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The festschrift tradition in African literature: Its implications for the future of African literary criticism

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Within the past nearly two decades or so, a number of festschrifts on African literary icons and other scholars have been published, suggesting a paradigm shift in the preferred choices of publication options open to critics of African literature. The front burner position which festschrifts now seem to occupy, the variegated nature of their structural configurations, the baggage of doubtful mix that we often get from their editors and the doubtful quality of a number of the papers published in them, are the main factors that have inspired the writing of this essay. We note that in spite of the usefulness of festschrifts as publication outlets which younger critics have often found handy, a number of inherent weaknesses have already manifested from the above-named factors, and we believe that these are portentous for African literature if they go on unchecked. Drawing analytical evidence from over twenty-five festschrifts published since 1994, this paper examines the implications of the festschrift tradition for the future of African literary criticism. **Keywords:** African literature, literary criticism, Nigerian festschrift tradition.

Just as African literary creativity has grown in leaps and bounds during the over half a century since the publication of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in 1958, so has African literary criticism blossomed, an upsurge that is indicative of the positively changing fortunes of African literature. In fact if the dictum of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus that "all is flux, nothing is stationary" is anything to go by, then that comment most fittingly applies to the changing nature of African literature. This is not only because of the rapid mutation of the traditional genres in the experiments done by creative writers, but also in the accretion we notice in the quantum of the various creative efforts as writers strive to make their voices heard.

A number of challenges have, however, confronted scholars who want to react with the same verve with which creative writers are churning out new artefacts. Chief among these problems is probably the unavailability of ready publication outlets for the expression of critical opinions on the various works that have kept flowing from writers' pens. A number of the earliest journals have become moribund, either because their founders are dead, retired or exhausted, or because the funds that would ensure their continued publication are no longer forthcoming.

In response to this situation, a number of critics have started to explore other publication avenues/outlets, and quite a number have settled for the *festschrift* as the way out of the publication quagmire in which they find themselves. Indeed, in line with this trend, Ezechi Onyerionwu (“Reward” 19) has noted in a review that “the *festschrift* tradition, especially its literary version, has found a home in Nigeria, Africa’s leading nation in scribal and intellectual literature.” Indeed, going by what is on the ground in Nigeria one could say that the *festschrift* has not only blossomed and become established as an alternative easily available to literary scholars for the publication of scholarly articles, but also has emerged as a major sub-genre for literary criticism.

A *festschrift* is commonly regarded as a collection of writings in honour of a scholar. It is often a book honouring a respected person, especially an academic, and presented during his or her life time. It could happen, however, that such a book gets presented posthumously. In such a case, it is referred to as a *Gedenkschrift*, “a memorial publication”; it then becomes a tribute or memorial volume made up of articles or essays in memory of a colleague (Wiktionary).

When *festschriften* come as essay collections in honour of a living person, they often emphasize him/her as a person of distinction, and are presented to him/her to mark some special occasion, such as formal retirement from active service. This fact accounts for the etymology of the word from two German words, *fest* (feast, celebration) and *schrift* (writing).

Typically, such a book compiled in honour of a scholar comes up at some major milestone in his/her career, or at the peak of it; and individual chapters may be written by colleagues, former students, and academic contemporaries with similar research interests. The general theme of such a book is usually the subject area in which that individual distinguished himself or herself.

Augustine Akpuda (380) has noted “three main traditions of *festschriften* in the Nigerian academy”: (1) “the ones exclusively oriented to literary critics”; (2) “those that focus principally on the *festschrift* personality as a creative writer”, and (3) “those that combine studies on the *festschrift* personality as literary and creative writer.” Let us note immediately that the above categorization, while capturing three important types of the *festschrift*, is not exhaustive. We could conveniently isolate a fourth category, those that focus on scholars or other intellectuals within the academy in other disciplines outside literature, who are neither creative writers nor literary critics, but have equally made their mark in other realms of intellection, in line with the best traditions of the academy. To this category, for example, belongs the book, *Technology, Educational Administration and National Development: Festschrift in Honour of Engineer Oyekwere Ikegwu Nwankwo*, edited by Onyekwere Okpara and Ezechi Onyerionwu. The justification for their project is provided by these editors thus: “Engineer Nwankwo, for many reasons, is one of the not-too-many Nigerians who have affected

their environment beyond dispute, while maintaining a self-effecting [sic], sacrificial attitude in the present era when every privileged opportunity in public service is seen and actually treated as a personal gold mine.” (12) This extract from the introductory chapter convincingly packages Engineer Nwankwo as a festschrift personality.

We could also add a fifth category to the template provided by Akpuda. There are personalities who are neither literary critics, creative writers, a combination of both, nor models of excellence in other disciplines in the academia, but who have also excelled in their areas of calling, even in the private sector. Such personalities exude sufficient charisma and display such moral strength in every area where they are challenged /commissioned to perform that they call for attention as festschrift personalities. The constraints of space would, however, not permit us to refer to them here.

In the past nearly two decades or so, festschrifts on literary personalities have assumed a front burner position and it is our intention in this paper to examine a number of them published between 1995 and 2011, to isolate salient features that distinguish the festschrift as an emerging sub-genre, and comment on their implications for the future of African literary criticism.

One notes, to start with, that the most common kind of literary festschrift is that put together by the former students of the subject, even though they may eventually incorporate persons who were never the subject's students and some of the latter who could be colleagues, because they possess certain intimate and relevant information which would enrich the book.

And, again, for the above reasons, such festschrifts are inevitably highly adulatory and eulogistic in tone, to reflect the mood of celebration, and isolate the subject as a personality of distinction. We shall dwell more on this later.

For now, let us note that one reason why the festschrift has become increasingly popular as a medium for honouring academics has been pointed out by Segun Awonusi and E. A. Babalola in their festschrift on Abiodun Adetugbo: “in [...] advanced countries [...] any giant stride in intellectual-cum-academic endeavours receives universal publicity and the esteemed scholar or super professors on their retirement hardly go away unceremoniously into solitude and despondency. (“Prefatory Remarks” xii)

Unfortunately, our own retiring professors/intellectuals have not been as lucky as those in the Western world. Here, there is a general disdain for the intellect, and a lot of ego-massaging from the *nouveaux riche*, men and women of sudden influence described in many African novels (such as Achebe's *Nanga* and Armah's *Koomson*), who have “made it” from doubtful sources. Such fellows take it upon themselves to announce their arrival and amplify it to the hearing of the world through self-sponsored publications compiled by commissioned professional praise-singers, some

of whom, unfortunately, may also be found in the academia. This is possible because, as Okpara and Onyerionwu (11) have also noted, in many African countries “the prevalence of sycophancy, desperate praise-singing and other forms of unconstructive hagiography is challenging the nobility and the dignity of modesty and decorum”. The consequence has often been that “highly-positioned individuals appear too willing to support ego-massaging projects of any kind that have them as subject.” This is in addition to biographies and like publications losing “the ideal propelling objectives, which are to examine to what extent aspects of a person’s life that have been proven emulatable [sic] and recommendable can be made persuasive to the lives of other individuals”. The emphasis seems generally to have been on non-lasting values, and the focus on material wealth and worldly possessions.

This point is best illustrated by the pitiable and lamentable story told by Professor J. O. J. Nwachukwu-Agbada about his experiences during the launch of his book on the Igbo proverb, which I would quote at length:

When I was about to publicly present my study of the Igbo proverb, which publishing was self-financed anyway, I wrote to many prominent Igbo sons and daughters that I have plans to embark on writing on Igbo songs, Igbo riddles, Igbo folktales, etc if only I could be supported with funds and tasked to produce the manuscripts within certain time periods, my letters yielded not even a reply. And when I launched the book on 19th of October, 2002, none of those ‘biguns’ attended the launch. A former governor sent a representative who pledged N60,000.00 and never redeemed it in spite of all the pressure I exerted. The most shameful was my state government which pledged N50,000.00 through its then Commissioner for Education, and before the said Commissioner left office, he made sure he destroyed all the documents relating to the long process which led to his being asked to represent the state at the book launch. It is as bad as that. (Quoted in Onyerionwu, Orié and Nwosu 16)

This is the extent to which the image of the intellectual has sunk, for which the internal generators of festschrifts have embarked on a salvaging mission. A sample of prefatory or introductory comments from festschrifts under examination here would show that their first programme is to restore what Isidore Okpewho calls the “dignity of intellectual labour” (in his chapter with that title in Kalu Ogbaa’s festschrift on Echeruo). For example, T. Akachi Ezeigbo, in the prefatory comments in the festschrift put together to honour Theo Vincent on his retirement writes: “For years, he extended the boundaries of literary criticism in the country by discussing literature in the media especially on television. His face became indelible, like ink, in the minds of literary enthusiasts and students of literature” (xiv); again, “Professor Vincent is a great teacher as well as an essayist, a critic, commentator and astute administrator. An eclectic intellectual, he is an undisputed authority in poetry, drama, literary theory

and criticism, and in African-American literatures” (xiv). By the publication of the festschrift she says, they “are honoring a man who has an enduring tradition of selfless service” (xv). In a similar vein Austin Asagba writes about Sam Ukala. His view is that the festschrift on Ukala “is indeed the only service and recognition we as artists, friends and professional colleagues can give to a man who is gradually becoming an icon and a phenomenon in the annals of Nigerian, and indeed African creative world” (Asagba 8). In fact, Ukala’s contributions are not presented in vague terms but are well defined: “Ukala’s contributions to the growth and development of Nigerian Drama and Theatre are great and immense. His meteoric rise to artistic fame has confirmed the sincerity, uniqueness and seriousness of purpose with which his avowed commitment to the use of theatre as a veritable platform for social transformation and regeneration of society.” (9)

It is indeed no surprise, in view of the above, that Asagba’s collection is the second festschrift in honour of Sam Ukala, the first having been published nine years earlier by S. Ogude, B. Egede and A. Uhumwangho. This accounts for why, this volume by Austin Asagba is easily one of the most balanced. Most of the contributors have neither been Ukala’s students nor his colleagues, but just admirers or critics who are fascinated by his works and consider them worthy of serious critical attention. Thus, instead of exhibiting that eulogistic tendency that could be said to be a mark of commissioned festschriften, the essays are objectively analytic of Ukala’s works from the perspective of what Matthew Arnold would have called “disinterestedness”.

The festschrift on Aigboje Higo, which fits into my fourth category above, is edited by F. A. Adesanoye and A. Ojeniyi, two experts (one a Professor of Language Arts and the other a thoroughbred book professional who succeeded Higo as Heinemann’s Chief Executive). In Ojeniyi’s “Preface”, he describes the book as being “in honour of Chief Aigboje Higo the doyen of book publishing in Nigeria [...] The publication [...] is more than a celebration of excellence and meritorious service to the fatherland. It is, indeed, a celebration of a pre-eminent figure in the Nigerian publishing industry (ix). In addition, “[their] respect and admiration for Chief Aigboje Higo have prompted [them] to write this book in his honour”, and [their] ultimate purpose is “to extol the legacies he has bequeathed to the industry for which he toiled for over thirty years” (x).

Another festschrift worth referring to is that edited by Ngozi Ezenwa-Ohaeto and Ifeyinwa J. Ogbazi in honour of R. U. Uzoezie. In their “A Note from the Editors”, they talk of “an assemblage of scholars who benefited from this doyen of scholarship [gathering] to honour him” as he “retires from a satisfying, and accomplished engagement after decades of actively educating and instructing generations of students of language and literature”. In the “Preface” to the book, J. Obi Oguejiofor, a Professor of Philosophy at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, writes that the book belongs to the “category of genuine and unalloyed [...] tribute initiated by individuals who

are well aware of and deeply appreciative of his quality as a lecturer, and whose own career has been impacted positively by his examples of dedication to duty and love of academics.” (xi)

In the festschrift on Afam Ebeogu, Austin Chukwu writes that the celebrant “has been the greatest pillar of the University’s discipline of English Language and Literature”; for which reason the “publication aims at immortalizing his name, at paying tribute to his academic leadership,” [and] as a “seasoned scholar, playwright, accomplished critic, and a source of inspiration” (v). The two festschrifts on E. Nolie Emenajo, one produced by Ozo-Mekuri Ndimele and the other by A. A. Onukaogu, Okpara Onyekwere and Ezechi Onyerionwu express similar sentiments as their mission statement. Ndimele describes Emenajo as “a celebrated linguist and a pioneer professor of Igbo Linguistics”; and the symposium held in this honour, from which the papers in the festschrift emerged was meant “to celebrate not only scholarship in our field, but also the impact of his contributions in the development of language” (*Linguistic Paradisevi*). On their part, Onukaogu, Onyekwere and Onyerionwu devote a special edition of their journal, *Enyimba, African Orality and Oral Literatures* to honour Emenajo. In fact they state categorically in the editorial that the volume is “in honour of the outstanding intellectual achievements of one of Africa’s leading scholars of linguistics, Professor Emmanuel Nwanolue Emenajo. A towering figure in the Nigerian Academy, Professor Emenajo has impacted heavily on the development of linguistics as a discipline” (iii).

No less praise is showered on Helen Chukwuma, the first woman Professor at the University of Port Harcourt, by the editors of *Woman in the Academy* which contains essays written in celebration of her academic achievements, on the occasion of her sixtieth birthday (ix). They did not forget to emphasize the “combination of versatility and depth in Chukwuma’s career” in their call for contributions to the collection. The infectious tone of deference to a rare achiever runs through all the festschrifts, from *The Post Colonial Lamp* on D. S. Izevbaye (2008), *The Gong and The Flute* (1994) edited by Kalu Ogbaa’s on M. J. C. Echeruo, *A Mine of Thoughts and Letters* (on Ossie Onuora Enekwe), *Compass* (on Willfried Feuser) and the seven festschrifts for Ayo Bamgbose, Kay Williamson, Munzali Jibril, Conrad Max Benedict Brann, Okon Essien, Nwachukwu coming from special gatherings of the Linguistics Association of Nigeria. The list is endless.

Some festschrifts feature some contributors with more intimidating credentials as editors or contributors than some others. We shall also return to this later. But specifically in this regard, I find *Iba: Essays on African Literature in Honour of Oyin Ogunba* (2003) unique. The “Foreword” is by Dapo Adelugba, a seasoned dramatist and theatre critic of the first generation; and there is an “incantation” (I would have preferred to call it an *Oriki*) by Femi Osofisan. In some respects, Osofisan’s “Incantation” on Ogunba reminds me of Niyi Osundare’s comment in his “Foreword” to the festschrift on

Aigboje Higo: "Higo was there when the current towering iroko in Africa's literary forest were but striving poplars" (Adesanoye and Ojeniyi viii). For comparison, hear Adelugba in the "Foreword" on Ogunba: "Oyin Ogunba was the first scholar to complete the PhD degree in drama at the University of the Ibadan School of Drama/ Department of Theatre Arts", and the essays assembled in his honour "constitute a most worthy tribute to a scholar who has worked in all the sub-fields covered" (vi). In his "incantation" Femi Osofisan writes in confirmation of Adelugba's eulogy that "there is probably no other teacher who has turned out as many students of literature, and particularly African literature, as Oyin Ogunba [...] He has earned himself, in the process, a reputation of being the most benign and the most compassionate teacher of literature in the Nigerian university system". He calls Ogunba "an assiduous teacher and a most unassuming intellect, a humble man of letters with much to be proud of otherwise, and a veritable gentleman in the old sense of the term." (6)

We might save ourselves the trouble of a population count of those who passed through Ogunba, in comparison with the Obumselus, the Echeruos, the Emenanjos, the Obiechinas, the Emenyonus, the Nnolims, etc, but the fact that they belong to a class of super achievers is indubitable and incontestable.

What is contestable, however, which we must now address, is the statement by the editors of *Iba* that "Books of this nature, called *festschrift*, usually say nothing about the persons in whose honour they are put together [...] in another tradition" (ix). I dare say rather that in *every* tradition where the *festschrift* has flourished, it says a lot about the person in whose honour it is put together.

All the editors of the *festschriften* we are looking at submit that none of the *festschrift* personalities they project lobbied for that recognition. T. Akachi Ezeigbo informs us that "Professor Vincent never asked his colleagues to do him this service. The decision to honour him with a conference and a *festschrift* was based purely on merit" ("Prefatory Remarks" xiii). She is aware however that "it is not uncommon to find some senior academics, whose retirement is imminent, lobbying for [the honour of organizing a conference to mark the occasion of their retirement], and providing the resources to have conferences organized and books of essays published to commemorate the end of their service in the institution where they had given the best of their productive years on earth." For most of the *festschriften* listed at the end of this paper, we assume that what Ezeigbo has said about Theo Vincent would apply. In fact, Ndimele informs us that the Linguistics Association of Nigeria is determined and desirous to honour her members who have excelled in the field of academics, and so the *festschrift* series it commissioned "is published annually to celebrate most outstanding scholars who have made very impressive marks in the study and promotion of languages, cultures, and literatures in Nigeria" (*Critical Issues*, "Preface").

However, we must admit that no *festschrift* can be produced without the awareness of its honouree. I am aware of some honourees who have written to influential

contributors to encourage them to make submissions to festschrifts on them. This is especially so because of the essential structure of festschrifts.

A typical festschrift opens with a preface, which might as well be taken as a mission statement of the editor(s). Next follows a foreword and sometimes a citation (if it is a book to be presented at a valedictory gathering). Then follows the essays assembled for the book. Most of the time, the essays reflect what the editors advertised in their “call for papers”, and often move in the direction of materials relevant to the research interests of the honouree. Some of the essays could be on the subject’s own writing or theoretical postulations on various issues; a few essays I have seen dig into the private correspondence of the subject, although some of them indeed need not have been included or cited. Then we have essays on his/her specific works, which might sometimes be followed by biographical essays by members of his/her immediate family, or friends and contemporaries who were very close to him. There may also be special tributes (as we find in the one on Ossie Onuora Enekwe), and memorial poems (where the subject is dead, as in that on Ezenwa-Ohaeto). We also normally find bibliographical listings and awards, and honours and recognitions (local and international). Here, we find a lot of “padding”, the inclusion of items that may be considered irrelevant. Then we have the interview, usually placed at the end, before the full list of the subject’s publications.

Much of what we find in the biographical essays is information obtained earlier from the honouree from previous interactions, or from his/her biography (if there is one). But because the biographical details have been highly edited, with a lot of “offensive” information that would show the negative side of the honouree expunged, the live interview conducted specifically for the festschrift is the most useful. An opportunity shows up for the interviewer to clear certain doubts about a scholar/writer. And this is because such interviews are very comprehensive, and are conducted in an environment devoid of distractions. As J. Obi Oguejiofor has noted, “It is inspiring to let them tell the living and next generations what inspired them in their work, what shaped their dedication; what sustained their engagement and their steadfastness, in simple terms, what made them succeed where so many failed” (“Preface”, in Ezenwa-Ohaeto and Ogbazi xxii).

We now come to the ultimate question: what are the implications of the flourishing of the festschrift tradition for the future of African literary criticism?

The first is that in the absence of a biography or autobiography of the subject, the festschrift becomes a medium for immortalizing in print the subject, far beyond what his personal writings have earned him or her. In this regard, festschrifts are encouraging biographical criticism as a method of gaining a better understanding of a writer or scholar’s works, through understanding his life and times as he reveals in the interview he gave to the editor(s). This, I am sure, would not go down well with formalist critics.

Next, in the face of economic difficulties that have created publication problems for scholars, the *festschrift* has opened up doors of opportunities for publication for budding critics, especially since there could now be collaboration by editors and contributors in order to reduce the weight of the debt burden arising from private book publishing. Thus, literary criticism is kept alive.

Again, younger scholars who are brought into the exercises of primary proof-reading and editing of submitted manuscripts get initiated into the “cult” of book publishing, and a number of them bring along their digital knowledge and skills into the production of the book in question.

Festschrift production has also helped reduce or even curb one bad variety of brain-drain, the situation where writers or potential writers and critics in the academia drop their formal academic engagements for non-academic pursuits in order to make ends meet in a hostile economy. Festus A. Adesanoye (129) describes this as “internal brain drain”. This does not refer to “the brain drain that has resulted from the fact of quite an unacceptably large number of the nation’s best brains having had to jump ship to seek career fulfilment in more economically commodious circumstances outside the country.” Rather it is “the brain drain resulting from university teachers having to abandon study, library or laboratory, as the case may be, to engage in some petty farming (or other businesses) in a bid to supplement their absolutely inadequate earnings from their university jobs.”

Thus, where lecturers would have abandoned their jobs due to lethargy arising from lack of job satisfaction and frustration, they are gingered into action. The publication opportunities opened up by calls for papers wakes them up from their stupor, especially where these calls come from their former teachers or intimate colleagues, or even former students, who compel them to engage their intellect more productively. The prospect of identifying with the book project itself can be exciting, and because there are usually many submissions, each contributor tries to write and submit a paper that would scale through the rigorous test in the process of peer review.

All in all, the production of a *festschrift* and its public presentation also provides an opportunity for not only showcasing younger writers and critics, by openly subjecting their efforts to public scrutiny thereby encouraging them. It also enhances their financial fortunes, since at the end of the day, especially for well-publicised and well-attended book presentation ceremonies to which men and women of substance respond, the contributors may reap financial benefits accruing from substantial amounts of money donated to support the book being presented.

This is in addition to Nwachukwu-Agbada’s perceptive observation that “literary *festschriften* are a valuable means of advancing the heritage of writing as well as cultural theories and epistemology” (see “Foreword” to Akpuda xvi). The *festschrift* tradition is also gradually reshaping the moral conduct of scholars and critics and others who see themselves as potential *festschrift* personalities. Since the possibility is there for a

man who has achieved a lot as an intellectual to become selected as the subject of a festschrift, because of the meticulousness of editors in their choices, many personalities of note are now very self-conscious of their conduct both in private and public life.

The festschrift tradition has also entrenched the celebration of scholars and academics of worthwhile they are alive. It has also encouraged the in-depth study of the works of writers (even their obscure works) that have ordinarily escaped the eyes of critics. We might add that the festschrift has also encouraged the study of authors and their works through the interviews which they give, through which we try to correlate their pronouncements to their art or theoretical postulations. It has therefore also made the interviewing of writers a *sine qua non* for understanding their credo, as well as elevating the interview to the status of sub-genre of prose.

One point we must not ignore is that the increasing publication of quality festschriften, through the valorisation of those to whom the honour is due, has begun to help knowledgeable persons with discernment to start separating the sheep from the goats in the academia, a process of sifting that would ensure that only the best remain after the wheat has been separated from the chaff through winnowing. Evidence of this, is that some of our scholars have more than one festschrift dedicated to them, for example, Chinua Achebe, M. J. C. Echeruo, Ime Ikiddeh, Sam Ukala, Ayo Bamgbose, Kay Williamson, E. Nolue Emenanjo, Tanure Ojaide and Ola Rotimi.

This is a salutary development, especially in our situation where we have stood for too long on a foundation of an unhealthy mix of negative values. As more and more people in the academia and other vocations continually engage in self-examination, as a preface for determining self-worth, those habits and drives that encourage ego massaging behaviours would gradually (hopefully) be deemphasized and dropped. Men and women in positions of responsibility would (we also hope) take a cue and become more conscious of their conduct while in office, especially if they expect that some day they could be nominated for valorisation through a festschrift.

There is, however, one problem that manifested from the flourishing of festschriften. A very meticulous look at some of them, especially those produced by young former students in honour of their former teachers, shows that a number of the essays are shallow and weak, sounding like refurbished lecture notes, because of the limited research experience of those contributors. The rush to beat deadlines is also part of the problem, and when the essays are submitted, some of the editors do not seem (in spite of their claims to the contrary) to subject those essays to proper peer review. As Echeruo has noted in an interview with Ezechi Onyerionwu,

Like many of my colleagues, I have been a stickler for thoroughness in scholarship [...] I would recommend to newer scholars that they be rigorous in their work, even if that only means that they identify a model of that rigour and pattern their writing in the early stages of their career on that model. I have learnt from my

teachers and from the experience of reading, generally, to *always* imagine that there is a wiser, more experienced reader over my shoulder, another pair of eyes reading and judging every word I write and every argument I make. (Onyerionwu, *21st Century* 60)

What makes a scholarly book or article is the process of vetting which we call “peer review”. It is not a perfect system, but it vouches that people familiar with the subjects on which we write had the opportunity of first reading the piece and recommending its publication so the profession can also read it and, hopefully, learn from it. Beyond that, the peer review system helps the author see the strengths of his or her work (Onyerionwu, *21st Century* 61).

I have quoted Echeruo at length because what he says also has to do directly with intellectual humility, the ability to admit that you cannot know it all and therefore cannot say the last word on any matter, which I see lacking presently in contemporary African literary criticism. It also saves you from being accused of intellectual arrogance. We notice that part of the reason some younger critics refuse to show the drafts of their work to presumably more knowledgeable seniors is not necessarily the fact that some seniors have forced themselves into “voluntary retirement”, remaining dormant for too long as academics even while not yet due for actual retirement. It has to do partly with the fear of the younger ones that the older ones may once again sideline them and take over the show.

We notice too that the poor quality of some of the papers published in festschrifts is due to the fact that some of those commissioned to write papers are unprepared, or are taken unawares by the call for papers; but the urge not to disappoint those who have honoured them with such an invitation to participate in the project compels them to “submit something”. It could also happen that by some coincidence some of those invited might already be working on some topic related to the declared purview of the proposed book, in which case all they need to do is “refurbish” what they already have in hand to beat the deadline.

In some cases, in their haste to “assemble something” the editors do not insist on essays that have direct relevance to the research interest of the subject, and those invited just submit essays they have already written, but have been unable to publish for various reasons.

My interviews with editors of festschrifts reveal that the extension of invitations to contributors often depends on the estimation or ranking of such scholars in the opinion of the editors. Such criteria as academic rank, status, academic activeness and other criteria come into play, but the presumed ability to deliver quality papers at short notice seems to predominate.

In all, the sometimes indiscriminate acceptance of everything submitted leads to editorial problems for the editors, who find themselves unable to arrange the submitted

articles into sections that show coordinated and well-thought-out organization. The salutary side to the emergence of the festschrift as a forum for expressing critical opinion in African literature though is that it has shown too that in spite of the hurry in which some of them seem to be, there are quite a number of meticulous critics among the younger generation. All they need is to exercise a little more patience, and add more “rigour” to their work, in the effort to use literary criticism to complement the efforts of the creative writer. By so doing they would be helping use the festschrift “to provide blueprints to individuals on what society, as a progressive and development-oriented institution expects from them, and of course, how to go about developing the attitude that is needed to fulfil such responsibilities.” In this process, they would “provide society with alternative role models, on whom lives of influence (not necessarily affluence) would be shaped.” (Okpara and Onyerionwu 12)

Thus, apart from serving as another medium for immortalizing recognized achievers, and as an additional forum for expressing well thought out critical opinions on established and emergent writers, the festschrift will also serve as a moral barometer for our society.

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