

RE-INTERROGATING THE NATURE AND ROLE OF LITERATURE IN CRITICAL DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

While attempts have been made to give a comprehensive definition of literature, such efforts have, however, ended up producing more questions than answers. This scenario perhaps explains why some scholars are wondering whether the question, "What is literature?" will ever be answered. There is, nevertheless, general agreement on the fact that the definition of literature is substantially as important as it may be, and that there is hardly any book that does. This paper pushes further the discourse by locating the concept of literature within the practical domain of literary criticism; and submits that the meaning and significance of the literary phenomenon lie in its philosophical elasticity and possibilities.

Introduction

There is always the tendency of thinking, like Hough (1966:9) also observes that "we all know what literature means", but then articulating it in definitive terms has remained a near-impossible task. It is possible to explain literature as a general term which in default of a peak definition may stand for the best expression of the best thought reduced to writing. But then, this does not also say much. Some scholars have also defined literature as including any text worthy to be taught to students by teachers of literature, when these texts are not being taught to students in other departments of a school or university (Hirsh, 1978:56).

McFadden (1978:56) sees literature as a canon which consists of those works in language by which a community defines itself through the course of its history. It includes works which are primarily artistic and also those whose aesthetic qualities are only secondary. The self-defining activity of the community is conducted in the light of such works, as its members have come to read them (or conceive them). The challenge of definition can also be seen within the context of alienation and identity crisis. Fashina for instance, has observed that one of the problems of

African drama (and by extension, literature) “lies in the alienation created by its crisis of identity” (1). This crisis is partly predicated on its modal transition from oral to written, as well as the elusive nature of its definition. Added to this, is the European concept of drama and theatre being fostered on the African forms of verbal performance and ritual aesthetics. This is done with the view perhaps to disproving the erroneous European idea that Africa was a land void of culture, arts and aesthetic sensibility.

North and Webster (2000: 9) argue that when we talk about literature that Shakespeare and Jane Austen novels, for instance, represent, “we are talking about texts that are ‘belletristic’”. The word which comes from a French phrase *belles lettres* which literally means ‘beautiful letters’. In other words, literature consists of beautiful texts, those written or produced to be works of art or those we have come to value as works of art. It is possible to reason that one significant point in favour of the belletristic approach to literature is that it leads us to reflect on the centrality of beauty to human society. This approach naturally addresses the poser, what kind of thing makes a literary text beautiful? However, as plausible as a belletristic approach to the definition of literature may be, it has its own sore areas. The first is that of identifying a standard of beauty. The old expression ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ suggests that each of us has a different standard for deciding what is beautiful, or that the perception of beauty can be affected by many other factors. The other challenge is the notion that a text is only created to be artistic. This is a very limited definition. While a text cannot claim whether you love it only for its looks, its author might. Texts are not the products of random events in a chaotic universal. Rather they come into being as a result of the author’s deliberate and careful work. They represent the author’s attempt to tell us something about ourselves and the world in which we live. Texts may be intended to entertain us, to educate us, to influence our opinion, to move us to action. Sometimes, they accomplish any or all of these goals even without the author’s conscious intention.

While giving the literary discipline a rather descriptive outlook, Henderson et al (1997:1) observe that literature is “an art form whose medium is language, oral and written”. It differs from ordinary spoken or written language primarily in three ways, viz:

1. It is concentrated and meaningful, even when it sometimes denies meaning. In other words, literature is not only about ideas, but also about experiences. It communicates what

it feels like to undergo an experience, whether physical or emotional.

2. Its purpose is not simply to explain, argue or make a point, but rather to give a sense of pleasure in the discovery of a new experience. For instance, a psychiatric, in writing a case study, concentrates strictly on the fact. Though the doctor may give the reader an understanding of the patient, he or she does not attempt to make the reader feel what it is like to be that patient. In fact, the psychiatric must strive to remain strictly objective as should the readers. Writers of essay, fiction, drama and poetry may try to put their reader inside the mind of such a character making readers ultimately share the patient's experience and feel what it is like to be the patient.
3. It demands intense concentration from readers. What Henderson and others are saying here is that In interpreting literature, readers may adopt the text-oriented, author-oriented or reader -oriented approach. Adopting a text-oriented approach, a reader may analyze a work of literature as complete in itself without relating it to the outside world. This kind of close analysis and attention to words and their context that the method requires can be very useful both in illuminating a literary material and in drawing attention to careful and critical reading. Author-oriented approach requires that a reader studies an author's life, time and culture to better understand the writer's work. This approach calls for research. The reader-oriented approach is realized with the understanding that each reader brings a unique set of experiences and expectation to literature. To the promoters and users of this approach, a work of literature is recreated each time it is read, that it is produced by the reading, perceiving, imaging mind of the reader and that consequently any reading of the work is valid

Examining the literary concept from a multi-faceted nature, Ryken (1974:17) argues that literature does not, for example, discuss virtue but instead shows a virtuous person acting. "Literature does not only present experience but interprets it. Literature is an interpretive presentation of experience in an artistic form.". A working definition of literature then, is that it is an interpretive presentation in an artistic form. The approach of Sartre (2005:11) to the definition of literature is rather instructive. While placing literature within the operational

contexts of history and society, he presents a definitive proposal for the phenomenology of reading. He then goes further to present a fascinating illustration of how to write a history of literature that takes ideology and institutions into account. Three fundamental questions are central to Sartre's investigation of literature. These include: what is writing? Why write? For whom does one write? Essentially, the author chooses to discuss prose, rather than poetry. He posits that prose has the potential of a purposeful reflection of the world, whereas poetry is an end in itself. In prose, words signify, they describe men, situations and objects. In the case of poetry, the words are ends in themselves. While Sartre's watertight distinctions may not be entirely tenable, the differences are there. Although criticism of a poem must pay close attention to its structure of words and symbols, it is obvious that the reader enters the poem through word association and references which are linked, however, indirectly to everyday significative language. What appears to be critical to Sartre's understanding of the functions and dynamics of literature is that if it is properly utilised, literature can be a powerful means of liberating the reader from the kind of alienation which develop in particular situation. By the same token, the writer also frees himself and overcomes his own alienation. Sartre argues that literature is alienated when it forgets or ignores its autonomy and places itself at the service of the temporal power. It is the responsibility of the writer to dispel ignorance, prejudice, and false emotion.

Meyer (1997: 1) admits that understanding exactly what literature is has been truly challenging and that pinning down a definition has proven to be tedious. Quite often, one seems to be reduced to saying "I know it when I see it" or perhaps "Anything is literature if you want to read it that way". Sometimes the motivation for a particular definition seems like the work to copyright lawyers aimed primarily at stopping people from using the word "literature" for works which have not been licensed and those that may be referred to as the keepers of the literary tradition. Perhaps in a bold attempt to find solution to the challenge of defining literature, Meyer presents two different approaches. These are the critical approach and the prototype approach, while the critical approach entails the usual style of defining a word in English by providing a list of criteria which must be met. The prototype approach on the other hand, gives a unique dimension to the meaning of words which does not focus on a list of criteria which must be met by each example, but on an established prototype, a particular good example of the word, to

which other example of the word bear some resemblance. Working from the prototype approach to word meaning Meyer tries to develop an answer to the question “What is Literature?” by suggesting that prototypical literary works are: written texts, marked by careful use of language including features such as creative metaphors, hell turned phrases, elegant syntax, rhyme, alliteration and meter, in a literary genre (poetry, prose fiction or drama), read aesthetically, intended by the author to be read aesthetically and contain many weak implications (are deliberately somewhat open in interpretation).

It should however, be noted that Wittgenstein (1953: 31-32) generally enjoys the credit for this approach. While it is true that he did not use the word “prototype” in the classic passage on this topic, he addresses the word “game” and argues that, instead of a list of criteria, there is the need to find a family resemblance:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call “games”. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic Games and so on. What is common to them all... if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships and a whole series of them at that.-- The result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overall similarities sometimes similarities of detail. I can think of no better expression to characteristics these similarities than “family Resemblances”, for the various resemblances of a family: build, temperament etc overlap and criss-cross in the same way-And I shall say: games form family.

The Nature and Functions of Literature

Adebayo (2010: 6) explains “that the primary function of literature derives from its nature”. Therefore, a discussion of the nature of literature has implication for its functions. Literature is an art made realisable in imaginative expression or a special use of language. Egudu (1976:14) has argued that whatever may be the analytical tool of literature, deliberate “manipulation of language for aesthetic effect” is its essence. The strategic place of language in literary experience cannot be overemphasised. Oyegoke while locating the literary dynamics within a linguistic framework observes that “literature is the second cultural imperative after

language” (2). Literature, according to him, is born when language gives creative expression to experience. Literature is a by-product of language and is in many respects similarly characterised. It is a form of expression. It communicates, instructs and entertains. It opens vistas of human life and experience to an audience or reader. It serves to expand the limits of language. The great languages of history, it is important to observe, produced great literature which was an essential basis of their greatness. Literature is far more productive hatchery for new lexicographical, semantic and grammatical linguistic additions than the conversational medium can afford language for its growth and expression. Wellek and Warren (1980: 22) hold the view that language is the material of literature as stone is of the sculpture, paint is of picture and sound is of music. Hence, according to them, it seems best to consider as literature only works in which the aesthetic function is dominant, while we can recognize that there are aesthetic elements such as style and composition in works which have non-aesthetic purpose such as scientific treatise, philosophical dissertation, political pamphlets and sermons to mention just a few.

While it is crucial to acknowledge that literature has other functions such as educating and correcting through satire, the fact still remains that its primary purpose is to be an aesthetically satisfying organization of words. Oladipo (1993: 5) observes that there exists a working “relationship between literature and philosophy from the perspective of ‘worldview’ and critical discourse”. He argues that philosophy and literature are both social phenomena and forms of social consciousness. Social, not just in the sense that they are produced by people who are “beings- in - society”, but perhaps more importantly in two respects. First, even when philosophy and literature spring from the experience of an individual or treat very abstract matters, they still constitute a reflection in the phenomena of life (Here it should be noted that personal experience, the experience of the individual, is still human experience and human experience is essentially social – a product of our interaction, not just with nature but also with ourselves). Second, philosophy and literature are products of the intellectual and practical needs of society and the individuals and classes compromising it. Whichever tool of analysis we use in describing or assessing literature, its relevance cannot be a work for its own sake. It either tries to present an experience of human relevance or attempts to repackage or remodel the personality of the individual in society. In performing any of these roles, literature operates within some context of

ideas which provide an anchor point for the web of descriptions, facts, constructions and evaluations which it contains.

Literature is core ideology in a certain artistic form. In other words, the works of literature are essentially expressions of the ideologies of their time. Continuing the contextualization of literature within ideological framework, Fashina (2001:11) posits that literature only exists as literature within an interpretative community, emphasising that it is not an object that has an actual existence in the world but an activity – a social practice –carried out by a select and authorized group. Put simply, literature is essentially an ideology, and literary meaning does not reside in the text but is the product of an ideological practice”. This phenomenon however, takes a central stage, as a humanist discipline that is relevant to the society as an instrument of social justice. Literature, Finnegan (2005:164) observes, has gone beyond its conventional perception of being a written text. Its significance extends to the domain of performance and just as literature exists in performance, so does performance have a lot to say about literature and literary theory. To argue therefore, that literature exists only in text or that it “signifies textual manifestation of writing” is misrepresentative is highly debatable.

Asein examines literature within a social-ideological context and submits that whether a product of an individual’s creative imagination, critical intelligence or as the shared collective product of a state, literature manifests observable traits and relates in terms of its themes, total landscape and tendencies to the social, political, cultural and physical environment characteristic of its enabling state (3). By nature, literature is generally a highly manoeuvrable art form. It creates and posits possibilities for social order without necessarily fragmenting entities. Literature is an exportable commodity and has a trans-territorial status that lends its universal applicability. However, even in that trans-contextual state, literature maintains a distinctiveness which it does not, and cannot, negotiate or compromise. It creates its own myths and mythopoetic hegemonies. It recognizes its own geography and negotiates its own space. Bamidele (2000:4) advances this argument by observing that literature shares basically the same sociological concerns and “that literature, like sociology, is a discipline preeminently concerned with man’s social world, his adaptation to it, and his desire to change it”. The literary forms in prose, poetry or drama, attempt to recreate the social world of man’s relation with his family,

with politics, with the state in its economic or religious constructs. Literature delineates the role of man in the environment, as well as the conflicts and tension within groups and social classes. Literature and Sociology are therefore, technically speaking, best of friends, no matter the operational differences in their method of talking about society. Literature in its aesthetic form creates a fictional universe where there is a possible verification of reality at the experiential level of man living in a society. It is arguable that imaginative literature is a re-construction of the world seen from a particular point of view which we may refer to as the abstract idealism of the author or the hero. While the writer may be aware of literary tradition, it is the unconscious re-working of experience fused with his definition of a situation and his own values that produce the fictional universe which the sociology of literature may be concerned to explore.

Ogunba (2006:10) asserts that literature is one of the greatest teaching powers of the world. Indeed, nothing “teaches so well about the life, culture, worldview and mode of thought of a people, as a good creative/literary piece of work”. Mbiti (1959: 260) gives credence to this cultural value of literature when he submits that to know the literature of a people is to know them well and that it is the precipitation of their mentality, their custom, their habit, their hopes and ideas about life itself. It is therefore, amazing how much one gets to know, about the Igbo by reading Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* or *Arrow of God*, about the Indians by going through R. K Narayam’s *Waiting for the Mahatma* or about the now seemingly insoluble India Pakistani conflict by reading Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* or about the ordinary life of Trinadians by going through Naipaul’s *The Mystic Masseur*. In each case, the details of the life and thought of the people are laid out in a clear-cut, digestible manner. No philosophical, sociological or political treatise can teach one as well as a good creative piece. There are however, a few challenges to this position. While it may be in the nature of literature and its study to defy logic, there are certain kinds of problems in literature which demand specific answers on account of the relevance of culture -- of which literature is an important part.--to history and politics. The critical discord that has marked the study of African literature has been intensified by the nature of the literature itself and the peculiarity of the circumstances which have shaped it. The uniqueness of literature therefore, becomes very clear: whereas these other modes of instruction are often theoretical, generalized and schematized, a creative literary piece, on the other hand, goes to the ground level,

focuses on individual action in all its telling details, and penetrates into one almost surreptitiously but firmly and remains with one permanently.

The Practice of Literary Criticism

While it is true that a major driving force for the reading of literature is pleasure or entertainment, it is not the overriding factor. Sooner than later, the reader begins to realize that he enjoys some things more than others, and some reading experiences are positively distasteful while others become more and more deeply absorbing. One way of explaining this would be to say that he begins to develop a taste for some things rather than for others. But this is even not the point. The real issue is that he begins the process of discriminating, of appreciating, and of feeling the difference between what is really important, really first-class or what is trivial or easily dispensable. As the reader begins to gain experience in the art of discrimination, in comparing his discrimination with other people's, particularly more experienced people, and as he reflects upon his literary actions and discovers the principles or guidelines on which they are based, he comes towards a state of mind in which he feels a capacity for judgment, that is, for delivering an opinion about the rights and wrongs of a situation, an expression or a problem which other people may accept or agree to, which is not subsequently overturned and which forms the best basis for many kinds of practical actions (Moody (1979). The critical reading of a work of literature is a demanding discipline. But then the beauty of literary appreciation and criticism lies in the fact the reader ultimately does not have anything to rely upon in making his choice but himself.

In order to appreciate literature and put it in its proper place in the critical enterprise, the reader or critic must understand the underlying theory that literature as well as other arts can best be thought of as a process of communication between the writer or the artist and his public. This understanding makes the critic to assess any piece of writing using two test-questions: Do we receive of the impression that the particular poem or piece of prose effectively communicates what it sets out to do? Is the idea picture, character or situation communicated itself of any value to us? Neither of these questions can be answered easily or automatically. Each of them requires us to read carefully, reflect and compare impression received from one thing with those received from others. The essence of literary criticism among other things, on the thinking that the

substance of a writer's achievement can only be strongly felt and assessed by responding to the way he uses words and that the capacity to make such a response can be formed or greatly enhanced by a training in literary appreciation and criticism. The literary critic is the voice and to some extent defender of the creative enterprise. No literary work is great in itself. Every outstanding work of literature is so referred to by disciplined affirmation. In other words, while it is true that there are generally accepted codes for measuring good and bad, there is no peculiar intrinsic value placed on any work of art. What a literary critic does is give us, as completely as clearly as he can, his response to a writer, a play, a poem, a novel etc and so help us to a fuller enjoyment and understanding of the experience in and behind the writing.

Alternatively, the critic can also reveal, by examining a piece of writing in detail, the elements in the writing which combine to make its particular quality. The mature critic who is conscious of the fact that his account and evaluation of an author must depend on the actual words written by the author, supports his remarks and judgment with pieces (no matter how little) of examined text, the text out of which his conclusions come. To do anything contrary would be tantamount to biased assessment, which in itself is antithetical to the critical discipline. Literary criticism can be no more than a reasoned account of the feeling produced upon the critic by the book he is criticizing. Criticism is not exactly science. It is in the first place, very personal and second, it is concerned with values that science ignores. The critic judges a work of art by its effect on his emotion more than anything else. All the critical nuances about style and form and all the classifications and analytical tools of conventional assessment are products of the emotion. It therefore, follows that a critic must be able to feel the impact of a work of art in all its complexity and force. To do so, he must be a man of complexity himself. A man with a superficial and indolent nature will never come out with anything but paltry comment. Criticism is not only an examination of the context but also a tacit investigation of the totality of the critic himself. Whatever comes out of the critic, either by way of what he says or commits to paper, is a faithful reflection of who he is. Besides, an artistically and emotionally mature man must also be a person of good faith. In other words, he should be courageous enough to admit what he feels as well as the flexibility to know what he feels. So it is possible for a critic to be brilliant and not honest, to be emotionally sound and yet manipulates feelings. A dependable critic must be emotionally alive,

intellectually capable and skilful in basic logic, and morally upright.

Lewis (1950:15)' views on literary criticism are worthy of note. It is the business of the literary critic to analyse and judge works of literary art. He is basically concerned with the work in front of him as something that should contain within itself the reason it is so and not otherwise. The more experience of life together --he brings to bear on it, the better of course, and it is true that extraneous information may make his more difficult. . The possibility of the critic being wary about how he exert extraneous knowledge on the author's intention cannot be ruled out because intentions are not particularly striking in arts, except as realized, and the test of realization are standard and can hardly be manipulated They are applied in the operation of the critic's sensibility; they are a matter of his sense, derived from his literary experience of what the living thing feels like. The tests may well reveal in the final analysis that the deep- rooted intention is something quite different from the intention the author would declare.

It is instructive at this point to place the relationship between the creative writer and the literary critic in proper perspective. In other words, as Izevbaye (1971: 26) has also explained, there are several ways in which criticism and the making of a literary work can be regarded as two sides of the same coin. In the first type of cooperation, the creative talent and the creative faculty co-exist in the same person and may be regarded as identical. It is this type of faculty which W.E. Abraham advanced as a foundation for the modern African criticism by defining the Akan tradition of criticism as that in which the poet is also a critic. However there is also a sense in which criticism exist as a seemingly independent activity practiced by more or less professional critics. Here, a division of labour takes place between the critic and the writer. Although in Africa, hostility has often broken out between a writer and his reviewer, review criticism remains part of the creative act. The influence of criticism on the final shape of the literary work is a general one because even in the published form the literary product still depends largely on the work of criticism for establishing its importance or its place in the tradition, for criticism is often responsible for bringing the work to the public; it might reduce the esteem it already enjoys with the reading public or it might help build up a tradition by creating a taste for similar literature. It might bring out the importance of a work by discovering in it new meanings not noticed before by the public, and thus give the work a new form and a new

importance, perhaps over and above what was originally intended or thought of by the author. No doubt the power which criticism has in influencing literary traditions was recognized and exploited early enough by modern African critics. Such exploitation can be said to have taken two forms. In this case, the writer attempts to create taste for his own type of literary composition. The impression is always erroneously generated that there is a secret process which would when mastered make understanding literature easy (Rawlinson, 1968: 1) but a good reader of literature is not one who has a series of categories to fit poetry (or prose) into, or a special vocabulary to describe them. He does not go about with an apparatus of terminologies and method in his head. He is a good reader and critic partly because he can respond to the unfamiliar, for which there has been no previously worked out critical account. There is no knowing beforehand with literature just how we should be expected to respond and the demand for an alternative component systematic procedure is one that practical criticism can never properly meet.

The fundamental questions a practical critic should pose to a work of art include the following: can I respond to poem in the way the writer wants me to respond? Can I in a way identify myself in the spirit in which it was written? In practice the compilation of these are infinitely various-- we cannot tell beforehand just how we will have to respond, there can be no adequately previously learned formula to tell us, and we may have to do any number of things to find the answers. But with some points, these general questions must translate into more practical questions such as: what is gained by this effect? Does this detail seem successful? Does it relate meaningfully to a general effect? What precisely is the intention here? In other words, to discover where our real preferences lie often involves a searching, exacting appraisal of everything that makes up the total effect of a poem. A young critic when first asked to say what he thinks of a poem,, if he has read it curiously, usually falls into –“I like this” , “this appeals to me” and so on. But we haven’t really read a poem until we know what we like about it more fully than this. Reflecting on a poem, deciding just where we stand in relation to it and finding the right language to express ourselves about it are essential part of the reading the poem. The work of art comes home to you when you respond newly to it realizing exactly what you like about it and having a vivid description of the work as part of the realization. If we are moved by the literature

and the spirit of the criticism, we should be able to find a sharper, more strongly felt description, "I will like this", and until we find a description that satisfies us, we know we have not finally grasped it. One basic question often asked about practical criticism as Cox and Dyson (1970:12) have also observed is: why read a work of literature in this way? Is analyzing not hostile to the spirit of poetry? This poser has been expressed so often that pushing it aside would be unfair to any discourse. As intricate as these posers may be, it should be understood that in addition to misconceiving the nature of the practical criticism, they underestimate the poem they seem to defend. They also suggest that our pleasure in poetry is a subjective illusion which closeness to the poem cannot sustain. This is not so. In fact, a poem or a work of art that is in any degree successful blossoms the critic's careful attention. A great poem actually begins to take possession of the critic not immediately and at one bound, but gradually over an unpredictable period of time. An isolated phrase or a line or a sequence of lines will return to the critic with a great sense of fitness and familiarity and he begins to wonder where he heard such a thing as the poem comes anew to him with its fresh form and beauty. It is not really that the critic recalls his analysis step by step, but rather that the experience of the poem, its totality, its uniqueness captures the critic more powerfully than before. The criticism has done its work and the poem has proved all the stronger for it. Criticism includes a new sense of the poem's structure and the imagery, its tone and verbal delicacy, its precise effect.

Practical criticism seeks to achieve analytical precision. The criticism of a poem is not antithetical to literary enjoyment. It is not the substitution of an intellectual pleasure for an aesthetic pleasure or the diminishing of the poetic understanding to a dull routine. On the contrary, it is an opening up of the poem for what it can really be: a unique and fascinating experience, carefully provoked by its maker and fully available only to those with the patience as well as the sensibility to recreate. If the poem is a good poem, the criticism begins in pleasure and deepens that pleasure as it proceeds. It makes our pleasure more articulate and therefore more meaningful. Emotion is enriched and extended by the exercise of thought carefully. To discuss the criticism of literature in this manner is to defend it; but is it not careless criticism that should more obviously be on trial? We cannot be content to like literary work merely at random and to pay them the compliment of not more than a passing glance; we cannot be content to take from a

great poem, for example, only it, as though it were simply a confirmation of something we already knew. The great poem has the power to enrich and extend us, to make us something more than we were before. In its essential greatness, it is unlike any other poem. But how is this uniqueness to reach us, unless we attend precisely and in very great detail to what it is? Every word in the literary parlance counts, every interplay of meter with rhythm, every modulation and nuance of tone. The creative writer has certainly been conscious of many effects he precisely intended, and this precision for us and for him is not the opposite of poetic experience. It is the means by which the poem is achieved. The creative writer surely needs the audience – the reader or the critic – to succeed. And the critic needs to cooperate by an active and impartial reading of what is in front of him. The literary product (poem) exists after the fashion of the printed pages and between its cover and the book shelf, but its real existence is only when a critic's mind and consciousness comes alive. The literary critic is not just any kind of person. He is a special individual with awesome analytical abilities and a balanced disposition. He is a man who truly sees. He is not satisfied in reducing the work in front of him to a cliché or a commonplace; rather, he examines the product until its particular reality comes vividly to life. The rewards of such attention are very considerable, since in works like great poems the words themselves as well as the experience they convey are more alive more revealing and disturbing than they are in the context of everyday experience.

Conclusion

From the above, it is quite clear that the quest for an all-embracing and definitive statement on the nature of literature is an endless one. This paper has attempted, not only to conceptualize the discourse, but also to situate the subject within the practical domain of literary criticism; thereby giving the meaning of the literary phenomenon philosophical significance and novel possibilities.

Notes

1. Fashina, N. "Textual, linguistic and mental dissonance: an alienation theory of African dramaturgy". Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Department of English.

2. "Language competence, reading culture and national development". Paper presented by Professor Lekan Oyegoke at the Annual Lecture Series of the English Students Association (ESARUN) Redeemer's University, Mowe, Nigeria in 2009.
3. "Literature and the state". Inaugural Lecture of the University of Ibadan delivered by Professor Sam Asein in 1995

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