the detriment of the masses. In "Tolerance, like a wondrous cuckold" the author laments:

Then came vandals
Beaky-nosed from distant lands
Next came the vandals
Home-grown and unabashed
Together prising my lady's locks
Frittering her priceless treasures (p.12)

The author decries the attitude of the leaders' self-aggrandizement in "The new year" when he says:

...Say: how many grains of prayer can fill the pot?
Those feeding us prayer and hope first stuff their own gut
With bread (p.21)

Theme of Poverty: the author also explores the theme of poverty by bringing to fore the plights of the masses in the hands of their selfish leaders who feed on the poor and make themselves richer with what is meant for everybody in the society. The poet says in "The new year":

Say: the new year begets a budget
It hits as hard as does a cudgel
Begetting trendier holes in famished pockets (p.21)

Also, in "The new commandments" the poet lets us into the ordeal of the masses to whom having food and clothes is luxuries which they sparsely afford all the time. He says:

Ask ye first to clothe and feed
Then shalt thou be strengthened
For other things.
If ye have food and clothing today
Thou shalt not be satisfied still
Till thou be sure of more, tomorrow. (p.26)

Theme of Racism: The author also explores the theme of racism condemning the injustices of the whites on the blacks. He kicks against practices of the whites oppressing the blacks and judgment by one's colour. The author subtly decries this act of segregation and passing of judgment based on one's colour since we are all created equal with same abilities and capabilities regardless of our different skin colours.. In "Down the throat of Pieter Botha" he says:

Perchance you come all black?
Expect to have your living bleak. (stanza 1, p.52)

Also, he kicks against passing judgment based on one's colour of skin:

Justice is you're wrong or right

Depending your face is black or white! (stanza 2, p.52)

Literature and Theology

There has been a shift from what used to obtain where literary works were analysed from a purely artistic and aesthetic point of view known as 'art for art's sake. This led to the argument by some scholars that literary works should in addition to being considered from the aesthetic and imaginative point of view should also be viewed from both ethical and religious perspectives. T.S Eliot (1935), argues that there is relationship between literature and religion and displayed the application of the religion in the study of literature. He posits that it is irrational to try to separate literature from religion.

Salmann (2010 p.27) opinion is in consonance with T.S Eliot positing that even the novel that is not directly approached from religious perspective "involves relevant theological reasons." To Eliot and Salmann, literature must not be directly centred on religious themes, they ordinarily have inherent religious nuances that can be unearthed. Eliot's argument about the inseparableness of literature and religion is that literature is aimed at affecting the behaviour of readers which is also what religion is out to achieve thus, the 'behaviour' is a common factor between religion and literature. Torockai and Preda argue that:

The common factor between religion and literature is behaviour. Our religion requires ethics, judgment and our own criticism- both ours and our fellows. In its turn, literature has an effect on our behaviour. Whatever the intentions of the author, his work affects us all as human beings. Even if we read a literary work only with an aesthetic purpose (keeping our moral judgment in another register), it affects us as human beings, whether we intend it or not. (2014 p.3)

The above quotation helps to unravel the interconnectivity and interdependency of literature and religion. A study of literature is invariably a study of religion in a way. They may differ in their function, they express reality that is displaced from the immediate. (Torockai and Preda, 2014 p.4).

Theoretical Framework

Style and Stylistics

Style to a layman is simply the manner of doing things thus, we can have one's style of walking, sitting, eating, dressing, talking etc. In writing or speaking, one's style will have to do with one's choice of words, phrases, sentence construction etc. According to Leech (1969), style is "the way in which an act is spoken, written or performed." This definition expresses style one's peculiar way of speaking or writing. To Leech and Short (1981), it refers to the use of language in a given context, by a given person and for a particular purpose. The above definition restricts style to

language use. Furthermore, it considers how language is used in context and the purpose it is serving in that context as used by a particular person. Corroborating this, Oloruntoba-Oju (1999) also sees context as a crucial part of style. He opines that style and variety are synonymous. He considers style to be a sociolinguistic concept since the variations in expressions and language are dependent on the society in which they are produced.

Stylistics is the scientific study of style. According to Abrams (1999)

Since the 1950s, the term stylistics has been applied to critical procedures which undertake to replace what is claimed to be the subjectivity and impressionism of standard analyses with an 'objective' or 'scientific' analysis of the style of literary texts. (p. 352)

It is a branch of language study that studies authors' use of creativity of language and other expressive means such graphology, deviations etc. which could be categorized as the style of that particular author. This is corroborated by Ekwutosi (2009), who defines stylistics as a branch of linguistics which studies the features for the distinctive uses of varieties of language in different situations. It then follows that stylistics applies to the various levels of language: phonology, lexis, syntax, pragmatics, semantics etc. Creativity is an indispensable concept in stylistics. This is why Simpson (2004) opines that "to do stylistics is to explore language, and, more specifically, to explore creativity in language use". Simpson's definition places primacy on creativity in language use when doing a stylistic study. This is to say that stylistics goes beyond just studying the grammar or syntax of language but how writers are able to do the 'abnormal' in their use of language. Thus, stylistics looks beyond grammaticality and ungrammaticality to look at how linguistic resources are employed dexterously to communicate a particular message in a particular context.

Stylistics broadly bifurcates into literary stylistics and linguistic stylistics. Literary stylistics according to Carter and Simpson (1989) is concerned with providing 'the basis for fuller understanding, appreciation and interpretation of avowedly literary and author-centred texts.' This is the exploration of the stylistic devices that are employed by a particular author to communicate his message. Its aim is to evaluate and explicate literary writings. Literary stylistics studies literary devices and figurative tropes such as simile, metaphor, allusion, personification, oxymoron etc. Linguistic stylistics on the other hand was proposed by Donald Freeman in 1968 (cited in Fish 1981) and developed by David Crystal in the same year. Linguistic stylistics seeks to explore the deployment of linguistic resources or devices in writings. Linguistic stylistic study is done on the various levels of language. At the syntactic level, the analyst could look at types of sentence or sentence structure; at the level of phonology, the analyst could consider the patterns of speech sounds, meter, rhyme etc.; at the lexical level, consideration could be given to content and function words, foreignisms, borrowed words, frequency of nouns, verbs, adjectives etc; at the semantic level, attention could be given to denotative and connotative meanings.

This study adopted the literary stylistic model for analysis thus, the Biblical allusions identified are used to achieve the aim of the study which is to investigate and unearth how the various

thematic issues raised in the selected data for analysis were realized through Biblical allusions as stylistic device.

Stylistic Analysis of Oloruntoba-Oju's Losses

This section presents the selected data and the analysis of the data based on the adopted stylistic model in order to explore how the thematic issues in the poems are realized through Biblical allusions.

Datum 1

My staff in anger against you
For a gushing response in this wilderness?
(‘Losses’; ‘Another Parable, Apata, the Rock’)

In the datum above, the author alludes to the biblical exodus of the Israelites in the wilderness en route the Promised Land recorded in the book of Exodus chapter 17. The above refers to the point in the journey where they were weary and thirsty, and complained to Moses who prayed to God and was instructed to strike a rock with the rod in his hand and water gushed out from the rock for them to drink. Oloruntoba-Oju uses the ‘the Biblical rock’ and the ‘masses’ referred to as ‘you’ in the above datum. Exploring the theme of apathy, Oloruntoba-Oju condemns the passivity of the people towards perceived oppression and injustices meted out on them. Thus, Oloruntoba-Oju is the ‘Moses’ with the staff (poem) who will bring out water (action/resistance) from the rock (the people). The poet’s message to the people is to become aware and be actively engaged in their affairs especially how they are being governed by those in positions of authority. This message is appropriately reinforced by the above Biblical allusion made by the poet. A proper understanding of the scenario between the Israelites and the rock and what resulted from it enhances the understanding of the poet’s message in the above datum. As the rock is transfixed no matter what happens, so are the people no matter what is done to them; they may be killed, cheated, maltreated, pauperized, incarcerated unjustly etc. yet, they do nothing to salvage themselves from their oppressors.

Another phase of the scenario is the immediate gushing response from the rock as it was struck by Moses with a rod. This also is pregnant with messages from the poet to the people. Firstly, it is noteworthy that the rock had the capacity to bring forth water which would benefit people. The poet intends to open the eyes of the people to the abilities in them if only they would act. This implies that the people believe that there is nothing they could do to salvage the unpalatable situations they are going through. ‘knowledge’ they say, ‘is power’. Since the people now know what they could do, it becomes easier for them to salvage themselves from their oppressors. Thus, Oloruntoba-Oju aims at informing the people and it is expected that this information ignites action from the people just as the rock at the hit of the rod. Herein lies the revolutionary stance of the poet.

Datum 2

The fear of Gun

Is the beginning of wisdom?

(the new commandments; St. 1 line 1-2)

In the above datum, the author alludes to Proverbs 9 verse 10 of the Bible which says that ‘‘the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom’’ thus replacing ‘‘God’’ with ‘‘Gun’’. Through this, Oloruntoba-Oju explores the theme of oppression of the masses by the leaders who rule with the gun making the masses to live in fear. The author exposes an abnormality in the society where the people living in fear of their leaders who are elected by the same people to serve them. Thus, we are presented with a society where obedience from followers is induced with the gun. God commands our fear because he created the world and he has the power to give life or take it anytime. This kind of fear should not be felt by followers for their leaders who are mere mortals like them more so, who are elected into those positions by them. This allusion makes it possible for the poet to express the kind of morbid fear the people have for their leaders who use gun to command followership. This also reinforces the theme of authoritarian leadership style peculiar to Africa and Nigeria in particular. Every good leader does not coerce the people to obey him. He earns respect and obedience from the people by virtue of his good leadership. This also brings to the fore the possibility that the leaders forced themselves into office hence, the need to use coercion to force obedience since the people will hardly obey someone they didn’t elect. The above Biblical allusion has reinforced some themes expressed by the poet which include the theme of oppression, corruption and failed leadership in Nigeria.

Datum 3

Thou shall have no other god

Save what can make thee survive the times.

(the new commandments; St. 1 line 1-2)

The poet alludes to Exodus chapter 20 which has the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses to the Israelites. The Ten Commandments spelt out the rules for Christian living. The above datum is the first amongst the commandments. God speaking, it states that, ‘‘thou shall have no other god but me.’’ In that commandment, God affirmed his sovereignty as the only God that should be worshiped by the Israelites and by extension, all Christians. The worship of another god is idolatry and God forbids it. The above datum expresses the theme of hardship and this is undergirded by the above Biblical allusion. Appropriate understanding of the above allusion enhances the understanding of the theme being expressed. As quoted above, the allusion states that only God be worshipped by Christians. In the same vein, the poet, in the above allusion places primacy to the hardship. The implication is that, as a result of the hardship, people struggle to survive thereby unable to attend to other issues of life. One could not possibly talk about good roads, good house, education, good clothes etc. when one can barely feed oneself. Just like God who alone should be worshipped, survival is the only thing on the mind of the people as a result

of the hardship being experienced. Thus, this allusion makes explicit the theme of hardship and enhances the understanding of it by the readers.

Datum 4

Thou shalt learn to love thy neighbor
When thou shall first have loved thyself.
(the new commandments, St. 1)

In the datum above, allusion is made to Mark chapter 12 verse 31 of the Bible where the Ten Commandments are recorded which begins with the phrase “thou shall” highlighting what should be done by Christians. Through this allusion, Oloruntoba-Oju through the opening phrase “thou shalt” in the above datum tells the people what and what is permissible by, not God this time but, the situation of things in the society. The quotation reads, “Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself...”. The phrase “as thyself” means that the measure of love to be extended to one’s neighbor is the measure of love one already has. The Biblical injunction, through the above allusion, that neighbours should be loved as oneself is not feasible according to the poet since one can only extend what one has to others. The infeasibility of this injunction lies in the fact that the people are not happy themselves about their plights thus, it becomes difficult to consider others. The above datum expresses the theme of severe hardship. That people even strive to fend for themselves hence, the issue of communalism and neighborliness which characterize Nigeria are impracticable not because the people don’t want to but because they are overwhelmed by personal needs to be met and there is dearth of resources to meet those needs.

In concomitance to the theme of severe hardship is the implication that there is leadership failure. When political leaders fail to provide pipe borne water, good roads, jobs etc., the people have to struggle for survival. Oloruntoba-Oju, using allusion intends to open our eyes to the depth of poverty and hardship in the land which make it difficult for the masses to fend for themselves let alone to consider others. These themes of poverty and hardship are appropriately reinforced by the above Biblical allusion.

Datum 5

Ask ye first to clothe and feed
Then shalt thou be strengthened
For other things.
(the new commandments)

In the above datum, the author alludes to Matthew 6:33 which gives priority to seeking God’s kingdom first then other things shall come along with it. The passage states that “other things” should only come after that the kingdom of God is sought first, in the same way, applying it to the above datum, other things can only be sought after if one is able to feed and clothe oneself. Through this, the author explores the theme of (abject) poverty in the land by implying that the people are poor that being able to feed or clothe is difficult. By saying “ask ye first...” implies that the feeding and clothing of the masses depend on whether or not they ask for it which even is hardly

given. This means that the poverty of the people is man-made and caused by the people in possession of the “clothes and food” who have denied the masses access to them.

The themes of hardship and corruption are expressed in the above datum. These themes are reinforced by the allusion made to the Bible. The passage referenced places primacy on seeking God’s kingdom then other necessities would be given, applicably, the poet places primacy to clothes and food. In countries where leaders are responsible, the issue of food and clothes does not even come up as that is already taken care of. They rather focus on development such as construction of roads, provision of portable water, provision and equipping of health centres, creation of jobs etc. That citizens still struggle to feed and clothe themselves is a pointer to the irresponsibility of government in place. Nigeria is a country that is blessed with abundant natural and human resources. This does not tally with what is seen in the country in term of development. This undoubtedly portrays our leaders as corrupt and selfish as they amass for themselves what is meant for the people.

Datum 6

Ask ye first what this thy country can feed thee with

Then shalt thou know in what measure to serve it.

(the new commandments)

In the datum above, allusion is also made to Matthew 6:33 of the bible that enjoins Christians to seek God’s kingdom first and other things will follow. Normally the “food” gotten through “labour” should be commensurate to the amount of effort put into the work. By directing the people to measure the “amount of food” and “their labour put in” implies that the amount of service the people put into the country is not commensurate to the “food” they get from it. Through this, Oloruntoba-Oju explores the themes of oppression and deprivation in the society as reward for labour is not commensurate to efforts put in to serve the country. Through this, the author calls on the people to see this injustice done to them by those in the position of power in order to protest for fair treatment. The passage alluded to places primacy on seeking God’s kingdom first then other things follow. In the same vein, the above allusion is cautionary as it implies that the people busy themselves serving the country while the country does not ‘serve’ the people. As patriotic citizens, the country comes first but then, the country does not cater for the citizens as it should thus, the poet calls for a rethink. The working class does all the work while the corrupt leaders loot the treasury, sharing public funds amongst themselves. Oloruntoba-Oju’s call to the people is aimed at getting them to act against this injustice in order to cause a change in the society.

Datum 7

And the greatest of these commandments:

Thou shalt bear no witness at all
Of these hard and rocky times
And the felony of thine self-chosen leaders
Be it False or be it True
Else in this new year the Lords decree
An early grave for you.
(the new commandments)

In the datum above, the author alludes to Exodus chapter twenty which contains the ten commandments to communicate a message to the people specifically, the commandment that nobody should bear false witness. The author employs this allusion to pass the message that just as the aspect of the ten commandments alluded to above, the leaders who are appointed by the people refuse the people bearing witness and, while in the biblical reference, it is a wrong act (false witness) that is being kicked against, in this case, the leaders oppress the same people who elected them into power and refuse them any complaint against the wickedness meted out on them.

Firstly, this allusion is made to show the top-down power flow approach in the form of commandment and order and, secondly, to show the consequence for disobedience. Surprisingly, the leaders who are commoners being given an opportunity of leadership now oppress the people and pass oppressive decrees that even God, the creator has not, hence, this allusion to show the wicked side of the commandments of the leaders. While God forbids false witnessing, the leaders forbid witnessing against oppression. This will then mean that while being oppressed and suffering, the people are expected to pretend all is well by not complaining. Anybody who complains has ‘an early grave decreed’ for them. This allusion reinforces the theme of oppression which the people suffer in the hands of their leaders.

Datum 8

Long before the laws were made for sinners

From on top the mount of Sinai
We all condemn the human flesh
Unwholesome diet on fetish tables

But... (Down the throat of Pieter Botha; St. 3 line 1-5)

In the datum above, allusion is made to the biblical account in Exodus chapter 19 on Mount Sinai where Moses collected the law. The law made in the land is not for everybody but for a particular group of people. By using allusion, Oloruntoba-Oju kicks against the law formulated to rather punish a particular group of people exonerating others regardless of whatever they do. He rather seeks an egalitarian society where everybody is treated equally and fairly regardless of some differences. Considering the region in context (South Africa), the law is racial and only in force when the offender is black. Through this biblical allusion, the author explores the theme of racial

discrimination, and with it, condemns it entirely. The author makes this bear not only to inform readers about it but to motivate the people to rise up and fight against it in order to have an egalitarian society where all will be treated equally. The above Biblical allusion reinforces the theme of (racial) discrimination. We have political, ethnic, tribal, racial etc. differences and sometimes, we allow ourselves to be divided on these differences instead of focusing what binds us rather than our differences. The poet uses the above Biblical allusion to condemn racism as the so-called laws of the land are motivated against some particular group of people who do not share the same ideology with the law makers. The aim of this is to promote equality in the society especially before the law.

Datum 9

Then you shall tell them, Mandela
 I do not know thee
 Get thee away from me
 Ye workers of evil
 For when I yearned for freedom
 You gave me a gift
 Of bondage
 I thirsted for water
 You gave me vinegar
 Hungered for bread
 You gave me stones
 And when they feign vindication
 When they say: But we never
 Did these things to you
 Then you will tell them, Mandela
 Since you have done so
 To my brothers and sisters in your domains
 Then you have done even so
 Unto me (Tell them, Mandela; St. 2-6)

The author alludes to Matthew 25:32-46 on Jesus' teaching on how God shall separate the "goats" from the "sheep" i.e. the unrighteous from the righteous and shall ask the unrighteous to get away from him because they merely pretended to be good whereas they were not. Through this allusion, the author explores the theme of pretence and oppression by African leaders who though pretentiously praise Mandela's virtues have vehemently kicked against same in their domains like the unrighteous servants in the above passage alluded to. The author condemns pretence by African leaders and calls for a society that encourages such "Mandelaic" virtues in Africa. Mandela lived an exemplary life that African leaders should emulate. He fought for the emancipation of his people from the whites. He was incarcerated for 27 years because of his activism and criticisms against the oppression of the blacks by the whites. The Biblical passage is a condemnation of pretenders

who lived in sin yet pretended to be holy. This allusion reinforces the theme of pretence. More so, the poet explicitly cautions those who live this kind of lifestyle to change or face rejection. This is aimed at having a sane society where there is freedom and amenities provided by the government.

Conclusion

Oloruntoba-Oju's *Losses* is fraught with Biblical allusions which serve as a viable means of reinforcing the various thematic issues raised in the poetry collection. Majorly, as shown in the analysis, Oloruntoba-Oju alluded to the Ten Commandments found in the book of Exodus chapter 20 of the Bible. This portion of the Bible contains God's commandments to the Israelites and by extension, all Christians. Alluding to this portion of the Bible among others helps the poet to express what the masses should be doing and what they should cease doing, and what the leaders should be doing and what they should cease doing. This comes in the form of the Biblical commandments. By alluding to the Bible, Oloruntoba-Oju is able to not only express the themes but also reinforce them through those allusions as shown in this study.

Some of the themes expressed are the theme of corruption, oppression, poverty and revolution. These themes as shown in the analysis are reinforced by the Biblical portions alluded to. The themes of oppression and corruption for instance, are reinforced by Proverbs chapter 9 verse 10; the theme of poverty is reinforced by Mark chapter 12 verse 31 and Matthew chapter 6 verse 33, while the theme of revolution is reinforced by Exodus chapter 17.

Looking at these themes, one could easily relate them to issues bedeviling the African continent particularly, Nigeria which is the home country of the poet. The poet has through his poems unearthed these issues as they affect the masses. The suffering of the masses through oppression, poverty and corruption as revealed in the analysis is inflicted on them by their leaders. Instead of engaging in developmental projects that will benefit the masses, Nigerian leaders rather focus on enriching themselves with the national and natural resources the nation is blessed with thus impoverishing the masses. It is noteworthy that the poet's aim transcends just informing the readers about their plights in the hands of their leaders. Consequently, and as revealed through the theme of revolution, the poet intends to engage the masses critically in order to realize that they could negotiate their freedom and improved living standard from their leaders if they could arise and challenge the leaders. Succinctly, the poet sees apathy as the challenge to the people's freedom which should be dealt with. The aim of this is to see a transformed society where the leaders are accountable to the people; a society where the masses enjoy the dividends of governance.

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