

PARADIGMS OF LIFE FROM ANCIENT
GREEK LITERATURE

AN INAUGURAL LECTURE,
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FOLAKE ORITSEGBUBEMI ONAYEMI

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**PARADIGMS OF LIFE FROM ANCIENT
GREEK LITERATURE**

*An inaugural lecture delivered
at the University of Ibadan*

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By

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The Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Registrar, Librarian, Provost of the College of Medicine, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Dean of the Postgraduate School, Deans of other Faculties and of Students, Directors of Institutes, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

Preamble

It is with the utmost sense of honour and of a very great privilege that I stand here today to present this lecture on behalf of our Faculty of Arts, the second from the Faculty this session.

This is the fourth inaugural lecture from the Department of Classics. The very first, titled *Roma Aeterna: The Value of Classical Studies for the Twentieth Century*, was delivered by Professor John Ferguson in 1957, the second one titled, *The Classical Discipline: A Luxury or a Necessity* by Professor Obafemi Kujore in 1977, and the third lecture, *Myth in History: A Classicist's View*, delivered by Professor James Ilevbare in 1998.

My reason for choosing this topic, *Paradigms of Life from Ancient Greek Literature* for this lecture is quite simple. Our University's motto is "Recte sapere fons". "Sapere" can be translated as "dare to know", "dare to be wise". It is the present infinitive of "sapio" meaning "I taste", or "I am wise". And since "recte", is an adverb, meaning "rightly" or "correctly" and "fons" the singular nominative noun meaning "fountain", "source"; then we can translate our university motto as "fountain or source of correct or right wisdom or knowledge", and we can also render it as "dare to know correctly the source". My former teacher, L.A. Thompson, taking the three key elements of the motto, had translated it as "for knowledge (sapere) and sound (recte) judgement (fons)". The University motto was appropriated from a line in Horace's *Arts Poetica* 309 and it has presented some difficulties in (translating): "Scribendi recte sapere est et

principium et fons” (“The source and beginning of writing correctly is knowledge”).

The search for knowledge is the hallmark of a university with its various departments, units and courses that are interconnected and inter-related because they are endeavours around which all human life revolves. The university has been rightly described as the place for “the acquisition of knowledge, the confident mastery of it, an adroit deployment of it for the cultivation of the mind and spirit and the enlightened capability of seeing the connected nature of things...” (Osundare 2007: 13).

Ancient Greek civilisation which emerged into limelight around 776 BC is one of the most brilliant, the most enduring and the most influential in world history and is, without doubt, the source of Western education, culture and knowledge, to which we all subscribe today. It is to the exploration of this phenomenal civilisation that I have devoted all my years of Classical scholarship.

Classical scholarship recently developed a new focus of enquiry termed Classical Reception Studies, described by Hardwick and Stray (2008:2) as “the ways in which Greek and Roman material has been transmitted, translated, excerpted, interpreted, rewritten, re-imaged and represented.”

Introduction

Life is the most precious asset in the entire universe. It is the essence of our being and coming into being and the culmination of our existence. World literatures are full of patterns, examples, sets of representations of and for this greatest phenomenon. Ancient Greek literature itself is resplendent with these paradigms which inform us on the people that used it since every form of art is deeply rooted in the society.

Greek literary history is archeologically traced to the prehistoric Mycenaean civilisation of the second millennium BC. The Mycenaean Age was followed by a time of severe economic and demographic depression, the so-called Dark

Age, which occurred between 1150 BC and 800 BC. The earliest written literature comes from the next phase of Greek civilisation called the Archaic Period, between 800 BC and 500 BC. This period is generally considered by scholars as the critical formative period of Greek cultural creativity. The expression “Archaic Period” is intended to mark a contrast to the “Classical Period” which followed it, roughly dated from about 500 BC to 330 BC, as this marks the highest point of Greek culture, when the Greeks set enduring standards of cultural excellence.

I intend to adopt a ring composition technique in this presentation. The ring structure, also called *chiasmus* or *chiastic structure*, is a very valuable tool that allows a poet to end a narrative where he starts it. This type of structure is typical of Greek literature of the Archaic Period and found generously in oral literature. It is a device that is observed in particular in the works of the revered poet of ancient Greece – Homer.

Homer is the one traditionally credited with the two epics that stand at the beginning of written Western Literature – the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Despite the arguments regarding whether there really was a poet by the name Homer, who authored the works, yet, “the formative influence of the Homeric epics in shaping Greek culture was widely recognised and Homer was described as the teacher of Greece” (Henbeck, West and Hainsworth 1988:3).

We should be demonstrating in the next few paragraphs how the ring structure functions, and shall in doing this, focus attention on the *Iliad* whose narrative technique provides an excellent exemplum of the ring structure format. Now, the *Iliad* is composed of twenty-four books, the first and twenty-fourth of which are regarded a near perfect symmetry in terms of actions related in the two books. The following chart shows how Books One and Twenty-Four form a symmetry that frames the *Iliad*:

Book One

- (1) Apollo inflicts a plague, and as a result many Achaeans die.
- (2) Agamemnon and Achilles quarrel and Briseis is taken away.
- (3) Achilles and Thetis speak, and Thetis proceeds to speak with Zeus.
- (4) Odysseus goes to the island of Chrysa to give Chryseis back to her father.
- (5) Thetis and Zeus speak, and Zeus accedes to her plea to help angry Achilles.
- (6) The gods quarrel.

Book Twenty-Four

- (1) The gods quarrel.
- (2) Thetis and Zeus speak and she is told to ask Achilles to relinquish the body of Hector (hence to subdue his anger).
- (3) Thetis comes from Zeus with a message, and she and Achilles speak.
- (4) Priam goes to Achilles' camp to get back the body of his son, Hector.
- (5) Priam and Achilles settle their differences and Achilles returns the body of Hector.
- (6) The women of Troy lament and the funeral of Hector takes place.

A second example of the ring structure is seen in Book Twenty-Four of the *Iliad* and this is the model that is applied to this lecture. This is the scene from Book Twenty-Four when Priam the old king of Troy takes ransom and departs in order to persuade Achilles to release the corpse of his son. The son, Hector, the stalwart of the Trojan army has been killed by Achilles.

The pattern set is ABCDCBA

- A. Priam orders the wagon prepared.
- B. He goes to the storeroom for ransom.

- C. He speaks to Hecuba.
- D. Hecuba responds, voicing her fear of the dangerous proposal and her hatred for the killer of her sons.
- C. Priam tells Hecuba that he is determined to go.
- B. Priam collects the ransom, which is described in detail.
- A. Finally the wagon is prepared.

I have considered the ring structure the perfect tool for this lecture also because the ring or circle itself is the symbol of life. It is impossible to examine all the paradigms of life as evident in Greek literature in just one endeavour of this type, therefore we will take a few concepts namely: the concept of life, heroism and death, the concept of listening to and the delivery of lectures and the concept of corruption and chivalry.

Concept of Life, Heroism and Death

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I like to start this part of the discussion with the first three stanzas of a poem of mine titled *Vita Brevis*—life is short.

Life is short.
 So let us be sated
 in eating the frivolity of joy.

Life is too short.
 Then grant not pecuniary necessities
 The annihilation of our hopes.

Life is far too short.
 Let not love be obliterated
 in the titillating desires of passion.

The ancient Greeks, as attested in their literature, are well aware of the sentiments expressed in the lines of poetry above. Brevity of life is lamented in virtually all the genres of

their literature but it is to Homer we must turn in order to examine their conception of life and its mitigation.

The Homeric world was made up of kings, commoners, slaves, the army and warfare, which was an integral part of Greek life because theirs was a world fraught with many dangers and much insecurity. In such a society, success basically means the successful physical defence of one's home or one's army. Clearly attached to this concept is heroization. The society which Homer describes is a ruthlessly competitive one in which males place absolute premium on their public reputation and in which every hero is utterly self-interested. The masculine need for renown is the hallmark of this society in which a male lives for glory and for the honour extended to him by the group.

Wars provided the opportunities for his validation as a hero and, consequently, bravery in the battlefield is a hallmark of the hero. Hector, for instance, would not abandon the fight and stay within the walls as his wife suggests in the *Iliad* because doing so would cause him to be ashamed in the presence of the rest of the Trojans. When he faces death in the hand of Achilles, Hector cannot withdraw within the walls and will rather go to death than lose respect of his troops.

It is for honour that Achilles himself opted for a brief but honourable life and since death is inevitable, as Sarpedon observes in *Iliad* 12. 320-328, "we may as well fight and win for ourselves glory or make glory possible for some others."

The *Iliad* is full of records of the deaths of heroes and on each occasion, the narrator does not fail to evoke pathos at the death of heroes who are often regarded as "god-like". A hero may even be compared to several gods at once as when Agamemnon is described to be "in eyes and head like Zeus who delights in thunder, in girdle like Ares, in chest like Poseidon" (*Iliad* 2. 478f).

However there is one great difference between the gods and men. The gods are "deathless" and "ageless" while men are mortal. It is the consequence of this mortality that the poet evinces at each description of the death of a hero. To a modern reader the pathos and tragedy of loss is more intense

at the hero's fall from a god-like stature to a helpless mortal "who bites the dust" or whose eyes are shut forever.

Hecuba's lament at the death of her son, Hector, illustrates the human pathos that often accompanies the loss of a hero or a loved one:

You were my pride night and day and you were the defender of all the men and women of Troy, who hailed you like a god. Alive you were their great glory; but now death and fate have caught you.

(*Iliad* 22. 634-6)

When Homer sings his poems of war, he at the same time sings of the attendant deaths and horrors of death. Embedded in Homer's poems of war, in other words, is the Greek concept of the consequences of wars which cut short the life of man and underlining the fact that man is oftentimes the cause of the brevity of his life.

Greek literature postulates a vertically structured three-tier universe. The first top level, is an invisible heaven beyond human reach, and is exclusively inhabited by the gods who live untouched by human woes. The second level, the middle tier, is inhabited by mortals in a harsh world where the Fates assign to them an unequal mixture of joy and pain, and whose lives end inevitably in death.

Hidden far beneath this is the Underworld, the third tier, the dark subterranean realm, the Kingdom of Hades, to which at death, the soul of man descends and where the dead are permanently domiciled as mindless disembodied ghosts or shades. Such an existence is very much abhorred by the Greeks. In the Homeric poems, for example, "to be alive and to see the light of the sun" (*Iliad* 18.01) and "while I have breath in my lungs and my knees are active" (9.609) are recurrent expressions that support this assertion. To the ancient Greeks, death is "to leave the light of the sun" (18.11) and "to go into the dark" or "to have one's limbs undone" (11.578).

One clear example of this is to be found in Book XI: 465-540 of Homer's *Odyssey*, where Odysseus descends to the Underworld, meets the ghost of Achilles, the greatest of the Achaean soldiers that went to the war in Troy. The following exchange takes place between Odysseus and Achilles:

Odysseus: I have not yet touched Achaea, not set foot in my own land, but have suffered endless troubles, yet no man has been more blessed than you, Achilles nor will be in time to come, since we Argives considered you a god while you lived, and now you rule, a power among the un-living. Do not grieve, then Achilles, at your death.

Achilles' response is swift:

Achilles: Glorious Odysseus: don't try to reconcile me to dying. I'd rather serve as another man's labourer, as a poor peasant without land, and be alive on Earth than be the lord of all the lifeless dead.

Achilles' lament here indicates that he would rather prefer to be one of the lowliest humans on earth than be king of the dead. Achilles was king in the Underworld because of the glory he achieved on earth. But now dead, he would have been willing to throw away all the glory just to be alive. The glory he strove so hard for on earth has become of no value to him. This is the same Achilles who when given the choice between a long, peaceful and happy life but without fame and a short famous life—decided to choose the latter. Jantzen (2006) describes the regrets of Achilles as follows:

Achilles seems to have forgotten all about the immortality of glorious fame. He draws no comfort from the honour he receives among humankind for his heroism on the battlefield... Achilles' lament... is full of the pathos of one who finds, too late, that any human condition, even slavery, would be preferable to death.

Let us leave Homer here and take on another concept.

Concept of Listening to and Delivering Lectures

Literary interest in the individual can be traced to the 8th century BC, regarded as the beginning of Greek literary history. Homer's *Iliad* announces its subject matter in its opening sentences as the Wrath of Achilles; the *Odyssey* deals with the ten-year homecoming adventures of the eponymous hero. Hesiod's *Works and Days* deals in part with the personal problems of Hesiod and his brother Perces; and some of the lyric and elegiac poets relate their personal experiences in their poems. These writers formed the foundation for much of Greek biographical and autobiographical works. Ancient Greek biography was not a clearly defined genre. Derived from Greek 'bios' (life) and 'graphia' (writing), Greek biography shared boundaries with or included the encomium, the biographical novel, the historical monograph on the deeds of a great man, and other literary genres. One of the most important functions of many ancient biographies is normative: they sought to present models or anti-models of behaviour according to which the audience or readers should regulate their own.

Plutarch is a key contributor to this genre of Greek literature. Plutarch (AD 45-127) was born the son of the biographer Aristobulus, a member of an affluent family in Chaeronea, Boeotia, and was educated in Athens under Ammonius. He was one of the most remarkable and prolific men of Greek antiquity. He travelled extensively, and, in Rome, gave lectures that brought him to the highest circles of Imperial Society, including emperors Trajan and Hadrian. It is either he had access to an extremely well-stocked library of his own, or he was gifted with a prodigious memory, or probably both. His 78 surviving treatises collectively called *Moralia* or *Moral Essays*, represent about a third of his original output in this field. In his writings, Plutarch effectively combines rhetorical skills with philosophical perception. He wrote essays and dialogues that demonstrate interest in humanity, science, literature, philosophy, political science, archaeology and history. He was a great biographer, an essayist, researcher, literary historian, literary comparatist,

historian of religion, mythographer, philosopher, politician, educator, writer of handbooks for the average person, a priest and reformer at Apollo's shrine at Delphi. His biographical work *Parallel Lives* influenced Elizabethan Renaissance, and more specifically, Shakespeare's Roman plays. As character sketches, the *Parallel Lives* was designed to demonstrate the common heroic qualities of Greeks and Romans as a means of providing models for optimal behaviour – political, social, intellectual and personal moral.

Plutarch, otherwise known as, “the encyclopaedist of antiquity”, in one of his collections, *Moralia*, wrote numerous essays which show not only prodigious shrewd common sense, but also have clear applicability to contemporary conditions, and have been described as “so entertaining that they should not be neglected by persons living in any period of world history” (Coleman-Norton 1968). We like to pay close attention in this lecture to his essay entitled *De Recta Ratione Audiendi* or *De Audite* for short. This is because of its relevance to our present discussion.

The introduction to Plutarch's *Moralia*, as published in the Loeb Classical Library, presents an indepth analysis of the essay. I like to reproduce parts of it here:

The essay on listening to lectures was first delivered as a formal lecture, and afterwards written out for the benefit of the young Nicander, who had just assumed the *toga virilis*, and was about to take up the serious study of philosophy... It must be quite evident that this essay is, in a way, a supplement and corollary to the preceding essay on the study of poetry. The former is concerned with the young, the latter with the more mature who are undertaking serious study... The essay has an astonishingly modern tone. The different types of students – the diffident student, the lazy student, the contemptuous student, the over-enthusiastic student who makes a nuisance of himself, the over-confident student who likes to ask questions to show off his

own scrappy knowledge, the student who has no appreciation of his privilege in hearing a great scholar – all these are portrayed in a thoroughly realistic manner. Stress is laid on the great contrast between scholars (particularly the philosopher) and the popular lecturer (the sophist). Then as now, it seems, people were not always willing to listen patiently to the scholar, but more often inclined to resort to lectures of the lighter and more entertaining sort. In this matter, as in many others, Plutarch marks the distinction of character – the character of the lecturer, and the effect of the lecture on the character of the hearer. The sophists having no particular character themselves and being below the general average of mankind, can do little or nothing to improve the character of their hearers, but, on the other hand, practically everything that the scholar says or does has its value for the up building of character if only one has the ability to profit by it.

This analysis will have to suffice here so that the application to contemporary life and issues can be unencumbered on the return leg of this lecture

Concept of Corruption and Chivalry

In 2005, I published an article titled “Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* as an Allegory for Contemporary Nigeria”. It is on this article, using the Sophoclean characters in the play *Philoctetes* as prototypes of Nigerian leaders and youths, that I rely for this section.

Sophocles, the Greek tragedy dramatist, who was born at Colonus near Athens about 496 BC, is often regarded as the greatest master of tragedy. The *Poetics* of Aristotle showed a preference for Sophocles over his rivals. The Academy as well as the Lyceum preferred Sophocles. According to Polemon (313 – 270 BC), Homer is the Sophocles of epic while Sophocles is the Homer of tragedy.

The *Philoctetes* is the last but one of Sophocles' plays. It probably came out in 409 BC. The background of the play can be glimpsed from another play of Sophocles' titled *Women of Trachis*. Here, Sophocles follows the version that Philoctetes set fire on the pyre of Heracles as an act of kindness to the latter and for which act he got the famous bow and arrow of Heracles as reward.

Philoctetes was bitten by a snake while leading his fellow chieftains to a particular altar during the voyage to Troy, and his cries of anguish and the stench of his wounds so much disturbed his shipmates that under Odysseus' instruction, they abandoned him, marooned on the desert island of Lemnos where, for ten years, he brooded over the injustice done to him by his fellow Greeks.

The *Philoctetes* opens with Odysseus, whom of all men Philoctetes hates the most, and Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, arriving on the coast of Lemnos. They have been sent to bring Philoctetes back as an oracle has predicted that the fall of Troy will only be possible with the presence of Philoctetes. Odysseus argues with Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, on the morality of what he plans to do, that is, trick Philoctetes. Neoptolemus agrees to undertake the assignment. Philoctetes arrives and Neoptolemus successfully deceives him with the false story that he is taking Philoctetes back home. Philoctetes is seized by wracking pains in the course of which he hands over his bow and arrows to Neoptolemus and falls asleep, having first secured Neoptolemus' promise not to leave him behind in Lemnos. When Philoctetes wakes up, Neoptolemus, overcome with sympathy and remorse, tells him the truth and returns his bow and arrows to him. Philoctetes, greatly disappointed, attempts to shoot Odysseus who has now appeared on the scene. Odysseus leaves while Neoptolemus remains. He gets ready to take Philoctetes back to Greece as he has earlier promised, with assurances from Philoctetes that his bow and arrows would avert the wrath of the Greeks. Then Heracles appears above them and tells them to go to Troy as this is the will of Zeus and that Philoctetes is destined to find healing in Troy.

The theme of the play is the suffering and relief of Philoctetes and the moral choice faced by Philoctetes and Neoptolemus. The Odysseus we meet in this play is a totally different man from the one we have met in Homer and different even from the Odysseus of Sophocles' *Ajax*. In Homer, he is the "Odysseus of the nimble wits", the man that can be relied upon to proffer wise counsel in times of communal needs. In another Sophoclean play, *Ajax*, Odysseus has seemingly taken to heart the lesson of moderation and reverence to the gods. But in *Philoctetes*, Odysseus avers that falsehood is not shameful if it is advantageous:

Neoptolemus: Do you not find it vile yourself, this lying?

Odysseus: Not if the lying brings our rescue with it.

Neoptolemus: How can a man not blush to say such things?

Odysseus: When one does something for gain, one need not blush.

(*Philoctetes*, lines 109 – 112)

In the prologue, Odysseus suggests that Neoptolemus capture Philoctetes and his bow by tricking him. Neoptolemus at first refuses but ultimately agrees, realizing that only thus can he win the glory of taking Troy. Not only is Odysseus quite comfortable urging Neoptolemus to tell a lie, but he is also unable either to understand nor appreciate the young man's reluctance to lie.

Neoptolemus, one needs to emphasize, is the son of Achilles who has been fed with tales of his father's chivalry, and has therefore always looked for opportunities to prove that he is worthy of his great father. Neoptolemus' first assignment is to cheat a cripple and he is greatly disappointed! He is persuaded to abandon the standards of morality imposed by his upbringing and he carries out the assignment. But his sympathy for Philoctetes got the better of him and he restores Philoctetes' bow:

Odysseus: (to Neoptolemus): You have turned back, there is hurry in your step. Will you tell me why?

Neoptolemus: I go to undo the wrong that I have done

Odysseus: A strange thing I say! What wrong was that!

Neoptolemus: I did wrong when I obeyed you and the Greeks.

Odysseus: What did we make you do that was unworthy?

Neoptolemus: I practised craft and treachery with success.

Odysseus: On whom? Would you do some rash thing now?

Neoptolemus: Nothing rash, I am going to give something back.

Odysseus: What? I am afraid to hear what you will say.

Neoptolemus: Back to the man I took it from, this bow.

Odysseus: You cannot mean you are going to give it back.

Neoptolemus: Just that to my shame, unjustly I obtained it.

Odysseus: Can you mean this in earnest?

Neoptolemus: Yes, unless it is not earnest to tell you the truth.

(*Philoctetes*, lines 1222 – 1236)

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, as is expected of the ring composition technique which, you may recall, I have adopted in preparing this lecture, it is time to begin the reverse journey in order to effectively complete the closing of the ring, as it were. And I do this, by elucidating contemporary life, especially as a Nigerian, with the paradigms that I have identified from ancient Greek literature, and which I have discussed earlier on.

The *Philoctetes* is primarily a character study and in reading this play through the lens of contemporary Nigeria, one cannot fail to identify Nigerian counterparts of the main characters, thus making its interpretation in the context of contemporary events in Nigeria both viable and valuable.

We start with one of the main characters, the incomparable Odysseus. He is an excellent paradigm of the average contemporary Nigerian. His fellows are legion in our country, where issues of 419, kidnapping, ritual killings and sundry other evils thrive. Nigeria's worst signature is corruption, as it perpetually maintains the record as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, even up till today. The ruling class, comprising the political office holders and public servants have seized public wealth and established a get-rich-quick-no-matter-the-cost culture that promotes corruption at all levels and in all sectors in the country, making corruption the most lucrative enterprise in Nigeria. This explains why nothing seems to work in the country and why instead of progressing, most things are retrogressing and there is a pervasive decline and dilapidation in virtually all matters Nigerian.

Stories of corruption of Nigerian leaders fill the media on a daily basis. The examples I cited in my 2005 article have become stale. Some of these old examples include the case of the then Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun; the fifty-five million naira scam involving the then Minister for Education, Fabian Osuji, and the then Senate President, Adolphus Wabara; Dr Iyiorcha Ayu's trouble over a 460 million naira property; and Dieprieve Alamieseigha's laundering of about 1.8 million pounds sterling (Nigerian Tribune No. 13: 725 of Friday 16 September, 2005 p. 1 & 4).

All these, as I have just accepted, are old examples. Some of the more recent ones include the Dasuki scandal on the alleged diversion and misappropriation of money meant for the purchase of arms for the Nigerian army to fight Boko Haram's insurgency; a General's alleged diversion of military funds for his personal use, and a petroleum Minister's alleged misappropriation Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation funds. It has been alleged that huge amounts of money belonging to some past and present leaders have been discovered in foreign banks. As I was writing this lecture, we were inundated with reports of the greed and unabated effrontery of Nigerian law makers involving the economy of the nation. I present only two of such reports:

This first one is an email I received via African World Forum (africanworldforum@googlegroups.com) on 18th April, 2016 at 5.23a.m sent by one Afis Deinde. I quote the contents:

Fear grips N'Assembly 'Cabals' as Buhari uncovers they appropriated N1.6b each to self in 2016 Budget.

Some 'cabal-law makers' presently at the national assembly have reportedly appropriated N1.6 billion each to themselves in the controversial 2016 appropriation bill rejected to be assented [sic] to by Mr. President, Muhammadu Buhari. According to *Vanguard's report*, the National Assemblymen cabals are afraid of the consequences of Buhari's decision to scrutinise the budget line by line. The bigwig Senators are reported to have appropriated N1.6 billion each to themselves in 'Consistency Projects' inserted in the budget. Another N200 million was set for ordinary members. The affected influential lawmakers in the two chambers of the NASS, are said to be worried that the action they took to corner substantial amount of money in the budget, using the platform of 'Consistency Projects' has been punctured by the refusal of the president to sign the budget without details. It was also gathered that the House of Representatives has agreed to address some of the concerns raised by the executive arm of the government in the budget while some of the controversial allocations inserted into the budget by the principal officers for their constituencies would be redirected to finance other critical national projects. The revelation has split the NASS into two factions with one backing President Muhammadu Buhari while the other is frontally opposed to him and his administration.

The 'strong men' of the NASS are reported to have cornered projects worth N1.6 billion each, leaving another level of committee men with N1.5 billion each and a general sum of N20 million for the average or common member of the legislature...

The second example is in the form of an email purportedly written by Femi Falana (*falanafemi15@gmail.com*) and addressed to Honourable Yakubu Dogara, the Speaker, House of Representatives. It is also cited *in extenso*:

Re: Proposed amendment of the Code of Conduct Bureau and Code of Conduct Tribunal Act by the National Assembly.

Our attention has been drawn to the ongoing moves by the chambers of the National Assembly to amend the Code of Conduct Bureau and Code of Conduct Tribunal Act (Cap. L15) Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004 (hereinafter referred to as "the Act"). Although the House of Representatives has not commenced deliberations on the Bill for the amendment of the Act, the Senate passed it for the Second hearing last week, barely 48 hours after its presentation by its sponsor, Senator Peter Nwaoboshi.

In view of the ongoing trial of the Senate President, before the Code of Conduct Tribunal over the alleged failure to declare his assets, the hasty move to amend the Act is insensitive, suspicious, self-serving and opportunistic. It is also illegal and unconstitutional in several respects. Firstly, to the extent that the proposed amendment is designed to serve the interests of an individual, it is a violation of section 4(2) Constitution which has empowered the National Assembly to make laws "for the peace, order and

good government of the federation or any part thereof..."

Secondly, notwithstanding that the Senate President has decided not to preside over the plenary in the Senate whenever the bill is being debated, the whole exercise is a clear violation of paragraph 1 of the Code of Conduct for Public Offices enshrined in Part I of the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution which stipulates that "A public officer shall not put himself in a position where his personal interest conflicts with his duties and responsibilities."

Thirdly, Section 3 of the Act which the National Assembly seeks to amend has become spent. Senator Nwaoboshi was reported to have said that he was proposing an amendment to Section 3 of the Act to provide "for an opportunity for the affected person whose rights and obligations may be affected to make representations to the administering authority before that authority makes the decision affecting the person." With respect, section 3 of the act is in *pari materia* with Paragraph 3(e) of Part I of the Third Schedule of the constitution. To that extent, section 3 of the Act is inoperative and invalid in every material particular. In *Attorney-General of Abia v Attorney-General of the Federation* (2001) 17 WRN I the Supreme Court held:

"Where the provision in the Act is within the legislative powers of the National Assembly but the Constitution is found to have already made the same or similar provision, then the new provision will be regarded as invalid for duplication and or inconsistency and therefore inoperative. The same fate will befall any provision of the Act which seeks to enlarge,

curtail or alter any existing provision of the Constitution. The provision or provisions will be treated as unconstitutional and therefore null and void.”

In the light of the authoritative pronouncement of the Supreme Court on lack of legislative powers on the part of the National Assembly to enact laws which have similar provisions to those of the Constitution, Section 3 of the Act has become a duplication of the relevant constitutional provision. Consequently, its proposed amendment is illegal and unconstitutional. In other words, without amending the relevant provisions of the constitution, the proposed amendment of the Act is an exercise in futility. As the proposed amendment cannot alter, enlarge or curtail the relevant provisions of the Constitution, the Senate ought not to continue to waste precious time and resources on the illegal exercise.

Since the Constitution has prohibited the enactment of *ex post facto* laws in circumstances of this nature the National Assembly ought to know that the ongoing move to amend the Act cannot have any effect on the celebrated trial of the Senate President. Having solemnly sworn to strive to preserve the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of the State Policy contained in the Constitution the members of the National Assembly should stop subverting the obligation of the Federal Government to “abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power.”

In view of the foregoing, we are compelled to urge the House of Representatives ably led by your good self not to lend its weight to the illegal amendment of the Act. You may wish to remind your colleagues in the House that when the

Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act 2000 was amended in 2003 on account of the investigation of corrupt practices involving the leadership of the Senate, the Federal High Court set aside the amendment as it violated the Constitution. As the same fate certainly awaits the Bill to amend the Code of Conduct Bureau and Code of Conduct Tribunal Act, it is hoped that the House will persuade the Senate to terminate further debates on it.

Yours Sincerely,
Femi Falana SAN.

(Olu Ojedokun's blog in *African World Forum* of Tuesday 2 February 2016).

Whether this letter was actually written by Femi Falana does not matter. The contents are clear and they demonstrate the selfishness of our leaders in this country. In spite of the huge outcry in both orthodox and social media against the move of the National Assembly to amend the laws with the sole objective of shielding just one person from facing the law, the house still went ahead to debate the bill, thereby generating more angst expressed on the social media, eliciting the following reaction, also circulated on social media:

The Raping of the Nation at the Senate!

In a shameless show of banditry and treachery that looked more like a broad daylight gang-rape or armed robbery of a nation than lawmakers passing bills, the Bukola Saraki Mafia Cabal at the Senate, presided by Ike Ekweremadu, hastily passed the Code of Conduct Bureau Act (CCBA) and the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) amendment bills through their second readings in just three days! This is the fastest for a bill, in recent memory. Insiders at the Senate reported that

36 Toyota Landcruiser V8 engine sport utility vehicles were allegedly purchased and distributed as bribes to the Mafia cabal, to facilitate the hurried amendment of these two bills, which directly affect Bukola Saraki's pending court cases for forgery, false declaration of assets, grandeur theft [sic] and money laundering..... The shambolic treaties of the bills' amendment were initiated by Senator Nwaoboshi. His motion was supported by Dino Melaye, who thought that the proposal was justified. The Senate Chairman of Ethics Committee, Sam Anyawu, also supported the bill during the debate include Senator Biodun Olujimi, who said "if you don't support your neighbour when his house is burning, it will extend to yours!"

Senator Yahaya Abdullahi supported the bill, but added insults to the injury by urging the Senate to be "mindful" of public perception, due to wrong timing of the bill. But his hopeless statement was rendered even more useless by Senator Abu Ibrahim, who supported the bill and unashamedly said that "the time is right!"

The CCBA and the ACJA amendment bills have therefore fraudulently passed their second hearing. They are now forwarded to the Senate Judiciary Committee for review, which will report back to the Senate in two weeks' time.

(African World Forum April 18, 2016 @ 8.51 am).

This post ended by urging Nigerian public to re-post widely and also supplied telephone numbers on which to reach the Deputy Senate President with a call or a text message signifying that the populace is against the amendment.

These posts reveal quite a lot about the character of our political leaders whose actions and inactions demonstrate lack

of humility, moral uprightness, enduring and noble political values as well as passion for their nation and compassion for the people. They administer the affairs of the nation with a culture of impunity that allows them to get away with the rape of the nation. When a country is afflicted with such leaders, development and progress cannot be its hallmark. It, therefore, did not come to one as a surprise when *TV360online* reported that data from the 2016 world ranking has ranked Nigeria top of the ten most corrupt countries in the world (www.tv360nigeria.com on 21 April, 2016).

The Odysseus of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* can even be excused for his misdeed on the grounds that he is a spokesperson for his nation. Odysseus is essentially needed first to tempt Neoptolemus and then to arouse the maximum hatred in Philoctetes. The authority of the Greek army is embodied in Odysseus to whom, therefore, victory is worth the sacrifice of virtue. It is in his attempt to fulfil his ambition that he has to prevail on Neoptolemus to do what he knows is clearly dishonourable. Although Odysseus' moral concepts and methods are far from admirable, he has a just cause. He represents the will and authority of the army, and he convinces Neoptolemus that if he fails to carry out the plan he will be failing the army and his country.

The ruling class, which, Odysseus represents in *Philoctetes* is like our Nigerian political class, our main affliction in this country. The nation fought a long battle to free herself from the shackles of military despotism, a battle that was seemingly won in 1999. However, the Nigerian dream for a meaningful and better life has since been totally shattered. Many had hoped that the return of the military to the barracks would usher in a class of patriotic politicians. The reality is that the country has substituted one evil class of Nigerians for another. Politicians have frustrated the institution of solid democratic structures and a viable democratic culture in the country.

The tragic elements in the Sophoclean play are reflected in the suffering and desertion of Philoctetes on the Island of Lemnos for ten years by his fellow Greeks just because they

could not stand his cries of pain and the stench from a wound from a snake bite when on national duty, leading the Greeks to an altar.

The treatment meted out to Philoctetes by the Greeks mirrors our attitude in Nigeria to our own heroes. We abandon heroes in their times of need and do not come to their aid when they have sustained injuries even on national assignments. For years, for example, the man who designed the Nigerian flag languished in his dilapidated house at Ekotedo in Ibadan. We do the same to sportsmen and women. We recall the case of Nduka Ugbade who sustained injury after scoring an equaliser for Nigeria in the under-21 tournament in Saudi Arabia in 1989. That match that saw Nigeria from a position of 0 – 4 against USSR to an eventual win for Nigeria was dubbed “The Miracle of Damman” but the burden of restoring Ugbade to full sporting health was borne by a second division outfit in Spain. There have been many more Ugbades since then.

It is common knowledge that in Nigeria today, a retired person may wait for as long as five years or more before getting his/her gratuity and the issue of non-payment of pension appears a calculated attempt at denying workers their deserved rest after retirement. We encounter, on a daily basis distinguished senior citizens and haggard-looking old people reduced to begging. It was even alleged that sometime ago when a governor of a state, was asked why the pensioners in his state had not been paid, he replied that those “living” had not yet been paid let alone the “dead”! Even now, the so-called “living” are not being paid their salaries. Everybody knows that, at the time of writing this, most states in Nigeria owe their workers at least three months salaries!

The sufferings of Philoctetes epitomise the life of an average Nigerian who must bear excruciating pains daily. Philoctetes is almost pathetically grateful to see Neoptolemus and his men. His anxious questions lest they should reject him demonstrate the loneliness and depression that he must have endured for ten long years, all alone. This makes it easy for him to be deceived by Neoptolemus. The acute poverty

and sufferings of an average Nigerian render us easy preys to exploitation by all manner of men, not even excepting the numerous pastors in our midst. An average Nigerian gets poorer by the day while the ruling class keeps multiplying and amassing wealth for itself.

In the face of the dire situation of our nation, is there any hope? I have asked this question in a poem of mine titled "Dare We to Hope?", which, with your permission, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I like to quote at this point:

With eyes smeared with pain;
and hearts washed dry by tears;
expectations hollowed out
by seasons of unhonoured vows,
dare we to hope?

For in the bid to beat the desperation
which clung to our clothes,
we dance the crazed dance and
sang the songs of snuggled breaths
in the market places.

To break the rocks and snatch
our heritage from the plunderer,
and our ransomed freedom
from the sect of fiends,
we got impaled in crags which
stalked our adulthood in stalled liberty.

Dare we to hope
that our children who breastfed
on the milk of atrocities,
and had their innocence bleached
from wombs raped by corruption
now hold heads of bravery?

Perhaps an inspection of the character of Neoptolemus may provide a guide as to where we must turn for salvation. Initially, being naïve, Neoptolemus is willing to allow himself

to be persuaded to do Odysseus' bidding to perform a dishonourable act. After his interaction with Philoctetes however, he shifts his loyalty to a higher cause in the face of growing moral misgivings and consciousness of guilt. Neoptolemus decides on the path of justice and identifies a contrast between loyalty to the state and justice. He rejects the argument of Odysseus by which he is initially convinced, that by carrying out the deception of Philoctetes, he will be considered a wise and great man.

It is in the character of Neoptolemus that this play offers the greatest hope and the best alternative for Nigeria. Every Nigerian youth must assume the Neoptolemus stance in rejecting the corrupt standards set by their leaders and, even, their father figures as symbolised by Odysseus. As the influence of Odysseus over Neoptolemus declines and the breach between them is final, so also must the youths of our nation determine and make a complete break from the chains that have led them to a life of desperately seeking to fulfil inordinate ambitions irrespective of the cost.

Moreover, every Nigerian must be re-dedicated to the cause of Nigeria. Like the young Neoptolemus, we must challenge, on a continuous basis, the opportunistic tendencies, corruption, mismanagement and bad leadership in the decisions we make in both our private and public lives. Nigerians must be united not only by a common purpose, but also by common values: duty, integrity, honour, love, hope, morality, progress, courage, patriotism, nationalism, industry, service, prudence, the fear of God and sense of responsibility. These are the qualities which Sophocles made innate in the character of Neoptolemus so many centuries ago and which are still useful and relevant to us today.

On the 20th of May 2016, while making corrections on this lecture, I read a post from Chukwudi Ibegu on *Africanworldforum* that the Ohanaeze Ndigbo Youth Council is assessing performances of Igbo governors and political office holders with a view to scoring them in areas of health, education, youth empowerment, and rural and infrastructural development. In the release, the Ohanaeze Youth Council

(OYC) also called on the Niger Delta Avengers (who have been blowing up oil pipelines in the Niger Delta) to halt the present hostilities in the Niger Delta as their action is having a negative impact on the economy of the entire nation. The Council also asked for restraints from all parties concerning the fuel price increase, while calling of the Federal Government to be mindful of the hardship that Nigerians are presently experiencing. Finally, the Council called for “peace and unity in the country...based on equity, justice, and fairplay.” Without doubt, this is an example of the positive activities that our youths should be involved in.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, to return to the opening lines of the *Moralia*, we see Plutarch reminding his young student of a saying that was prevalent in the society at that time, namely that “to follow God and to obey reasons are the same thing” (IE). This maxim does not apply to young students only. It is also applicable to adults and the decisions one makes as one listens to “lectures”.

In this particular instance I intend to illustrate the point I am trying to make here from listening to religious lectures. Let us examine a little more closely Plutarch’s maxim about following God and obeying reason being equivalent activities. Although it is often said that “faith” and “reason” are antithetical in human and spiritual experiences, a sentiment to which one could subscribe to, nevertheless, it is still possible to argue that people need to apply some reason to what they are told from the pulpits. As an illustration:

You are in a prayer meeting and there is a call for people who want blessings from God to come out and sow “seeds”, that is, give some money in the hope of future blessings. You are told, for example, that if you are asking God for children, you sow a particular amount of money for one child, a different amount for more than one and some different amount for other types of blessings.

If one applies reason to these declarations, the first question to ask would be whether the person making the calls actually possesses the ability to grant these wishes.

The next question will be whether the money “paid” as “seeds” in these instances actually has a function in acquiring these blessings. And, finally, applying reason, one cannot fail to realise that the Giver of all blessings, the Almighty Himself, does not “steal” from us before He releases these blessings.

I do not want to be misunderstood. I do not condemn in totality the attitude of giving to religious activities. I am only saying that we must apply reason to the things we listen to in order to prevent us from becoming victims of other people’s shenanigans. We get trapped because we are often too lazy to apply reasons to what we hear. Even the Bible advocates in Acts Chapter 17 verse 11 that we must be like the Berean Christians:

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures everyday to see if what Paul said was true. (New International Version)

The Bible also enjoins us not to be lazy and not to “believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (I John 4:1). This is a clear validation of Plutarch’s maxim that obeying God could in fact, be a function of reason. Our value systems are a product of a combination of our beliefs, education, practices and the experiences that make up our daily life. The onus lies on us, therefore, to find balances among all elements that make up life and living, in order to repair our damaged value system and to make the right decisions.

In an interview with the Nigerian-born Pastor Sunday Adelaja, who is the founder of the largest Pentecostal church in Europe in Kiev, Ukraine, he is quoted to have accused, many Nigerian pastors of breeding corruption in the nation (Olu Ojedokun’s blog on www.africanworldforum at 18:25 on

Tuesday, 2 February, 2016). In justifying his position, Pastor Adelaja gives an example:

A pastor could say that somebody would be a millionaire before the end of the year, whereas we are in November or December and there are 500 people in the auditorium. All of them will shout amen!!! Yet pastors don't correct them saying that no, you would not become a millionaire before the end of the year even if you shout amen for the whole day. The person that would become a millionaire is the person that has worked for it. The only person that would become a millionaire is the person that has at least signed a contract. When pastors don't clarify that, everybody begins to believe that some miracles would happen. So when such a member goes to his office and he sees an unsigned cheque, for a million dollars and nobody is claiming responsibility for it, he claims it. He believes that it is God that has provided for him. That is how corruption gets from the pulpit to the society. That particular member would claim that God has answered his pastor's prayer. He would boldly come out to give testimony the following Sunday while the remaining and ignorant members would shout halleluyah! Meanwhile they too are expecting similar miracles and on and on. That is how the vicious circle of corruption from the pulpit to the whole country runs.

The pastor in this example is clearly culpable of negatively inciting the expectation of his hearers through what he teaches but the congregation too is liable for not applying reason to what they have heard. There is thus a tendency to think that success or what is called "breakthroughs" come only from prayers. We therefore do not take into cognizance other factors responsible for success such as hard work, preparation, commitment and so on. Breakthrough, itself, indicates success that comes from years

of hard work, labouring to achieve something. Pastor Sunday Adelaja explains breakthrough by likening it to water, springs or streams breaking forth from under the ground. For the water to break forth, it must have been forcing its ways for ages or for years before it, all of a sudden, breaks through. "The breakthrough that we see all of a sudden was a result of hard work, invisible hard work".

In the essay on "Listening to Lectures", Plutarch's comments are not applicable to religious circles alone. In fact, Plutarch addresses the essay to stakeholders in the academic world—more precisely, to students, audience and teachers. He says that young students become unruly in the academy or school (our modern universities) because they have just gained "freedom". They have just laid "aside the garb of childhood" and so they assume that this freedom translates into an "absence of control" and that they are no longer subject to control. Plutarch then warns that exhibitions of lack of control are actually an indication of lack of education, for the "passing from childhood to manhood is not a casting off of control, but a recasting of the controlling agent" (*De Audite IE*).

Plutarch's young scholars can be identified in many students in today's Nigerian universities. Many of them believe that admission into the university or other tertiary institutions is a licence for all sorts of misbehaviour that result in various negative outcomes.

The most recent disruption of peace on the campus of University of Ibadan is a result of such erroneous beliefs that an admission to the university is a licence to take the law into one's hands. The destructive actions that emanate from such a mindset are exemplified in the barring of the university entrances by students on Saturday, March 12, 2016. It did not matter to the students who carried out the action that day, that being a Saturday, members of the public, outside the university, would definitely have one reason or the other to be on campus on that day. The grief, the distress that their action could cause was not considered, nor the fact that they could have been in the shoes of such people. If they had exercised a little bit of self-control or explored other possible alternatives

for expressing their grievances, such students would not have been the agent of such sadness and discomfort as were witnessed on that day. The subsequent uncontrolled mass protest by students which led to the closure of the university for many weeks from 26 April, 2016 is a further demonstration of how the lack of control by students can be counter-productive.

Plutarch also has a word for teachers in the essay. He draws a distinction between two types of teachers by analyzing their characters. He likens one set of teachers to the philosopher, characterized as committed, rightly focused, knowledgeable, and disciplined. These are the types that Osundare (2007:18) refers to when he says:

Lecturers were on top of their disciplines; they took their teaching seriously and never joked with research... And what wonderful role models most of them turned out to be!

The other set of teachers, Plutarch represents with the sophists, who, having no particular character themselves, only seek to entertain, rather than teach. Osundare (2007:24) identifies such as those that:

Come thirty minutes late to a one-hour lecture, and depart ten minutes before the end... the so-called "senior colleague", who, now too busy, too big to teach, farms out his or her allocated courses to junior colleagues or graduate students while she/he goes out in search of private contracts or political appointments.

And by extension, this group includes those who, rather than teach, "entertain" their young audience with tales of debauchery, employing bombastic terms and capturing the impressionable minds of their naïve students with non-achievable ideals.

Plutarch also has a piece of advice for an audience similar to one seated here and a lecturer, which I represent today, and for an audience in a classroom. As I read Plutarch, I could not

help one or two chuckles. He says that, “even with the most hopeless speaker” the routine behaviour at a lecture is to sit upright without lounging or sprawling, to keep your eye on the speaker, to maintain an attitude of active attention, and an expression free from any sign of superiority, displeasure, or wandering thoughts and other preoccupations.

Plutarch points out that the success of a lecture will depend upon the way the audience listens as well as the way the speaker speaks. “You must be careful to avoid”, he goes on, “frowning, a grim expression, letting your gaze rove, twisting your body about, crossing your legs—yes, and nodding, whispering to one another, grinning, yawning with sleepiness, and letting your head droop. If you do this sort of thing it is your fault if the lecture goes wrong”.

Well, if I or anybody in the audience today is guilty of one or the other of Plutarch’s forbidden actions, we can be forgiven on the ground that this aspect of the lecture has not come early enough for it to warn us—if it had come, for example at the beginning of the lecture, we probably would have been in a position to comply with Plutarch’s recommendations. This is one of the consequences of our ring structure approach. However, we can take note to exhibit proper behaviour at the next lecture that we shall attend.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, on this return journey our last stop naturally enough must be at Homer. Wasserstrom once declared in a lecture:

We must return to the *Iliad* if we are to overcome the *Iliad*. To follow Homer’s lead means that “the way from then to now and back must always be gone over and again”. I must still turn back to Homer, the greatest poet of force, of violence, determined to teach his epics without keeping the horrors, as it should be – and as, finally, I think, Homer teaches how to do.

(Reed College: Odyssey Convocation Lecture
2006).

The *Iliad* is full of detailed accounts of warriors' moments of death. The many descriptions of death of heroes in the poem emphasize and reflect at one and the same time both the greatness and fragility of human life. Examples are legion:

When a hero dies, dark night corners him (5: 659)

he is seized by hateful darkness (16: 602)

he is robbed of his sweet life (10:459)

his soul rushes forth from the world (14:518)

it goes down to Hades bewailing its fate (16:855)

leaving behind its youth and strength (16:502)

the doom of death covers his eyes and nostrils (5:42)

his armour rings upon him (4:522)

he breathes out his life in the dust, hateful fate swallows him up he gluts the god of war with his blood (5:289)

stabbed in the back, he lies in this dust, stretching out his hands to his friends, wounded in the bladder he crouches, breathing his last, and lies stretched out on the earth like a worm. With a spear driven through his eyes he collapses arms spread wide, and his killer cuts off and brandishes his head; he lies on his back in the dust, breathing his last, while all his guts pour from his wound to the earth; he dies bellowing with pain, clutching the bloody earth, or biting the cold bronze which has severed his tongue, or wounded between the navel and the genitals where the wound is most painful for poor mortal men, writhing like a roped bull about the spear (13:548, 13:652, 14:493, 4:524, 13:393, 5:74, 13:570).

His eyes are knocked out and fall bloody before his feet in the dust; stabbed in the act of begging for his life, his liver slides out and his lap is filled with blood; the spear is thrust with his mouth, splitting his white bones, and filling his eye sockets with blood which spouts at his mouth and

nose; hit in the head, his blood and brains rush from the wound. (13:617, 20:470, 16:346, 17:297)

Wounded in the arm and helpless, he awaits his slayer, seeing death before him; his prayer for life rejected, he crouches with arms spread out waiting for the death-stroke (20:481, 21: 113).

To “overcome the *Iliad*” therefore demands that we examine the factors that make it “from beginning to end a poem of death” (Griffin 1980:142). Death is inevitable in the *Iliad*, in which all humans are mortals. The Greek society described in the poem is a highly competitive one in which winning glory and honour on the battlefield makes life meaningful not only because humans are mortal but also because of the societal value system that set so much store by gallantry and bravery. Our present society is not only a highly competitive one but also one that has become highly volatile in which events by the day are sounding the gong for war. The *Iliad* is one of many world literature that have painted the horrors of war; but it is special in the way Homer juxtaposes the world of war and that of everyday peaceful human life in order to impress upon the psyche of his audience the imperative need of the choice of peace over war. In this way the *Iliad* “is both a poem of death and a poem of life: in other words, it is a poem of mortality. With unwavering and unsentimental realism it presents the necessities and opportunities of human existence, tragic limitations that are at the same time inspiring and uplifting to live with and to contemplate” (Schein 1984: 84).

The realities of present-day Nigeria invite us to reflect on issues that are weaving a tapestry of a choice between war and peace. The momentum with which these events gather may not even leave us with a choice if we refuse to contemplate them now. Nor should we be deceived into the complacent belief that we are immune and cannot be touched by the impending doom simply because we inhabit the hallowed walls of a university. In fact, the sacredness of our

vocation as the source of knowledge compels us to contemplate with the aim of providing solutions to the crises which presently plague our nation.

The remote and immediate causes of the Nigeria Civil War (6 July, 1967 – 15 January, 1970) are back with us today in a more terrifying, and compelling combination: a crumbling economy, a hungry, angry increasingly desperate and paranoid populace, growing unrests, ethnic killings, sectarian murders, an inept, arrogant, obsessive, and corrupt political class, ethnic and religious divisions throughout the nation and even within the armed forces, and so on.

Agitations for secession, especially that of Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the renewal of the call for Biafra, are an indication that we, as a nation, have mismanaged the peace we garnered after the end of the war and we have not learnt adequate lessons from the experience of the thirty-month war. If we accept the argument that the poet of the *Iliad* artistically portrays “a coherent description of human reality, including the reality of war” (Schein 1984: 141) in order to convey the warning that the central feature in war is chaos and that acts of inhumanity show no restraint under the brutalizing influence of war, then Professor Uche Azikiwe’s warning (2016) that “anybody that experienced the Biafra war won’t talk about war again”, should be considered most apposite.

The issue of the Fulani herdsmen and of incessant attacks and reprisal attacks between them and their host communities should be rightly taken as a threat to national security. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2015 report, “Fulani militants” killed 1,229 people in 2014 – up from 63 in 2013 – making them the “fourth most deadly terrorist group” in the world. In this presently politically charged atmosphere, the ongoing narratives of the relationship between the herdsmen and their host are the right ingredients for ethnic strife that might eventually culminate in war. The issue has been turned to a North-South, Christian-Muslim one and has generated a deluge of hate and revenge messages in the media. The contents of most of these messages are so blood curdling and

terrifying that a continuous gong for war rings through our land on a daily basis, and more stridently each time.

However, it is an accepted well-trumpeted mantra that war is not the solution to the issue of the Nigerian state. The undisputed facts of the history of Nigeria support this position which is reiterated by Uche Azikiwe among many others. In her reaction to the question about the future of Nigeria in the *Tell Magazine* of February 8, 2016, she says:

I toe the line of my husband, one Nigeria. If Nigeria disintegrates, I don't think there's any part of the country that will survive it. The north or any part of the north may not survive it, as an independent country and the same applies to the west and the east. I pray that what we have in our national anthem that all the efforts of our heroes past will never be in vain because it will mean that all our founding fathers went through to see that Nigeria was free and one will be in vain.

The solutions to the Nigeria question are not far to seek and have been identified times without number. Some of these are the following: social justice and good governance; a revisit for possible implementation of some of the recommendations of the recent Constitutional Conference; need to embrace dialogue rather than violence or force in handling the secessionist agitations; the completion of abandoned projects such as the Second Niger Bridge, dredging of River Niger to Lokoja, Lagos-Ibadan Expressway; and ensuring equitable federal appointments to reflect the federal character. The Federal Government must do everything possible to provide jobs for our teeming and qualified youths who are jobless years after "listening to lectures" in higher institutions. Let us create jobs for them so that they can positively realize their full potentials.

And finally, those of us in the ivory towers must continue to warn of the dangers that beset our dear nation. Like the poet of the *Iliad*, we must continue to sound the gong,

emphasizing that there is no glory in war. We should not be discouraged by the seeming lackadaisical attitude of our leaders to warnings, and admonition earlier proffered; we must continue our lamentations until our nation emerges from the quagmire of rot and decadence. To know is not enough; we must do; we must do by speaking out. To forestall possible disintegration of our dear nation, we must continually launch a jeremiad on the conditions of things in general.

My Research Contributions

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, in the past twenty-two years, I have done research and published in the broad areas of Greek and African Studies which can be divided, more delicately, into the following major areas: Literary and Cultural Studies, Women Studies, Epistemology and Social Ethics. I have also engaged in some creative writing.

Literary and Cultural Studies (1994, 1997, 1998, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011): Cross-cultural interpretation has been an aspect of my investigations which have resulted in a number of articles including, among others, "Threptria and Sanjo: The Pay-Back Parent-child Relationship in Ancient Greek and African/Yoruba Cultures". The article analyses the concept of the term *threptria*, referring to the system of *gerontrophia* whereby sons cared for their parents and nurtured them in their old age in ancient Greece. It compares this with the parallel custom among the Yoruba of reciprocating parental care by a child, a concept I denote with the term 'Sanjo'. The article shows that there are certain cultural universals that indicate that a comparative study of both the Classical and African cultures is a viable area of specialization within Classical scholarship. Another essay, "The Medea Complex in Fagunwa's Yoruba Novels", investigates witchcraft as depicted in Greek and Yoruba literature and concludes that characters and events in ancient Greek literature can be used to proffer moral maxims which

can help the Yoruba/African societies overcome certain tendencies and apprehensions.

Women Studies (1999a, 1999b, 2002a, 2002d, 2002e, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2004a, 2004b): My paper, "Images of Women in Classical and African Proverbs and Popular Sayings", employs the culture-reflector approach to demonstrate the similarities of the values in the patriarchal Greek, Roman and African societies, which show proverbs as a vehicle for stamping legitimacy on some cultural practices and attitudes in order to maintain patriarchal pre-eminence. It also shows language as an important instrument in conveying and entrenching traditional male-oriented ideas about society and in the transmission of stereotypes of expected social behaviours that codify gender-related performances.

"Women, Sex and Power in Classical and Nigerian Drama: Lysistrata and Morountodun" discusses the notion that women "intrude" in public spheres and attain political prominence, and concludes that this can be an effective method of effecting societal changes. "Finding a Place: Women's Struggle for Political Authority in Ancient Roman and Nigerian Societies", examines women's struggle for power in the classical world in comparison with the role of women in current Nigerian political arena and concludes that Nigerian women could still learn a lot from women in antiquity.

Epistemology and Social Ethics (2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2009, 2015): "Who sacrifices?" An explanation to the Greek Question from a Yoruba point of View", addresses the surprisingly elusive issue of (*o thuo*n) "who?" at a Greek sacrifice.

The paper is able to resolve the question of "who?" (*o thuo*n) in Greek religion by relating the "who?" of Yoruba sacrifice to that of "whom?" in Greek practice. *Ancient Greek and African/Yoruba Gods* is a book that serves the dual purpose of informing about the parallel lines along which traditional Yoruba and the ancient Greek constructed their

responses to the important question of existence, and second, of confirming the assumption that a common humanity lies beyond our diverse cultures.

As regards *Social Ethics*, “Sophocles” *Philoctetes* as an Allegory for Contemporary Nigeria”, provides a refreshing way of looking at moral issues in ancient Greek society, particularly in relation to contemporary Nigeria, thus affirming the relevance of the Classics in understanding human character and in dealing with many moral and sociological issues, plaguing our nation.

Creative Writing (2006): My collection of poetry titled: *Each Shaft of the Sun* demonstrates that the literary genres and styles of classical antiquity can still be employed in producing new creative works that will address issues of concern and still engage readers’ interest.

A collaborative effort resulted in the publication of Kofi Ackah and Folake Onayemi (2011): *A Guide to Ancient Greek Literary History*. This is a book that is designed to provide for our African students of Classics a guide to ancient Greek literary history. The aim is to expose the reader to the variety of literary texts and their corresponding conceptual categories, purposes, performance contexts, historical prerequisites, key contributors and, by implication, the creative potential of the human mind.

Conclusion

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I have attempted in the course of this lecture to prove that the study of Classics is an attractive and relevant option to an African in contemporary society and have sought to extend the frontiers of Classical scholarship by charting the way for a comparative Classical and African Studies.

I have also tried to demonstrate, in this lecture, the universal concept that human lives are inter-connected and we are meant to learn from one another’s experiences. The interplay of forces from ancient Greek literature to our contemporary world bridges the gap between the seen and the

unseen. In contemporary life, we identify a reaffirmation of the ideologies expressed in ancient literature, which is poignantly significant of the enduring triumph of the human spirit.

This interrogation of ancient Greek literature and the insights derived therefrom have demonstrated the truth as eloquently expressed by John Ferguson in his 1957 inaugural lecture. According to the famous classicist:

The study of the Classics... teaches us to believe that there is something really great and excellent in the world, surviving all the shocks of accident and fluctuations of opinion and raises us above that low and servile fear, which bows only to present power and upstart authority... We feel the presence of that power which gives immortality to human thoughts and actions, and catch the flame of enthusiasm from all nations and ages.

(Ferguson 1957:11)

Acknowledgements

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, a Yoruba adage suggests that it is outright robbery when a good deed done is not acknowledged. Permit me, therefore, Sir, to render a few albeit, insufficient acknowledgements of good deeds that I have enjoyed both as a human being and in my career as an academic.

First of all, my thanks to the Almighty God and Father of all creations who created and has preserved me till this day.

I am also very grateful to the University of Ibadan for preserving its Department of Classics, now the only surviving Classics Department in the whole country. Without this Department, I would not be delivering this lecture today. I am grateful to the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Abel Idowu Olayinka and the Dean of Arts, Professor Bola Ekanola for giving me the opportunity to present this lecture.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my parents. First, to my father, the tall, slender Ondo man, a disciplinarian who

inculcated in me from an early age, the love for books, who, though deceased now, has always been with me in spirit – Mr. Festus Akinwole Olapetun (Oladeti). And to my mother, who we laid to rest exactly three months ago today, Mrs. Patricia Esimaje Akinwole, I will be forever grateful. You will always remain *Iya mi, Iya Folake, ti ko common*.

In my academic pursuit and career, my debts grow by the day. I owe a lot of people gratitude, definitely more than I can possibly recollect here. However, I start with my academic father – Professor James Atane Ilevbare. Baba, I am so glad that God has spared you to witness this day, and that I have been able to do you proud. God has not allowed your labours to be in vain. Thank you very much Sir.

I will also for ever be grateful to Ambassador J.T.F. Iyalla, a most worthy alumnus of the Department of Classics, who has always been of tremendous encouragement to me. I also like to place on record the contributions of Professor Olowo Ojoade, another worthy alumnus of our Department, to my academic success. I am very grateful to Professor Festus Agboola Adesanoye, who is not only an academic mentor, but also a surrogate father and for whom I have a special place in my heart. He not only hails from the same town as my father, but also bears the same first name as my father.

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I must acknowledge all my colleagues, staff and students in the Department of Classics, University of Ibadan. With their love, patience, tolerance and cooperation, the Department has removed the toga of “Crises” that was once its appellation and has now donned the toga of progress. I mention here, especially, Prof. Obafemi Kujore and Mr. Nigel

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and Dr. Martine de Marie all of South Africa; Dr. Obert Mlanbo of Zimbabwe and Professor Muyiwa Falaye of University of Lagos, among others. I acknowledge them all.

I have also been blessed by special friends, some of whom I grew up with and others whom God brought into my life at some point. These people have been of tremendous support to me and have stood by me through thick and thin: I wish to acknowledge them, also in no particular order: Stella Kolajo (Ayoola), Taiwo Abioro, Kehinde Okusanya, Nihinlola Aluko-Olokun, Medinat Momoh, Kunbi Olasope, Kikelomo Adeleye, Mabel Ewverhioma, Kunbi Labeodan, Gani Adeniran, Dimeji and Kemi Oluwayelu, Kate Ezeoke, Chigoziem Isa, Olubunmi Adeluola, Gboyega and Moji Ositelu, Sanmi and Bukola Longe, Niyi Arutu, Phillip Oyelaran, Moffat Ekoriko, Funmi Awe, Wura Bankole, Kudirat Akande, Adebomi Oyewumi, Francis Osakwe, Ezekiel Owoeye, Sola Raji-Oyelade, Edith Maduagwu, Titi Ojo, Wumi Bello, Adenike Ogunse, Aina Adeogun, Omolade Obisesan, Segun Alawode, Oluwole Smith, Owolabi Ajayi, Tunde Aremu and Bunmi Oladimeji (deceased).

I will not be where I am today without my very large and supportive family: my brothers and sisters: Akindele, Akinwale, Folarin, Suzzette, Omolola, Bankole, Ogheneovo, Olalekan, Afolasade, Rachael and Adesola. My nephews: Oluwaseun, Oluwabukunmi, Adeoluwa and Adeayo. My children: Ademola, Folake, Olawole, Folayemi, Oluwabamise, Babatunde, Akintunde, Ayobami, Oluwakayode, Funmilola, Moyinoluwa, Boluwabade, Sophia, Mercy Favour and Flourish. My grandchildren: Ayoyimika, Olarenwaju and Ayoyikanmi.

This large family of mine also include: Mr. and Mrs. Onifade, Mr. and Mrs. Adaramola, Chief and Mrs. Adesida, Mr. and Mrs. Ayorinde and Pastor and Pastor (Mrs.) Koleade, Pastor and Mrs. Owoyemi, Mrs. Alero Akanfe, Mrs. Helen Gbenebitse, and Yeye Modupe Ola.

I must not fail to acknowledge the love and support of my octogenarian mother-in-law, Mrs. M. B. George. Mama has become another mother to me and to all the ladies of the

George household and all members of the Ajayi family of Osogbo, I say thank you all.

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Last, but not the least, I thank my husband Mr. Olumuyiwa Adesola Onayemi, who has given me the space and support to be what I wanted to be.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, being very conscious of the ring structure, which I have applied in this lecture, I consider it appropriate—indeed, inevitable—that I end it with the last three stanzas of my poem, *Vita Brevis*, with which I began the lecture:

Life is short.
How then do we need
the bane and horrors of wars?

Life is too short.
The hours cannot fulfil
the many demands of its days.

Life is far too short.
Let us devote it to the truth,
for we have only one life.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, friends and family, I thank you all for your patience and for listening to this lecture. God bless you all.

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BIODATA OF PROFESSOR FOLAKE ORITSEGBUBEMI ONAYEMI

Folake Oritsegbubemi Onayemi was born into the family of Mr. Festus Akinwole Olapetun (Oladeti) and Mrs. Patricia Esimaje Akinwole (nee Magbeleye) on Sunday the 4th October, 1964 at Ijebu-Jesha, then Western Region of Nigeria. She attended Olive Primary School, Bodija and Sacred Heart Primary School, Oke-Ayo, off Ring Road, both in Ibadan for her primary school education. She attended Our Lady of Apostles Secondary School, Fatimo, Ago-tailor, Ibadan from 1975 to 1980, from where she obtained the West African School Leaving Certificate. While in Secondary School, she was made the Day Student Prefect in Form Four to Form Five. Thereafter she proceeded to Federal School of Arts and Science, Ondo, where she went through the Higher School Certificate Education from 1980 to 1982. She then worked briefly at the defunct National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) Ibadan from 1982 to 1983 until she gained admission to the University of Ibadan in 1983 to do a degree course in the Department of Classics. In her first year in the Department, she won the Departmental prize for best academic performance. She graduated from the University of Ibadan in 1986 with a Bachelor of Arts Second Class (Hons.) Upper Division Degree in Classical Studies and had her National Youth Service Programme (NYSC) at Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.

Thereafter, Folake Onayemi returned to the University of Ibadan and continued her studies in the Department of Classics, University of Ibadan, from where she obtained a Master's Degree (M.A. Classics) in 1990 and M.Phil Classics in 1997. She then proceeded to the Ph.D programme and had the honour of carrying out part of her Ph.D programme at the prestigious Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States of America. During the period she was seconded to teach Comparative Greek and Yoruba Mythology at the Department of Classics, University of Texas, at Austin,

Austin-Texas, USA. She returned to Nigeria and successfully defended her Ph.D thesis in 2001 becoming the first woman to obtain a Ph.D in Classics in the Department and in Nigeria.

Folake Onayemi was employed as an Assistant Lecturer on 1st July, 1994 at the Department of Classics, University of Ibadan. As such, she became the first woman to be employed as a teacher in the Department. She was promoted to the grade of Lecturer II in 1996; Lecturer I, 1st October 1999; Senior Lecturer 1st October, 2002; Reader 1st October 2005 and Professor 1st October, 2008. By her elevation to Professorship, she became the first female Professor of Classics in the University of Ibadan and the first Black female Professor of Classics in Africa, South of the Sahara.

Professor Folake Onayemi is a member of several learned societies among which are:

- Classical Association of Nigeria;
- Member, Concerned Circle of African Women Theologians: Women in Culture and Religion;
- Member Women's History Network, United Kingdom;
- Member Network for Archaic and Classical Greek Songs.

Folake Onayemi's honours and distinction include:

- Visiting Scholar, Department of Classics; Brown University Providence, Rhode Island, USA (2000 – 2001);
- Visiting Professor, Department of Classics, University of Texas at Austin, Austin Texas, USA (January to March 2001);
- Appointment to the Professorial Women's Advisory Board of the American Biographical Institute (2004);
- Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL) Bayo Kuku Postdoctoral Fellowship (2004);
- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (2005);

- Alexander S. Onassis Foundation Fellowship (2006 – 2007 Cycle);
- Visiting Scholar, Department of Classics, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana (August 2009 – December 2010 and August 2013 to July 2014);
- Advisor, American Council of Learned Societies' Humanities Programme (2008 to date);
- Nigerian Representative at the International Federation of the Societies of Classical Studies (FIEC) 1999 to date;

Professor Folake Onayemi has served this University and other Universities outside this Country in many capacities:

- Departmental Secretary at Academic Staff Meeting 1994 – 1998;
 - Departmental Representatives at Faculty of Arts, UI, Environmental Committee 1998 – 2000;
 - Member, Faculty of Arts, UI, 40th Endowment and Fund Raising Committee, 2001;
 - Member, Faculty of Arts, UI Student's Disciplinary Committee 2001 – 2003;
 - Member, Faculty of Arts, UI Finance Committee 2003 – 2005;
 - Representative of Congregation at the University of Ibadan Senate 2003 – 2005;
 - Member, Sub-Committee of UI @ 60;
 - Acting Head of the Department of Classics, University of Ibadan, July 2005 to June 2007; September 2007 to August 2009;
 - Head, Department of Classics, August 2014 till date
- She has also served as:
- External Examiner, University of Cape-Coast, Cape-Coast, Ghana 2006 to 2009, and 2011 to 2014;
 - External Examiner, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe, March 2014 to date;

Professor Folake Onayemi's Community Services include:

- Secretary, University of Ibadan Creche Parents/ Teachers Association, 1996 – 1998;
- Chairperson, University of Ibadan Creche Parents/Teachers Association, 1998 – 2000;
- Member, University of Ibadan Women's Society Creche and Nursery School Board;
- Secretary, University of Ibadan Women Society 2002 – 2005;
- Member, The International School, University of Ibadan Board of Governors 2006 – 2007;
- Hall Mistress, Awolowo Hall, University of Ibadan 2013 to date.

Folake Onayemi has attended conferences across the United States of America, United Kingdom, Greece, Spain, Italy, South Africa, and Ghana among others, where she presented seminar papers. She has published over 30 publications including three books and has supervised many M.A, M.Phil and Ph.D candidates; three out of whom are her colleagues in the Department presently. She is also the editor of her Departmental journal – *Nigeria and The Classics*.

Professor Folake Onayemi heads the Children's Church at Christ Jubilee Church, Oke-Ayo, Ring Road, Ibadan where she worships and she is married to Mr. Olumuyiwa Adesola Onayemi.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

Arise, O compatriots
Nigeria's call obey
To serve our fatherland
With love and strength and faith
The labour of our heroes' past
Shall never be in vain
To serve with heart and might
One nation bound in freedom
Peace and unity

O God of creation
Direct our noble cause
Guide thou our leaders right
Help our youths the truth to know
In love and honesty to grow
And living just and true
Great lofty heights attain
To build a nation where peace
And justice shall reign

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN ANTHEM

Unibadan, Fountainhead
Of true learning, deep and sound
Soothing spring for all who thirst
Bounds of knowledge to advance
Pledge to serve our cherished goals!
Self-reliance, unity
That our nation may with pride
Help to build a world that is truly free

Unibadan, first and best
Raise true minds for a noble cause
Social justice, equal chance
Greatness won with honest toil
Guide our people this to know
Wisdom's best to service turned
Help enshrine the right to learn
For a mind that knows is a mind that's free

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