

**MEMORY, VIOLENCE, RELIGION AND IMMORALITY IN POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE:  
RE-READING ISIDORE OKPEWHO'S *THE LAST DUTY***

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**Abstract**

Memory, which is the art of storage of pieces of information and regurgitating them for use by remembrance, is a useful tool in literary tradition. Memory weaves up the word, the incident and the action in any work of art. Literature thus is seen as metonymy which word are put for thought. Memory graduates into the words which is language and becomes personalized in action. This paper attempts to establish the relationship that exists among memory, violence, religious and immorality in Okpewho's *The Last Duty* (1976), using the view point of post-colonialism. It attempts to unravel the structural pattern which the writer of the novel adopts to brace up the actions and events that happen in the novel in view of a master-servant relationship. The novel is made up of three parts each featuring the characters themselves in action, each narrating their own case or part. The writer uses the memory of the war event to describe the violence and immorality that exist in society virtually enshrined in religion and the fear of God. The actions of Major Ali blend with Major Bello. The activities of the military align with the war time, while Chief Toje's actions are in tandem with his accomplices. Odibo, Oghenovo, Oshevire and Aku are merged together but Oghenovo exhibits a child's innocence throughout the novel. Domination gives effect in violence. When what ought to be done is not done, violence ensues. The writer captures this scenario of omission and neglect from the beginning to the end of the novel. The war (Biafran/Nigerian war) is caused by domination, the fight and consequent death of the private soldier is domination; the hatred and implication of Oshevire by Chief Toje is engendered by dominating in as much as the fight and violent acts of Odibo and Chief Toje over Aku, Oshevire's wife. Each of these establishes a post-colonial relation. The author uses this novel and the events in it to give a summary picture of what transpired at the war time.

**Keywords:** Memory, Violence, Immorality, Religion .

**Introduction: Brief Background of the Author and His Work.**

Isidore Okpewho is the author of five scholarly monographs, four novels, numerous articles and book chapters. He was also the editor of many anthologies. In honour of his numerous and monumental contributions he earned prestigious awards from many organizations, which include: Nigerian National Order of Merit (NNOM), the Guggenheim Fellowship, the ALA's Fonlon Nichols Award and many other international honours. Apart from his sterling contributions in scholarly works, Okpewho is also an accomplished fictional writer who has many

fictional texts to his credit. His fictional works are : *Tides* (1993), *The Last Duty* (1976), *The Victims* (1970), just to mention but a few. Born in Agbor in 1941, he spent most of his childhood in Asaba, his mother's home town and he attended St. Patrick's College, Asaba. He moved to Ibadan later and attended Government College Ibadan and came out with a distinguished distinction of First Class honours in 1964. He worked in Longman Publishing Company, within which period he published his first novel *The Victims* in 1970. He also carried out many scholarly publications in reputable journals.

*The Last Duty* is premised on the Nigerian

Biafran war called the Nigerian Civil War. It explores the tendencies of blackmail, betrayal, callousness, violation, abuse and wanton destructions of lives and properties. Using the focus on Oshevire and his family, Okpewho explores and dissects the war and its impact on a young and enterprising family. The narrative centres on the plight of Oshevire and his family, highlighting the predicament of their innocent son-Oghenovo. The narrative of the novel captures the principles of master-servant relationship which is the ambit of the post-colonial theory and the post-colonial novels. Kalu posits that:

Literature is based on the milieu, the society and the vision of the author. It reflects the story and geography of the society. The sensitivity of the author and the material within his compass to dispense with and articulate consciousness are very meaningful in literary discourse (37).

The post-colonial theory became known through the work of Edward Said in "Orientalism" (1978). The work became popular through the thrives of metropolitan intellectuals and academics. Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) is an inspirational key text in this theory as it reveals colonial violence on the Blacks. Post-colonial Theory embodies post-colonial studies. The post-colonial reader and writers deconstruct and expose discrepancy which features in his environment through his character and characterization.

The post-colonial writer uses history as a major tool to excavate evils of colonialism for the benefit of the present so as to enhance the future. The post-colonial writers bring out to the fore the history of the colonized "other" (Widdowson, 1995) which has been suppressed and silenced by colonial violence. Post colonialism rejects the imperial discourses which claim in-built centrality and supremacy in all spheres of human affairs. It, therefore, attempts to dismantle the central position of the imperial position of Western culture and politics. It operates in a double space and close relationship with the binary side of colonialization. Brydon in Kalu, says "it is complicated in that in which it challenges" (167). Post-colonial texts tend to produce a sense of identity which may be contaminated by rejecting what is already

inextricable from them. Hence it is embroiled in complexity. Brydon states that "there is a leap from the recognition that the Post colonialism is contaminated by colonialism... to the conclusion that such contamination necessarily implies complicity" (167).

#### **The impact of memory in *The Last Duty*.**

The novel opens with a recall of the attack by the Sambian air raid which is quelled by Major Ali's counter attack. Brigadier Major Ali dispels an enemy plane on a bomb mission by shooting down one and compels others to retreat. The joy of the people is heightened over his effrontery. This is an action that is called for the right of might as against the notion of justice. It takes the courage and intelligence of an individual to vividly capture an incident on record. Intelligence forms an essential ingredient in any literary work. As Herbermas puts it "... the question of intelligibility is one element of the validity claims of ordinary discourse" (105) but the sincerity, truth and correctness of the claim of the discourse cannot be ascertained. Hence the writer strives to communicate meaning through the means within the limit of imagination and memory.

A recall is made of the invitation of Oshevire's wife by Chief Toje, through Odibo his servant. As he waits anxiously for the arrival of Aku, Chief Toje in anger keeps yelling at Odibo:

You are just a dump mass body  
ambling about without any sense in  
your head. So stupid that even though  
you realize that a woman is afraid for  
herself and her child you do not see  
that if she has to go anywhere for any  
reason somebody have to keep her son  
company if only to reassure the mother  
(7)

The writer's memory imbues each character with actions and words. The author is excluded from these. Each character is responsible for what he says or does as issues from the writer's memory. These therefore snow ball into meaning deriving from 'thought' (Aristotle) implying the message. The lust for Aku, Oshevire's wife is the cause of Chief Toje's anxiety and anger against Odibo. He is anxious to have her sleep with him and become his sex companion.

Literature, it is known to be imitation of nature

(Plato, Aristotle). According to Aristotle in Adams:

Poetry (literature) diverges into two directions, according to the individual character of the writers. The graver spirit imitated noble actions, and the action of good men. The more trivial sort imitated the action of meaner person, composing satire, . . . (50).

Again, it is evident that literature is the house of tragedy which is an imitation of an action which implies personal agent:

who necessarily possess certain distinctive quantities both of character and thought, for it is by this that we qualify action themselves; and these-thought and character are the two natural causes from which actions spring, and on action again all success or failure depends (Adams, 51).

In his memory of the Biafran war, which he calls war of attrition by the Sambians, Okpewho recalls the evil tendencies imbued in humans, the suffering encountered by people engaged in the war and ordinary civilians in the characters he creates. Aku feels sad as she remembers sorrowfully how her husband was carried away. She watches with mixed feeling as her son tries to put on the shirt bought for him by Chief Toje. The boy's joy has no bounds and she leaves the boy in that mood to visit her lover Toje. She is caught in the web of a dilemma of restraint and compliance and submission to the evil intention of Toje and maintaining her resolve to love her husband alone, in live or in death. She says:

However hard I try, I can never keep my mind from dwelling on this sorrow. For what else can it feed on, imprisoned as I am for so long on a solitude that seems to have no end (10).

Aku discovers that Toje has interest in her and has been showering gifts to her and her son. She expresses this that "and now I see a new danger, a new kind of danger, for several months now Toje has shown us kindness. He has continued to buy clothes, food and other necessities and to give me money from time to time" (12).

The situation Aku finds herself is akin to Alekiri's in Amadi's *Estrangement* (1986), the estranged wife of Mazi Ibekwe who in the face of the war – the Nigerian civil war lost his wife to a military officer who assisted her and the daughter during the difficult crisis of the war. Ibekwe laments:

Alekiri, wife of Prince Ibekwe, had no business living with a soldier and bearing child for him. He stopped in the street bit his lips and clenched his fist. People stared at him (Est. 34).

Aku reminds us of the effect of the war in the community, she says:

For about one year now this town had been subjected to constant attacks by the Sambian forces, by air and by land. Once in a while an air raid visits us, and bodies are counted (11).

Literature is certainly the product of abstract thought' (Paul Valery in Adams, 915 – 926). Literature is what it is because the writer has made it to be so by creating situations, events, and characters and actions to represent his thought and the content of his mind. Valery says:

My experience has thus shown me that the same self can take very different form, can become an abstract thinker or a poet, by successive specialization, each of which is a deviation from the entirely unattached state which is superficially in accord with exterior surroundings and which is the average state of our existence, the state of the undifferentiated exchange (917).

By this Valery is of the view that literary creativity is a thing of the mind to emit actions and situations that replicate human experiences. It is a representation of actions as they are or ought to be in real life and in the make-belief existence of nature. Aku who finds herself in a dicey situation in her life fears of the abstract situation of events. She becomes apprehensive of what could be the outcome of the rolling of events. She fears that a gift from a military man or any other man to a lonely lady, and unprotected could be a sign of

love overture, and an indication that a relationship is to be established.

Under normal circumstances, Aku should have nothing to fear. But the fact that she is being lured into an immoral relationship with a stranger, a man who is not her husband instils fear in her. The community has rejected her. Nobody goes to her stall to buy anything except the soldiers. She thus finds herself in a state of helplessness. Literature can never and will never be divorced from memory. Joseph Addison states that:

The sense of feeling can indeed give us a notion of extension, shape, and all other idea that enter at the eye, except colors, but at the same time it is very much straitened and confined in its operation, for the number, bulk, and distance of its particular objects. . . . It is the sense which furnishes the imagination or fancy . . . such as arise from visible objects, either when we have them actually in our view, or when we call up their ideas into our mind by painting, statues, descriptions or any the like occasion (288).

Being an act of imitation of what has been or ought to be, literary creation stems from the root of memory. The sense of feeling, working together with the mind creates events, action and or situations that have been or ought to be in reality. Oshevire, Toje, Aku, the war situation are acts of memory and imagination which the writer creates as mid wife to deliver his literary work using the Biafran war as his subject. The suffering situation of the children is also created. Oghenovo represent all order children and what they passed through during the period of bitterness occasioned by the war.

Through the evil device and conspiracy of Chief Toje, for sheer jealousy and envy, Oshevire is incarcerated in prison custody pending trial as an accomplice. This action makes him to leave behind his child and wife in a lonely environment in the exploitative hands of the military, Toje and Odibo. The entire community has rejected her. Nobody goes to her stall to buy anything except the soldiers. The entire community was under siege and there was sporadic shooting causing

people to take cover under the bed or under any object that could shield them. Oghenovo, in his child's innocence accepts the lie told to him by his mother that his father bought cloth for him. Which he happily and innocently shows to his friend and neighbor, Onome. But Onome's response sets him aback as he heard that his father was in prison and could not have been responsible for the cloths. Onome reveals further that his father was a thief who stole from the soldiers and they put him in prison. Oghenovo, in anger fight and beat up Onome for calling his father a thief. However, Aku beats Oghenovo for fighting, for fear of incurring the wrath of the people against them. This is a picture of what can happen in any society experiencing war. Toje's envy and conspiracy, the action of the private soldier who kills the licentious girlfriend and her soldier lover and other events in the novel are products of imagination and memory of things that happened, the way they happened and or ought to have happened. Literature is the representation and among the different kinds of representation, 'statuary' (Addison) is the most natural and shows us something which is akin to the real object which is represented. Literature through the wavelength of the novel represents through description. Addison is of the view that the secondary pleasure of the mind by imagination proceed from the action of the mind, which compounds the idea arising from the original object, situation or events, with the ideas that are conceived in the description.

#### **Violence in *The Last Duty***

War is the product of violence. Violence is a state of angst, depression, weeping, sorrow and death amongst others. Violence involves the pragmatic approach to literature. The pragmatic approach presents literary work as it affects the reader. *The Last Duty* is presented in such a way as to affect the reader's emotion through "catharsis, the purgation of pity and fear" (Adams,3). The act of violence runs through the length of the novel. Being a post- war- novel it explores the incidents of war hazards, which range from bombing, destruction of lives and properties and exploitation. It also explores the exercise of power, which is the ultimate determinant in human society as it is basic in relations within and between groups. Power implies the ability to defend one's

interest and necessity to impose one's will by any means available. Power, or mores also deals with the manner and ability in bargaining in human society. Hence the pragmatic approach holds that the reader should be affected in one of the following ways: 'moral uplift, scientific adjustment or other kind of learning, pleasant or sorrowful, psychological or philosophical, purgation of unpleasant sensation and sublime transformation' (Adams, 3). War time exploits are tools for the wealthy and those in position who have mechanical might to exploit the less privileged in society. Chief Toje is not in conformity with Major Ali and does not condone his military principles and orders with which he uses on the civilian and military population in Iddu. Chief Toje condemns this outrightly. He describes Major Ali as "a misguided little monkey"(27). Chief Toje is a harsh and intolerant fellow, boastful and, in fact, a braggard. He is bitter about the shift of respect and attention to the soldiers who are strangers and have not contributed anything towards the development of Iddu. He wields power and uses its influence against his detractors and rivals. Chief Toje implicated Oshevire and caused him to be incarcerated and be separated from his family.

Through the action of Chief Toje, Mukuro Oshevire is imprisoned for saving the lives of two rebels – a young and an innocent boy whom he directed the way to safety and a man whom he did the same benevolence to save him. For this charge, he resolves he did not collaborate with anybody, whatsoever, whether rebels or otherwise but saved lives at the instinct of his morality and his conscience. The trial of Mukuro Oshevire is the trial of violence versus innocence in society, particularly during a period of war. At this point the reader discharges a sense of pity for Oshevire who is imprisoned, merely for saving lives of victims of war. War time is a period of harvest of woes and calamities. In Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra* (1975), the reader is informed that "love of power by itself is not a damning trait. It is obnoxious and dangerous only when it is coupled with too much pride and cruelty. After all we all have power of one sort or another..." (18). It is such that Toje wields against his rival Oshevire which makes him vow to square up issues with him over his

separated wife. He beats his chest on the presumption that "... I am one of the town, only an honorable and outstanding citizen of it, appointed by my position of importance to determine who stays free and who stays chained..." (32). War can even mean no sign of life whatsoever, a total wiping away of a village. In *Sunset in Biafra*, Amadi again reveals that:

No man, no woman, no children, no cat, no dogs, no ducks, no chickens, no goats nothing but deathly, unearthly quiet. Here and there a swarm of disturbed flies showed the location of decaying corpse. Many of the corpses were unmolested by the vultures, who had simply had much more than enough, (167).

The incessant raids by jet bombers, shattering and killing people kept people in anxiety, emotional trauma and fear. The army officer who becomes killed by a private soldier over a love tango, and the subsequent public execution of the private soldier all spell horror. The information about Aku by Chief Toje affected Major Ali and he sought to give security to Aku and the child because he sensed a mark of mischief toward the family from Chief Toje. Private Okumagbe is henceforth detailed to keep watch over her and her child from the view point of the Council Hall. Ironically, he is instructed not to disturb Chief Toje or Odibo from seeing Aku and the son, since they are the only acquaintance to the family. Hence the traitor is mischievously given the license to move in and out freely into the family he wants to destroy. The writer here creates the leverage for the perpetration of the desire of Chief Toje to get him ridiculed, by exposing his impotence and affirming the potency of Odibo whom he uses as his errand boy and stooge. He juxtaposes both to society to judge who is superior between the two.

Odibo is not spared in this act of violence as he is instructed against his will to keep Oghenovo company each time Aku goes to meet Chief Toje in Odibo's hut. Odibo is abused and insulted by Chief Toje, but he has no option than to tolerate the assault and keep his relationship and the favour he gets from him. Odibo contemplates this strange relationship with another man's wife when the husband is in detention in a faraway



place. He states:

Yet, if the truth should be told, what has he got to do with her and alone with her in my place? I cannot now remember, but I do not think that Toje had much cause to pay frequent visit like this to Oshevire while he was a freeman, before the soldiers came and took him away. And now he makes me take much food and clothing to her at her house. And ask me to tell her to come and meet him at my place. It is all very strange, this business with another man's wife in the secrecy of my wretched place, that can hardly provide any sort of comfort to decent people (61).

*The Last Duty*, each time it is read, reminds the reader of the war experience at the Nigerian civil war and makes those who could not experience it to understand or have an idea of what war time entails to humans, other living creatures, and the environment. This becomes Odibo's lot and each time this happens, he prays that the curfew should come quickly for him to own his house, "his wretched hovel"(62). Due to war time exploit, Oshevire is forcefully separated from his family and his wife is ravished by his arch enemy and his boy Odibo. War time is a period when your enemy exploits the slightest mistake to incriminate you. This was what happened to Oshevire as he became incriminated by Toje. He questions the integrity and safety of anyone when a scoundrel could just wake up and accuse you of this or that action and you are tried and eventually fired at the squad. He thinks about his family and sorrowfully and pathetically states that:

But let that be. Whatever comes upon them will be my perpetual sorrow, for I could have wished that, if I should suffer for what I am convinced was an act of humanity on my part, I should bear my suffering alone, and not drag along with me the only people for whose sake alone life for me is worth living. Yet nothing at all will deter me from the path of truth and integrity. I will forever stand up like a man (89-90).

Violence knows no bounds as air raids are carried out intermittently by the rebel forces. Air raids by

the rebel are common and this causes panic on everyone in the community as Major Ali laments, "the rebels meant business, this time. A haunting peace still pervades this town, uneasy, as after a tremendous storm or a ripping outburst of gunfire"(93). He claims in his statement "six lives were claimed at the air raid, fourteen injured and most of them at critical conditions. Many are in refugee camps because their homes and bread winners are now a victim of the air raids"(93). A community member, Mma Dafe, a victim of the air raids whose son and husband were claimed lament and weep uncontrollably, "...The world should leave her alone to lament her fate for what left of her when... when the only son that meant life to her has gone"(99). Even the herbalist Godinheaven, who proclaims his potency and the efficacy of his charms became a victim of the raid. His herbs and charms could not protect his sign post at the air raid. He narrates:

When those planes visited my family and I did as the civil defense said. We laid with our belle flat on the floor, under the bed. And then those blasts sounded. After they have departed we all came out, and the next I saw was that damage. I thought to myself, what a stupid raid,(103).

*The Last Duty* is presented in a dramatic form where each character acts by himself and presents their action according to the tenor of events. Literature evolved through the classical era which was characterized by certain modes of presentation of event structurally so that the whole is constructed. The Illiad is one mode, here, there is one central story. The stories of the various participants flow into this main line of action as contributing tributaries flowing from different structured directions. The odyssey is another mode (Akwanya, 1997). "The focus here is on the representative individual who has a past, but has to contend with different set of circumstances that stand between him and his destination"(118). Hence the work is structured as a sentence and to be analyzed as such. This pattern flows in tandem with the Odyssey where the situations are mainly perceived from the character's point of views. This

approach best describes the novel under study. The Illiad presents its narrative as a sentence in a passive form and the logical subject is subordinated to the events because, “having set the sequence in motion the writer or initiator cannot control it anymore. It becomes independent of the author” (Wimsatt and Beardsley in Adams, 1014-1022). In this novel, only a few major characters speak from the scene of few major characters as collaborators. Rukeme is lured into testifying against Oshevire by Chief Toje so that he can settle the old scores in which Oshevire humiliated his father for stealing his rubber latex. But truth and reality prevent him from achieving his evil scheme except making attempts and moves towards exploiting and violating his wife. He schemes against Oshevire out of jealousy for out smarting him in the rubber business. All his efforts and plans against Oshevire fail and he is frustrated as Oshevire gains freedom. Private Okumagba is not happy with the details to watch and guard the family of a rebel. He contemplates a serious action to end it all. Agbeyegbe, the stubborn prisoner addresses other prison inmates on the charade of oppression, subjugation and exploitation of the masses by the ruling class. He declares:

... gentlemen, the bane of the world today is exploitation, the exploitation of the lower classes. And they are lower because they chose to be, but because their oppressors have constantly kept them in that position and blocked every chance they have of rising to greater positions (144).

He seeks support from the prisoners to execute his plans, but no one seems to agree and align with him. He reveals to Oshevire the stark reality and truth of his wife, that those who put him in detention will stop at nothing to own all he has including his wife.

### **Religion and Immorality**

Religion and immorality are in the opposite poles of conception. Religion is a belief system which governs the moral ethics and activities of a people, group or sects. It controls the moral activities of individuals in society to the extent of dissecting between evil and righteousness. Be it Islam, African Traditional Religion, Christianity, name it, all have the same

cardinal focus – seeking the face of the Creator through righteousness to achieve or secure salvation in holiness. Religion entails peace, tolerance, forgiveness, openheartedness, love, morality, the art of being accommodating and the maintenance of discipline among others. The concept of war to begin with beats against religion and is bereft of morality. War results in destruction, enmity, violence and death as envisaged in *The Last Duty*. Ali discloses that “... Just yesterday, late in the evening, a number of rebel planes had visited this town on a bombing mission” (3). War brings about attacks and counter attacks, significance of atrocities and enmity. It is also evident that; “For about one year now this town has been subjected to constant attacks by the Siambian forces by air, and by land” (11). Oshevire and his family had lived peacefully and joyfully until the war broke out and he happens to be a Siambian. Chief Toje schemes and incriminates him for supporting the Siambians, a rebel collaborator. Oshevire is picked up by the soldiers and put in detention pending his trial. This act separates him and his family. His wife and child become subjected in the community of Iddu. She is thus exposed to exploitation by Chief Toje and Odibo. Chief Toje implicates him out of sheer jealousy as a business rival and square up issues with him as a revenge for disgracing his (Toje’s) father for stealing Oshevire’s rubber latex. For Aku, the wife of Oshevire, a Siambian, the entire community rejected her. Nobody goes to her stall to buy anything, except soldiers. She thus finds herself in a total state of helplessness.

Lack of discipline also prevails during war. The text under study reveals that a private soldier involved in an act of immorality becomes involved in a love tango rivalry with a sergeant. This causes a fracas between them over the girl. The private in anger kills the girl and the sergeant. The shooting arouses fear in the neighbourhood, but the army rounds up the killer. The private, Sule is court marshaled and publicly executed by firing squad before the glaring eyes of the public. For lack of discipline Chief Toje becomes infected with a venereal disease. This infection causes him to consult a local herbalist, Godinheaven for a cure. The infection destabilizes his manhood. He schemes to get well and test his potency on Aku,

Oshevire's wife. He declares:

And between now and the time my misguided sense of justice could bring the authorities of Iddu to set Mukoro Oshevire free of the claims they have thrown round him, I am determined to use his wife to prove to myself that I still possess that power which I know lies within me. I am still Toje Onovwakpo...(27).

Chief Toje is intolerant, harsh and a braggard. He has abuse for everybody. He is boastful and is shrewd contriver who derives joy in hurting others. He feels bitter about the attempt to negotiate to end the war. He does not feel sympathy for war prisoners, rather he feels they should continue in detention.

The master-servant relationship in this novel reveals the "purgation of pity and fear" (Aristotle in Adams,52) the reader is wrapped in awe as each character reveals their ordeal. At the panel, volumes of conspiracy and lies are uncovered about Mr Rukeme's evidence against Oshevire before the panel. Another commissioner takes on Rukeme which all the more proves that his evidence is full of falsehood. Realizing that Rukeme has made a mess of the evidence against Oshevire, he makes another attempt to meet Major Bello, but the soldiers at the gate of the military Headquarters turn him back and he becomes frustrated. The evil scheme of committing adultery with Aku makes Chief Toje to go to any length to correct his infirmity. Godinheaven prepares a concoction made of sheep dung and other objects and ignoble materials for him to drink. This implies that the evil mind does not make him fear a walk in the mid-night to achieve his evil scheme on Aku. Toje collects the potion, doubting and worried about its efficacy and smell. He is head bent on ravishing Aku Oshevire's wife. He also fears about the soon return of Oshevire her husband, his arch enemy whom he wants to square up issues with through ravishing and exploiting his wife sexually. He laments in exasperation and anxiety:

How much time do I have left?  
Already the misguided officials at  
Iddu are beginning to release men  
from detention. How do I know that

Oshevire is not the next man to be freed? (175).

Those bereft of the fear of God can always do anything to achieve their evil scheme. The Holy Bible chronicles such evil deeds in Cain and Abel,(Genesis 4:8);Ahab and Naboth,(1Kings 21:1-29). Chief Toje abandons his legal wife and schemes to break a peaceful and love bestowed family of Oshevire being desirous of exploiting his wife carnally. He affirms his decision and position that:

But I can scarcely take any chances now. I had rather that I had full sexual knowledge of his wife before he was released, than miss the prize and face the double shame; to be exposed to the whole community of Urukpe as a shameless adulterer and yet live on with the deep personal knowledge that the most important man in the town is impotent. God, I have no time to spare...(175).

Chief Toje is hunted by his conscience for his guilt and shame as he meets Odibo in his hovel of a house. Odibo does not give him the required attention and he begins to feel worried and contemplates whether he has been given away by the odour of the concoction from Godinheaven or something else. In his evil schemes, he inadvertently introduces Odibo to Aku, giving him the opportunity to explore her carnality. The sexual encounter he experiences with Aku assures him and confirms him a real man. Before now, he had been clothed in the garment of his disability and sees himself in a complex of inferiority. He then becomes aware of the secret visits to Aku by Chief Toje in his (Odibo's) hovel. Now he realizes adultery has been the sole drive.

But Odibo, despite his sexual exploit and the confirmation of the potency of his manhood he is violently reduced to nothing by Chief Toje. He regrets and laments over this situation of his with Chief Toje. He sees his sexual encounter with Aku as the achievement of a warrior. He declares:

This is heaven: to have a woman sharing my own bed with me – and not only not unwilling in such lowly circumstance but indeed loving every moment of it and addressing me in a



language I could have sworn I would not have never hear. This must be heaven...(204).

Odibo, by this statement shows and proves that he had never been exposed to sex up until now with Aku. This is an eye opener to him and he relishes and frolics in this achievement. Caught in bed with Aku by Chief Toje, he tries to cover up with lies when she had hidden under the bed, but being not convinced Chief Toje dashes back and barging on them discovers Aku sitting at the edge of the bed weeping. Odibo and Chief Toje are engaged in a malicious and fatal fight with machetes while Aku tries helplessly to separate them. Both are fatally hurt to a point of coma. Aku weeps with her son while civilians gather and are accusing Aku of being the cause and as a rebel, they demand for her death. Amid sobs, she explains to Major Ali how it all happened. Major Ali blames himself for his liberality while Aku owns the cause of the fight. Major vows to work like a soldier henceforth instead of the public relation approach and attitude he had adopted in the administration of his duty with the civilians and the soldiers under his command since he was deployed to Urukpe.

A child does not understand the plight of a mother. So Oghenevo could not know what the mother was passing through. In his innocence, he sees Odibo as his uncle or relation who cares for him, while he sees Chief Toje as his big father. He does not understand the word "prison" or 'detention', or 'collaborator', but what he knows is to eat and play around with friends if he secures the license from his mother. As he sees the mother crying, without knowing the reason, he also joins and begin to cry while Major Ali orders her to stop crying. He cries because he fears that Major Ali wants to kill or harm his mother. This is common among children. When they see their mother or any of their relations cry, they follow suit. For them crying indicates danger and the fear of its consequence. His cry was a way of stopping or asking her to stop crying so that the soldier will not beat and kill her in the process.

Before the panel Oshevire responds to the charges against him with glaring firmness the situation convincingly clear of all he did which does not impinge on the integrity of anyone within and outside the Urukpe community. He explains

how he saved the life of an innocent boy from the hands of an angry mob. He also informs the panel about the relationship that existed between the community and the Siambian soldiers when their town became taken over by the government soldiers and the resolutions reached by the council in the Otot's Palace.

The story is resolved with the reshuffle of command and Major Ali is being transferred to head another command. Oshevire regains his freedom and he is given a lift by a military van going towards the same direction as himself. Having gained his freedom, Oshevire was supposed to be joyful and reunite with his family. But happiness eludes him when and as he eventually confronts his wife and learns the bitter truth about what had transpired in his family in his absence. He meets Esegghene as he alights from the military van. Ironically, Esegghene was also the last person he saw as he was being driven away for detention in a military van. Esegghene gives him an idea of what to expect of his family and home. In response to his question, Osei asks him "Are you still alive yourself" (206), and adds "You should be a dead man. You are better dead than alive" (226). The mad man's statement carries meaning which may not be comprehended by the sane person. They make prophetic statements surrounding issues of critical emblem. Oshevire is led to the military barracks and he meets his wife and child. She welcomes him but breaks into tears. This is significant. The memory of the past and the events that followed right from their marriage and the departure of the husband for the detention room and her marriage failure caused her to cry. What happened is ugly and shameful for the husband to know, hence this sways her emotion and she sheds tears before her husband instead of joy and romance. She is thus rather distressed. She sobs and whimpers over the situation she finds herself. Oshevire controls his emotion like a man while Major Ali explains the situation to him as he dispels the delegation from the Chief who had come to ask for the repatriation of Aku as her presence was claimed to a threat to the community.

Left with no option, Mukoro Oshevire takes his wife and child home and in sheer desperation sets his home ablaze and moves and moves with his family into the wild. Violence here

begot violence. The war, Toje's scheme of revenge eventually gave birth to the subsequent actions and situations in the novel. Man is the enemy is the enemy of mankind. Oshevire who would have happily reunited with his family is caught in the web of distrust and fate. He is a victim of the fate he never deserved. He meets his death and knows nothing again about his longed for family. Oshevire finds himself in a similar situation as Ibekwe, the antagonist in Amadi's *Estrangement*. Also, a war novel, Ibekwe's wife, Alekiri, disappears in the confusion that ensued when their community was over run by the Federal soldiers, and there was confusion stamped and absolute pandemonium. In the confusion caused by the raid, she missed track with her husband and so becomes separated with her husband. She goes off with her daughter to an unknown destination while her husband searched for them to no avail. After the war, she returns with another daughter, her second child, but whose father was a military man who gave them succor and protection during the period of confusion occasioned by the war. War time separation demands tolerance and accommodation. Ibekwe did not accommodate Alekiri, his wife but sent her away with her children, including his own biological daughter due to anger, despite the intervention the Women's Welfare Association. However, Ibekwe did not resort to violence to the extent of destroying his home and taking his own life, but only resolved to have nothing to do with his estranged wife. But Oshevire involves himself in violence and exhibits temperament of immorality. He is discharged and returns to join his family. Explanation is made why his family is taken custody of by the military and they are released to him without any cost.

Without asking his wife for an explanation, which should have been the reasonable action to take, he carries out an arbitrary decision of setting his house ablaze and venturing into the wild with his newly recovered family. He was careless of the fact that it was war that brought this, moreover, war time demands care as guerilla tactics are used in warfare. In his loss of emotional control, he refuses to obey the order to "Stop" (242), which sounded many times. Being far ahead of his wife and son, he is shot down. To him life was no longer meaningful

without his cherished wife and son, particularly his wife who has been violated by persons not worth his integrity. This affirms Osei's statement that, "you are better a dead man" (227). It was quite immoral of him not to consider the voice of reason and take his wife in confidence and in desperation and situation and treat her and his son with such careless abandon. If the wife erred, he should have considered the situation of her error and weighed the circumstances against the odds. He had no reflection of how he married her – a virgin. He should have equally considered that his exploiters paid dearly for it as their just reward.

The writer uses this episode to showcase the Aristotelian tragic fault that is unleashed on Oshevire's intransigence and his unforgiving temperament. This is one factor that mars his righteous position in the novel. This behavior, in truth establishes catharsis – the purgation of pity and fear in the reader. Oshevire remains true to his high ideals despite the seeming changes he discovers in his community as aftermath of war. Like Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, after his exile refuses to accept change and dies a shameful death, so also Oshevire, being recalcitrant to war situation and its consequent changes dies shamefully.

#### **Conclusion :**

*The Last Duty* is a narrative which borders on war time experiences. Being so, the writer hinges his story on memory which is the hallmark of literary art. The writer employs memory skillfully and adroitly to explain the issues violence, immorality and the jettisoning of religion and the fear of God and nature in particular. He uses it to warn against the evil consequences of war, particularly for those who may not have had the opportunity to experience it. He explains the crucial situations that happened or may have happened, or in the same strength, ought to have happened. He explores the issue of power, abuse of power, exploitation, war victims and the state of society in the expression of combat. The writer blends the war time situation with real life situation. He presents Oshevire as an idealist who believes that things will remain static, unchanging and unresolved as against the realistic temperament of things being the way they ought to be at any given time. The protagonist is presented

as a masterpiece in idealism. Under what seems to be a build up of condemnatory proofs, there is a perception of the heartbeats of compassion and empathy for a man in deep agony and spiritual

crisis. Oshevire is alienated and suffers much and becomes berserk in his agony against society, his wife and nature that he cherished much more.

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