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**TOWARD INTERVENTIONIST LITERATURE  
IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY UNITED STATES**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This* paper's main argument is that, given the social problems the United States is facing as a leading world power, her literature ought to rise to the occasion as a tool for righting the society's wrongs. This is especially so as many of the other traditional institutions, typically religion, are failing as agents for servicing the moral health of society. The paper notes, however, that current American poetry is generally opaque, a situation which makes it ineffective as a medium that should teach the wider world. The paper concludes with a suggestion that American poets should make their work move stylistically transparent, and hence, move accessible to the public so that it be more relevant to society as a didactic tool.

**INTRODUCTION**

We begin this paper by returning to the basic question of the function of literature in society. This question appears a simple, if not a simplistic, one, yet answering it satisfactorily could

launch us into the deep and ever-expanding forest of literary/critical theory, with all its quagmires. The dominant conception of the role or function of art in the classical era was of the phenomenon as imitation or reflection (or refraction) of life. Subsequently, especially since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, developments in the neighboring disciplines of anthropology, linguistics, psychology, economics, religion, etc., have occurred to unscrew a sluice-gate of literary and critical theories, each with its own functional and stylistic perspective of literature. Among these schools have been the didactic, Marxist, formalist, structuralist and psychoanalytical approaches. There have also been such ones as archetypal criticism, and then the relatively more recent potpourri of post-structuralism (with deconstruction as its arrowhead), reception theory, feminism, queer theory, ethnic and cultural studies.

This paper looks at the whole gamut of theories from two broad perspectives – those which may be described as preaching arts for arts sake (including the formalist and or expressive schools), and those which stress the didactic role of literature in addition to its pleasing or delighting. The intensity with which a particular piece of writing has reflected these two aspects of form and content is often the inverse of its greatness as a work of art.

However, whether one follows a didactic or arts for arts sake orientation, a residue of the classical mimetic theory (art as a reflection of life) follows one. Writers in colonial, neo-colonial and post-colonial societies (especially the so-called “Third World” countries) which have disquieting social, economic and political issues are seen to be generally committed. On the other hand, writers who belong to the ruling aristocratic class or group privileged in some other way may find nothing to condemn except the flowers and trees and birds and the skies to contemplate and praise. The literary milieu of the United States somewhat reflects

a pattern that supports this argument. A study by Ronald Kotulak reported under the title: “White Guys Happiest, Study Finds,” (qtd in Rivkin and Ryan, 326 – 327) reveals these statistics of the situation between the blacks and the whites in the US: (1) White males scored 5.8% on the negative mood scale (2) White females followed with 8.1% (3) 10.7% for black males and (4) 16.4% for black females. This shows that white males and white females are about twice happier than their black counterparts in the same country. Accordingly, the literature of African Americans and American feminists is generally more overtly committed to social issues than that of their contemporaries who are whites. Even in modern Nigerian literature (which is generally committed to social issues), a study by Ushie (2001) on the country’s youngest group of poets shows that although the young voices are generally angry and despondent, the work of two members of the generation – JIP Uba and Adolphus Amasiatu – is completely insulated from social issues. And these two poets are soldiers, the professional class that the generation’s work confronts. It follows, therefore, that literary writing cannot avoid completely the social conditions of its society and author.

The foregoing attempt at relating literature to its society and literary/critical theory raises certain questions for the literature of the United States, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These questions take into account the understanding that the U. S. is going to continue in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century her role as the World’s leading democracy, and which would be a model for the rest of the world. Against this background, would it be healthy for the United States itself to remain divisible, if not fragmented, along racial, ethnic, religious or gender lines? And, can one really assert that only the disadvantaged groups would be at risk in a society where inequality and inequity exist? Equally fundamentally, will the U.S

continue to have the credentials for her leadership role in world affairs while experiencing these cracks at home? If not, how does the country tackle these contradictions within, especially in the face of the fast-eroding puritanical foundation on which the U. S. was built? These issues and the attempt to resolve them constitute the quarry for this paper.

#### THE UNITED STATES TODAY:

The accounts of the conditions that facilitated the rise and fall of previous civilizations of mankind need to be kept constantly in view by any subsequent world power that seeks to last long in global control. Essentially, in nearly all cases, the collapse of an empire was always brought about by a combination of internal and external factors. The internal factors had always been lack of social justice, abuse of power, imbalances in the distribution of wealth and similar acts of inequity within the polity. These acts of social injustice would almost always work against national cohesion, and the resulting cracks often offered external aggressors the weak link to subdue an otherwise powerful state. The ancient Greek and Roman empires offer us examples of this phenomenon on the European continent, while from West Africa, Old Ghana, Mali and Songhai empires would suffice. There had also been Babylon and Mesopotamia in the Arab World. These accounts thus justify the need for the U. S. and her admirers to continue to examine her and provide the necessary feedback. The primary shoulders on which this task falls are those of the U. S. citizens themselves, especially the intelligentsia and writers among them.

Our earlier tangential reference to race and gender equations in the U. S. suggests that the country today is not free from some of the usual vices and contradictions that had culminated into the

fall of older powers. Our first support for this comes from the portentous words of Robert T. Kiyosaki and Sharon L. Lechter: Soon, there will be such a horrifying gap between the rich and the poor that chaos will break out and another great civilization will collapse. Great civilizations collapsed when the gap between the haves and have nots was too great. America is on the same course, proving once again that history repeats itself....(*Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, 63).

Another testimony is the text of a prayer said to have been offered by Rev. Minister Joe Wright "to open the new session of the Kansas Senate." Excerpts from the text of the prayer, which is now circulating widely, including the internet, read:

Heavenly Father, we ... know Your word says 'Woe to those who call evil good,' but that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values. We confess that we have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your word and called it pluralism. We have exploited the poor and called it lottery. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it self-esteem. We have abused power and called it politics. We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition

We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression. We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment. Search us, Oh, God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free ...

This prayer touches on most of the problems facing the U.S. today as a country. In more precise terms, however, there have been the inter-racial and gender challenges as well as those of the doomsday in school syndrome and hate crime, which refers to crimes motivated by hatred, bias, or prejudice, based on the actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity of another individual or group of individuals (<http://1/www.lib.msu.edu/harris23/crimjustice/hate.htm>).

There has been, for example, the incidence of police brutality, which in many cases, has been traced to race and is, therefore, a hate crime. Possibly, the peak of this act of police brutality was the 1991 beating in Los Angeles of Rodney King, and the riots that followed. In his best-selling work which goes by the rather controversial title, *Stupid White Men*, Michael Moore, himself a white American, notes that a black man being shot dead is no longer shocking. Just the opposite – it's *normal* [his italics], habitual. We've become so accustomed to seeing black men killed – in the movies and on the evening news – that we now accept it as a standard operating procedure (p. 60).

Moore adds, "[i]t's odd that, despite the fact that most crimes are committed by whites, black faces are usually attached to what we think of as 'crime' (p. 60). He further cites the findings of a research which reveals that "the average of income for a black

American is 6 percent less per year than the average white income" (p. 62). And, in his keynote address at the ninth annual national convention of the American Studies Association of Nigeria, ASAN, in Calabar, Nigeria, 2002, Dr. Adell Patton, Jr, reproduces the following account of the report of a poll conducted by *The New York Times*:

Do Americans work together with other races?

Eighty percent of whites held that they worked with only a few blacks or none at all; ninety percent of whites who attended religious services at least once a month said that none, or only a few of their fellow members were black; while 73 percent of blacks held that almost all of their congregants were black. And the poll now shows that this is still true in the year 2003! Seemingly, not much progress has been made on the future of going to Heaven together! (*Ethnicity*, 32).

This picture extends more or less to other non-white Americans such as the Native Americans, Latino Americans, and, incidentally, also includes "the poor whites of Appalachian and beyond" (*Ethnicity*, 31). These social ills have continued despite the following provisions in ARTICLE XIV, section I of the U. S. constitution:

No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Contradictions of this sort between what should be and what is, which manifest in the inequality among the peoples of the United States are no healthy omens for the country. They reduce the cohesiveness of the state and make it vulnerable to any external aggression.

This leads us naturally to the next issue: the natural envy and sometimes-hypercritical eye of other rising or potential world

powers anxious to replace or take over from a waning civilization. From the era of the Cold War to the removal of Panama's president Immanuel Noriega; the long-time face-off with Libya's Gadaffi; the two-time invasion of Iraq; the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan following the tragic September 11, 2001 crashing of planes into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon; the less perceptible but deadly impact of the U. S.-backed international finance organizations (notably the World Bank and the IMF, which are seen by many as the U.S.'s economic hunting dogs) on the so-called "Third World" nations, the U. S., deservedly or not, may have begun to lose the goodwill of some countries or regions of the world. Indeed, she is not infrequently accused of double standards in her relationship with other countries. For a country that would consolidate her leadership of the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on the platform of democratic ideals, these internal contradictions and an international image of a bully could have disastrous implications.

### THE UNITED STATES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Based on the present conditions, it is possible to hazard the following as the likely situation of the U.S in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First, mankind's increasing understanding of natural laws would continue to increase his doubt over the truth of biblical miracles. Similarly, his knowledge of germs, viruses, bacteria, surgery, antibiotics would continue to weaken his belief in sin as a possible cause of ill health, and his increased awareness about the atmosphere would affect his Christian convictions, as Spong has observed:

Heaven, in the mind of first-century people, was located just beyond the sky, it was a sky into which no one in that era had ever flown and out of which people believed that stars literally

could fall. To get to heaven, where God dwelt, one simply had to rise, as Jesus did in the ascension story, into the sky. But when Copernicus and Galileo challenged the accuracy of the three-tiered universe, they rendered this possibility null and void (*A New Christianity*, 120).

As we will argue shortly, Christianity has not been a sufficient check against the vices and excesses of the West, but it was likely the moral platform on which the Catholic bishop Bartolome de Las Casas stood in his condemnation of both the slave trade and the killings of Native American Indians by the conquistadors. And being the foundation upon which the U.S was built, its present decline would further widen the sluice gates for hate crime, violence in schools, racism, alcoholism and drug addiction to pour out in the 21<sup>st</sup> century US.

Second, the social problems and acts of injustice contained in the text of Rev. Minister Joe Wright's prayer (which we presented above) will increase in number and complexity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century U. S. Indiscipline among the children, the coveting of neighbor's possessions, the abuse of power in the name of politics and abortion would increase. And, as immigration and procreation continues to increase the population of Latino-Americans, Africans and Asians, imbalances in the economic status of the citizens would increase, resulting in more acute social problems. In the circumstance, there will likely be heightened ill treatment of the "it" immigrants under the cover of the provisions of the Homeland Security Laws.

Third, if the White House under the Republican George W. Bush does not overhaul fundamentally the U.S government's foreign policy as it affects the so-called "Third World" countries, the image of the country will likely suffer much more damage

with dire consequences for Americans. This is because of the brisk and lethal competition, often colored by the cosmetics of diplomacy and propaganda, which is the main driving force among the nations of the world today. Except in many Sub-Saharan African countries where the political leadership sees power as an end, most of the rest of the world's leaders see political power as a chance to push their nations up over the heads of all other nations. A leading world power is, therefore, perpetually a target of overtly harmful or innocuous-seeming arsenal from other nations. This is the position the U.S has been in, and this position will become more delicate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century except if her foreign policy is overhauled to reflect a deep understanding of and consideration for the cultures and aspirations of the rest of the world.

#### LITERATURE AS INTERVENTIONIST MEASURE

Tackling the challenges outlined above certainly requires a multi-prong approach. Religion, education and the family are among the commonest sites that promise proper upbringing of each child, and hence of the society. Tocqueville's testimonies to how Christianity formed a part of the national identity of the American are sufficient evidence of the role of religion in peaceful and harmonious existence. Yet, even in Christianity's more solid form during the Medieval and Renaissance periods and after, many atrocities were committed under its name in Europe and in the 'new' worlds which the Europeans explored. Besides, Christianity's immoral indifference to the trade in slaves and its collaborative assault on the cultures of non-Europeans, which weakened them for the colonizing soldier and administrator, have relieved that Faith of its potency as a fountain of moral behavior which Tocqueville presents. Unlike religion, which is in principle in a world of its own, education and the rights of the American parents to control of their children are to a great extent anchored

on the country's laws, which give the American child an overdose of freedom.

The failure of Christianity and the infection of the family and education by the state's excess freedom leaves us with one option: cultural production, in particular, literature as one way by which the American child and adult can return to the desirable norms of social existence. Hardly is there any human activity today that can influence societal behavior more efficaciously than cultural production, especially with the advancements in electronic transmission of culture. Nigeria offers us a good illustration of a society in which literature mediates social and political life despite the country's chaos and retrogression. Let it be quickly explained that the failure of the Nigeria project is the failure of the nation's political class, not of her men and women of letters. As such, though the country is drifting apart 47 years after independence today because of the seeds of greed and ethnicity which her political class sowed, the return to African culture, which its early writers advocated in their writings at that time, is continuing. This must be an essential genesis even of the current Nigerian home videos, which explore the typical African culture and project themes that condemn avarice, wickedness and ostentation. Besides, while the politicians are busy mincing themselves along ethnic, religious and regional lines with only the nation's treasury as their centripetal force, the nation's men of letters have continued to speak with one voice against its social malaise irrespective of their region, religion or ethnic group. Osundare (*Thread in the Loom*, 63) notes similarly that "unlike the country Nigeria, Nigerian literature possesses – has developed – a binding, overwhelming sense of mission and a humanist vision tragically absent in the country's political domain". Most Nigerian writers are thus didactic in orientation, and their primary target is the government, which represents and

symbolizes the political institution. Nigeria is not an only example. Finland, as another, has Elias Lonnrot's epic, *The Kalevala*, which has been described as "a rallying-flag for national aspirations (Introduction to *The Kalevala*, xiii) And so have all societies depended much on their literature for moral codes, national identity and aspirations.

The Nigerian Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, has expressed it repeatedly that the writer is the voice of vision in his own time who, if listened to, can ignite the wholesome renewal of his society. Before Soyinka, Shelley had described poets as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." This confidence in the role of the writer in his society is also supported by the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, when he asserts that "History has proven the annihilating power of poetry" (Ushie, 304). And in one of his last letters to his friend, William Boyd, the slain Nigerian writer and activist, Kenule Saro-Wiwa, wrote:

The most important thing for me is that I've used my talents as a writer to enable the Ogoni people to confront their tormentors. I was not able to do it as a politician or a businessman. My writing did it (qtd in Na'Allah, 55).

And, from the American literary scene itself, there have been the significant contributions to the nurturing of democratic ideals through the writings of such men as Walt Whitman, Thomas Paine and Herman Melville. While Paine's pamphlets, "published during the various despondent periods of American Revolution" were said to have stopped desertions and made men to reenlist (*An Early American Reader*, 693), Whitman's poetry has been described as "fully" absorbing "and eloquently" expressing "the spirit of American nationalism and democracy" (*A 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Reader*, 10). Elsewhere, Whitman himself, like Nigeria's Saro-Wiwa, insists that writers of a given society would affect their politics "far more than the popular superficial suffrage" (qtd in Ellman,

xix). Another testimony to the relevance of earlier American literature to its society is Theo Vincent's observation, "gradually with the works of Cooper and Poe, among others, literature that was faithful to the immediate experiences and concerns of the people began to emerge" (*American Studies in Nigeria*, 85).

In consonance with this public-consciousness of the older American writers, Whitman's poetry, for example, has the following, among other characteristics. Though he uses the first-person singular pronoun "I", his concern is a communal one, either with America as a nation or as a part of the international community in a relationship that recognizes mutual respect. Secondly, his style and language, while not being simplistic or boring or polemical, is simple and accessible to *that* public or the national and international communities. A similar texture of literature can be found in much of American writing up to the 1970s, especially in the period roughly coeval with modernism. Examples of this species of writing are in the works of Carl Sandburg, Allen Ginsberg and, generally, African American and feminist works. If, as we saw, Christianity, which was a part of the national identity of the US, is waning, to what extent is American literature today ready to respond to the challenges of the U.S in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? What vision is this literature providing for the American society in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that would reminisce Whitman's emphatic declaration that "I project the history of the future"? (39); or the Ghanaian critic's assertion that "Given the choice of the agent of the oppressor and the person of the oppressed, the voice of the sensitive writer is clearly bound to be on the side of the oppressed" (Apronti, 84).

#### THE U. S. POETRY TODAY AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Incidentally, although individualism and freedom were a defining characteristic of the American State, the early literature

of the United States up to about the 1970s was collectively more focused on social and communal issues than what obtains in American poetry of today. Like many African writers today, Whitman used the first-person singular pronoun, "I", but in representative capacity. This made him, like his African writer, a spokesperson for his society - national and global. But while fossils of individualism as a part of the American national identity are hardly found in the early literature of the U.S, the U.S poetry of today bears increasing evidence of individualism. This is particularly so of white, non-feminist poetry. Kay Murphy's two poems, "Skunk Childhood" and "The Day My Grandmother Dies", both taken from her collection, *Belief Blues* (1998) offer us the first illustrations of this trend. Here is "Skunk Childhood":

The woman bent over cabbages  
balanced on the garden rake  
Late afternoon so fleshy and raw  
the roof of the tin shed shimmered:  
Inside, heat, a snake-killing hoe, burying  
spade for the smokey cat, its back leg lost  
to the mower's blade; cocker spaniel  
collared by roots under the cactus garden  
The woman's routine, once a haven of weeds  
Turned wild strawberry red  
a patch scratching its body of hives  
its jam of beetles  
The old woman turned to the backyard swing  
names of the dead too possessed to forget  
The fabulous beast appeared  
on the walk, drenched in a scent  
The girl recalled  
fell to her knees, and began.

This poem is obscurantist, and its obscurantism derives both from its "complicated syntax" as from its "privateness of the theme

and symbolism" (*Toward*, 212). In the Introduction to the collection, W. D. Snodgrass presents the difficulty in the syntax thus:

Why need we question whether to read  
"The fabulous beast appeared/on the walk,  
drenched in a scent [.] /The girl [whom the  
woman] recalled/fell to her knees, and began,"  
or else to read, "The fabulous beast appeared/  
on the walk, drenched in a scent/the [former]  
girl recalled [and that then she] fell to her knees."

The ending of the poem, "and began" is too vague and under-specified to help register a unified ideational image on the reader's mind. Each reader would thus fill in his own meaning.

Here is the second poem by Kay Murphy, "The Day My Grandmother Dies":

Pumping hell out of one of those  
indestructible machines  
squat with wide tires and deep tread  
found on vehicles tearing up the desert,  
a small girl passes me  
and spits over her right t-shirted shoulder  
then speeds on  
increasing the distance between her  
and what she has made  
And I although in no hurry  
walking home from the park  
seem to throw myself into the insult  
which arches and hurls toward me  
like a message from another world.  
The distance between us, the wind's velocity,  
and ours, true all contribute to the accuracy of the shot,

but she means it for me, without doubt.  
 Her face, so much older than her spare frame,  
 turns again as I wipe the smear from my skin  
 helpless with outrage so much closer to death  
 than I was seconds before leisurely enjoying the fall  
 afternoon and the flute of Herbie Mann.  
 Now I, Without courage to follow her  
 to shout even some obscenity at her vanishing form,  
 unlock my front gate and hurry in.  
 The clock in the kitchen reads ten till six when the phone call  
 comes.  
 Then I know who the girl is,  
 know there is no stopping her,  
 know, in whatever time it takes,  
 she is circling the block.

(*Belief Blues*, 47- 48).

Again, Snodgrass notes that "the grandmother is not even mentioned." This "departure" of the text from its contextual and situational "promise" in the title thus illustrates the "privateness of the theme" of the poem. The text inheres a deliberate vagueness of the situation of the poem, which hinders wide sharing of its meaning. In defense of Murphy's obscurantism, Snodgrass argues: Though we might prefer ... meaning summed up and spoon-fed, the world and the mind do not so readily yield their mysteries .... We must struggle for the meaning and what we have bought dear is more deeply our own

(14).

The anthology, *Conjunctions: 35 American Poetry States of the Art*, holds more examples of the opaque, privative poems.

These stanzas from John Ashbery's poem, "As Umbrellas Follow Rain," are a good example:  
 Too bad he never tried it -  
 he might have liked it.  
 She saw us make eye contact.  
 And that was that for that day.  
 Too bad he too, when I  
 ammeaning if I came along it'd  
 already be too late.  
 Some of the swans are swarming.  
 The spring has gone under - it wasn't  
 supposed to be like this.  
 Now they watch him and cringe.  
 Who are they? Who is he?  
 We decided to fly Chinese.  
 The food wasn't that good.  
 And oh Erwin did I tell you  
 that man - the one - I didn't  
 know if I was supposed to or not.

He crawled back listlessly,  
 holding a bunch of divas.  
 It's hard work getting these out,  
 but so's any thing you're entitled to do:  
 classes to attend....(9)

Some of the difficulties in following this poem result from the presence in it of too many personae and hence points of view, idiosyncratic arrangement of the events in the poem and vagueness of the situation and or context of the poem. Ashbery's own words provide the background for this kind of opaqueness: I think that any one of my poems might be considered to be a snapshot of whatever is going on in my mind at the time - first of all the desire to write a poem, after that wondering if I've left the

oven on or thinking about where I must be in the next hour (qtd in *The Norton Anthology*, 2664).

And, the editor of *The Norton Anthology American Literature* (Vol. 2) confirms that Ashbery's "earlier books rejected the mere surfaces of realism and the momentary to get at "remoter areas of consciousness" (*The Norton Anthology*, 2664). The editor further notes that Ashbery's poetry "has become particularly influential for a younger generation identified as Language poets, such as Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, Michael Palmer, and Susan Howe". Among other stylistic predilections, the work that follows this tradition is said to be "attracted to the linguistic playfulness of Ashbery's poetry and to its resistance to being read as a single, personal voice" (*The Norton anthology*, 2664).

The privative, individualistic traits in these poems were not a dominant predilection of the early poetry of the U. S., and certainly do not hold the promise of a poetry that would fill the vacuum in moral standards that may emerge from the ebbing puritanical foundation of the U. S. And certainly, such poetry distances itself from, or seems to be turning a blind eye to the challenges of racism, hate crime, violence in schools, drug addiction and inequality, which the U.S. would have to face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This, certainly, is not the kind of poetry that Whitman had in mind when he declared that "What cities the light or warmth penetrates I penetrate those cities myself / All islands to which birds wing their way I wing my way myself" (178). If most Americans can follow this kind of opaque and individualistic poetry with ease, certainly not many readers outside the U.S can, let alone enjoy it and draw moral lessons from it to shape their social visions. The poetry is a literary meal meant for a select few when more are in need of literature's nourishing effect, a situation that reminisces the dichotomy between modern societies' affluent few versus the

starving majority. While individual differences in the creative enterprise are to be expected, these should occur within a framework of thematic and stylistic neighborliness so that on the whole the literature can respond to social issues as characterized by Classical, Renaissance, Romantic and post-colonial eras in western and other literatures, all of which reflect the material realities of their time and clime.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that since the launch of industrialization, which has bifurcated human kind into laborers for and owners of capital, the two groups have been steadily drifting apart, with obvious dire consequences for mankind and his environment. With this drift has been the degeneration in the morals and social values necessary for a holistically healthy human community. In the particular case of the U.S. the paper has also noted the fading puritanical foundation, a phenomenon that could become a real challenge to the society if there is no replacement for the ebbing Christian values.

While the paper recognizes the usefulness of such other institutions as religion and education in rebuilding the society morally, it argues for the literature, in particular poetry, of the U.S. to be more didactically focused on the social challenges of the nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such literature would aim at rehumanizing mankind where industries have turned him into an object, and' recommunize him where individualism has turned him wholly inward and idiosyncratic. In doing this, American writers could borrow a leaf from their Nigerian (or African) colleagues where, in spite of the colossal failure of politics and the economy, the writers still speak with one voice and project a common vision despite their religious and ethnic differences. In

addition, African writers generally have been the main contributors to the regaining of self-pride and confidence of Africans in themselves as can be witnessed in the cultural renaissance going on in the film, literary and art worlds even as W. H. Auden had argued that poetry makes nothing happen. Such a re-evaluation of the trends in current American poetry in both its concerns and styles is necessary to reposition it for its expected didactic rôle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the U.S would be expected to continue her leadership role in world affairs.

#### END NOTE

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