

## The Social Media, New Voices and Poetry of Social Commitment in Eyoh Etim's *Virtual Chants*

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### Abstract

*The advancement in information and communications technology is one of the remarkable gains of the twenty-first century. The social media, which is one of the subcategories of this avant-garde development, has brought humanity closer than ever and affords people the world over ample opportunity to share information, ideas, experiences, passions, philosophies as well as copious academic resources on globally-linked platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok, and Pinterest. Scholars in the humanities have aptly keyed into this occasion to share scholarly texts and materials for the benefit of millions of people on the virtual space. As one of the sub-disciplines in the humanities, literature has been amply deployed to fulfil the objectives of educating, informing and entertaining users of the internet at little or no cost. This paper examines *VirtualChants*, a collection of postmodern poems with postcolonial undertones first posted on Facebook by Eyoh Etim (the author) and later collated and published in hard copy. The paper notes that the numerous social media platforms provide immense opportunity for artists to bring to the global space, not only their resourcefulness, but also germane issues of contemporary relevance.*

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Humanities, Information, Artists, Resources.*

### Introduction

Over the centuries, poetry has developed in leaps and bounds. Apparently the oldest genre of literature dating back to rituals and other religious observances, poetry was mainly oral and performance driven. Because it was not authored, it belonged to the community and served as a tool for supplication, communal celebration, celebration of the supernatural, and for appreciating the gift of nature (Finnegan, 1-5). From these early beginnings developed the personal and impersonal forms of poetry such as the lyric, traditional epic, and the ballad. Though later presented in black and white following the advent of literacy, poetry and indeed literature could not gain a significantly wide circulation until the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg, a German, in 1450 A.D. Barely three decades later, precisely in 1476,

William Caxton, an English merchant brought the nascent development into England resulting in an unprecedented distribution or spread of printed materials including poetry collections to hundreds of thousands of people (Jowit, 44).

If the late medieval and early renaissance periods witnessed an inventiveness that resulted in the availability of hard copy books that unprecedentedly encouraged literacy, the twentieth and twenty first centuries have beheld an ostensibly mind-boggling and ground breaking invention called the Internet, that has succeeded, among others, in making the world a global village – a term coined by the Canadian thinker and media theorist, Marshall McLuhan, in his works *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typographic Man* and *Understanding Media*, published in 1962 and 1964, respectively (<https://www.medium.com>). It refers to the way various media and technologies have accelerated social interaction and cultural change around the world. For Valerie Forgeard, the term global village does not only designate an increase in electronic media, but rather a decrease in distance that brings people closer together. Its concept means that “our rural entities are no longer separate entities, but interconnected parts of a large community where knowledge, culture, and even languages and lifestyles have merged into one” (<https://www.brilliantio.com>).

The revolution in the information and communications technology has been copiously advanced by the numerous social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tiktok, and Pinterest. Facebook, for example, described basically as a real-time social networking site, provides an exceptional opportunity for people the world over to interact with one another by connecting them using wall updates, private messages, and video chats. It also enables users to share information, advertise products, entertain as well as educate on any subject or life's experience. With a character count of up to 63, 206, Facebook has been utilised by millions as a veritable instrument in the process of educating, informing, and entertaining digital citizens on the Internet (netizens) (<https://sproutsocial.com>). Thus, Facebook users have posted profoundly educative works on their walls as a way of contributing to global literacy. Literature is one of the subjects in the humanities that have enjoyed this new media patronage. Thus, there is Internet or electronic literature (e-literature) with digital poetry and prose as the electronic subgenres (<https://i-d.vice.com>; <https://www.https://researchgate.net>). The broad terminology that covers this sub-genre of avant-garde scholarship is digital humanities.

The United States Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act (2018) defines the term humanities as the study and interpretation of language, both modern and classical, linguistics, literature, history, jurisprudence, philosophy, archaeology, comparative religion, ethics, the history, criticism and study of the arts. It embodies

those aspects of social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods as well as the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history... (<https://www.georgiasouthern.libguides.com>). In the same vein, Rens Rod defines humanities as a discipline that investigates the expressions of the human mind, which expressions include language, music, art, literature, theatre, and poetry (<https://www.jstor.com>). Generally, humanities comprise arts and the social sciences which study the human culture and deploy methods that are primarily critical or speculative as distinguished from the mainly empirical approaches of the pure sciences. In a nutshell, humanities examine how people have created their world, and how they are in turn created by it. Certainly, the humanities cannot afford to stand aloof in an age of digitization, hence, the huge effort at maximal utilisation of the opportunities offered by the Internet by those in the discipline.

Digital or electronic poetry (e-poetry) is a creative work of art posted on the Internet for the consumption of millions of social media users. However, some of what constitute digital poetry are works that may have been published earlier and later uploaded on the Internet for a wider access or readership. Yet, there are many others whose authors write for the first time and post same on the Internet without any prior printing or publishing. Eyoh Etim's *VirtualChants*, a collection of online-based poems, though later collated and published by the author, falls in this latter category. The topology of the text is such that the reader appears to be reading Facebook in print with virtually every key feature of a typical Facebook page including all the comments and the likes – indeed, an apt expression of postmodernism in the arts. Particularly amazing about this avant-garde approach to literary communication is the fact that each poem is greeted with spontaneous responses from netizens in the form of likes and comments. Poems that appeal to the emotions of readers most attract a greater number of these responses. Like poetry collections printed and published in hard copies, poems posted on e-platforms such as the social media also pay unqualified attention to realistic issues that bother contemporary society. These online poems are largely a reflection of the author's creative ingenuity which raw materials are gathered from the day to day pleasant or disenchanting experiences of the society that the poet persona is. Eyoh Etim's *VirtualChants* is more preoccupied with the latter experience than the former, hence, this paper's choice of a postcolonialist reading of the author's debut e-poetry work.

### **PostcolonialRealities in Eyoh Etim's *VirtualChants***

The postcolonial theory is a branch of academic discourse that hinges both on history and contemporary reality. From the perspectives of the former, it analyses the history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of Europe, and focuses on the literature of societies sometimes referred to

as the Third World nations of Africa, Asia, Caribbean Islands, and South America. Usually, it excludes literature that represents either British or American viewpoints and concentrates on writings from formerly colonised cultures that were once dominated by, but remained outside of the white, male, European cultural, political, and philosophical tradition (Abrams and Harpham, 306). The theory is predicated on the need for the formerly colonised segments of the world to endeavour to 'write back' to the coloniser in a bid to tell, not just the story of colonialism and its aftermath in their individual nations, but also to subvert the notion of the *transcendentalsignified* by projecting the history, culture, worldview, metaphysics as well as other peculiarities of their individual societies in tandem with the realities of their cultures without yielding to external influence. It strives for an end to all forms of foreign hegemony in terms of culture, history, metaphysics, and worldview (Bressler, 200). Apart from re-examining the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonised, the postcolonial theory also aims at determining the economic, political and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonised peoples and the colonising powers even as it analyses the methods of decolonisation and strives to participate in the processes and goals of political liberation.

For many a decade, myriads of postcolonial world's critics and scholars have deployed the theory to lament, not just the evils of colonialism and the pitiable condition of the postcolonial society, but also to trade and leave infinite blames at the doorstep of Europe for its underdeveloped condition (Rodney, 48; Fanon, 40). However, this polemical position and outright labelling of Europe and indeed the West as the brains behind the postcolonial society's dwindling fortune seems not to go down well with many African scholars and critics as a number of them choose to think differently. For this class of scholar-critics, while it is indisputable that colonialism has its own fair share of blame for the disadvantaged state of these societies, it would be imprudent to continue to hold it accountable for the destitute condition of these nations. Such attempt may be likened to the action of the absurd man in the proverb who left his house burning to chase a rat "fleeing from the flames" (Achebe, 78). Thus, while it is essential for writers and critics of African literature to 'chase' away the colonialists and perpetually frown at colonialism, Achebe believes it would be expedient not to lose sight of home-grown colonialists that continually jettison, derail, or thwart efforts at developing the continent. In other words, there is absolutely no point getting bent on unabatedly confronting colonialism while ignoring deliberate actions/activities at the home front aimed at undermining the fortune of the postcolonial society by its leaders. This is the philosophy which drives the second perspective or focus of the postcolonial theory.

A good number of critics have pitched tent with this school of thought which harps on the need for the postcolonial society to look inwards for solutions to myriads of its problems. In other words, rather than being colonialist or euro-centric, the

criticism of African literature should look beyond the race and bourgeoisie-proletariat relationships between Africa and Europe to the bigotry, chauvinism, corruption, ethnicity, nepotism, inept leadership and the numerous oppressive class structures within the continent, which are glaringly more immediate and directly affecting society adversely. This is what Stanley Igwe portrays in *How Africa Underdeveloped Africa* (2013), where he, unequivocally, lays the blame for the impoverished condition of the African continent at the doorstep of its inept leaders who swim in corruption and yet turn round to blame colonialism for their abysmal failure (13). In *How Africans Underdeveloped Africa: A Forgotten Truth in History* (2010), Joshua Agbo, who shares a similar ideological and argumentative affinity with Igwe, posits that the long held conception of the “subaltern” or the empire writing back to the centre is no longer sustainable, and that it is time the empire began to 'write back' to itself. Thus, rather than continue to dissipate energy on colonialism and its aftermath, Agbo encourages literary writers and critics to pay more attention to leadership issues within the African continent that constantly derail, hamper or undermine development. This paper aligns its sentiments with the position of these latter critics which holds that the blame game is no longer sustainable, and that there is need for introspection if the postcolonial world's socio-economic and political narratives must change.

The role of the writer towards the evolution of a better society cannot be underestimated; indeed, the writer is socially committed to the environment. Social commitment requires that writers get involved in every effort aimed at making the society a better place to live in. It demands that they contribute meaningfully to the realisation of society's expectations, dreams and aspirations by proffering solutions to its multifarious problems. This is in tandem with Achebe's proposition that apart from teaching Africa's past, the African writer also has a responsibility to pay attention to the present in the bid to tackle problems of the contemporary times even as he warns that failure to do so would reduce the writer's relevance in the society, a position, also canvassed by Azeez Sesan, when he notes that literature should not merely reflect and refract life, but should be deployed predominantly for “proactive action and sustainable development” (987, 283). The implication, however, is that, the writer is not only a teacher, but also, very fundamentally, a visionary, a sage, a messiah, and above all, an agent of positive change. Essentially, these roles “galvanise the trends observable in the writer's works” (Agbasiere, 71).

As stated in the early section of this paper, the numerous social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, among others, afford the writer the occasion to post literary texts in any of the genres to millions of people across the world. However, a writer whose foremost commitment is his society basically has his immediate society (nation or state) in mind in the course of such posts even though some persons outside the writer's immediate society may also find some of the issues raised in the

text relevant to what obtain in their polities. For example, a Third World poet who writes from Africa and raises issues of socio-political disillusionment on his Facebook page may have Third World subjects from Asia or Latin America respond, corroborating the social media chat relevant to their own experience. This is one of the cardinal gains of the revolution as people, irrespective of geographical locations or distance can relate, interact, and share views and opinions unrestrainedly. Eyoh Etim's *Virtual Chants* is a collection of poems which examines a number of germane issues including those that harbour on Nigeria's socio-economic condition. This paper conducts a critical analysis of some of the poems in the collection.

Corruption is, perhaps, one of the greatest threats to development that the postcolonial societies are confronted with. In Nigeria, for instance, corruption has assumed the status of a hydra-headed monster that appears too persistent to eradicate (Eyoh, 26). It appears the most obstinate albatross that has pigheadedly hung itself on the neck of the Nigerian state causing inestimable harm. This is the concern of Etim in one of his poems titled “29<sup>th</sup> February 2018”. The poem satirises the Nigerian civil and public service whose officials have made corruption a trait by devising different ominous methods and approaches in perpetuating and perfecting the art. It frowns at a situation where government officials steal public funds only to claim that snakes and monkeys “swallowed” them.

They fight corruption  
by looting our treasury  
with snakes and  
monkeys

monkeys (*Virtual Chants*, 4; henceforth, *VC*)

The poem also makes an allusion to the Chibok school girls who were abducted by Boko Haram terrorists in April 2014 (<https://businessday.ng>), and attributes their inability to gain freedom to mendacity and corruption on the part of government whom the poet describes as “terrorists of history” and “kidnappers of time” (*VC*, 4). Thus, rather than frontally tackle the numerous challenges the nation is confronted with, the ruling class slip into a pool of clumsiness and only wish that citizens forget these things and not mention them at all. Mentioning them, of course, is regarded as a direct affront on the country's ruling class which do not tolerate opposing voices. The poet is however not dissuaded by the intolerable nature of the ruling class even as he rhetorically asks: “If you steal my lips, can you stop time?” (*VC*, 5).

In developed climes, politics is synonymous with the pursuit of good governance and used to advance the course of development in the society even as politicians compete to bring life-touching projects and programmes to bear on their constituents. It is anchored or played by well-endowed members of the society with requisite academic, intellectual and all-round know-how. The reverse, however, appears to be the case in Nigeria where politics appears the exclusive preserve of the



academically and intellectually bereft class whose only credential is their unabated ability to spew lies and deceptions. This is what the poet addresses in another of his postmodernist verse that has no title. The entire poem is a sequence of questions which attempts to find out why politicians in Nigeria find it difficult to stick to their promises and, of course, why the country's masses or electorate have chosen the path of perpetual gullibility. The first few lines of the poem indict not only the political class but also the ever-credulous electorate:

How many 170 promises can keep us hoping and  
hopping?  
How many 365 lies can  
make one year?  
How  
many 52 excuses per week can placate  
furious faces in one year?  
How many countless propaganda can divert the  
attention of the gullible?

(VC, 63)

The bard is also bothered about a lot of fundamental issues that hinge on the country's yearning for a better polity including the possibility of having the country's best on the saddles of leadership. Other questions posed by the poet border on the prospect of evolving true democracy in the country, ending the era of senseless killings, curbing lawlessness and impunity as well as ensuring equal rights and justice for all citizens irrespective of ethnicity or religion.

In virtually every independent nation state, Independence Day is regarded as a very significant one as it affords citizens the occasion to reflect on the journey of nationhood vis-à-vis its overall performance in every key sector. Such anniversary also grants citizens the opportunity to appraise their history in relation to the present and indeed the envisaged future. It is usually declared a public holiday to enable citizens to celebrate their nation as an autonomous, self-accountable or sovereign entity. However, rather than the above-stated experience, Independence Day in Nigeria appears an ordinary day bereft of any basis for celebration. This is the thrust of another of Etim's poem with no title. The poem satirises the country's bent on depending on other nations for virtually everything several decades after independence even when it has what it takes to stimulate its economy towards robust productivity and performance. As one of the leading oil producing states in the world, the poet believes Nigeria has the economic wherewithal to embark on infrastructure renaissance, revamp her ailing industries, manufacture many industrial goods for local consumption and export and even lend to less-endowed countries in Africa and other Third World States. But no! The country is "happy in dependence"; she is comfortable going cap in hand to China and other willing nations to seek never-ending loans using various guises and nomenclatures. This is

why, on an Independence Day, rather than celebrate the country's sovereignty, the poet sees no basis for such jubilation. Rather, he bemoans the state of the nation consumed by recession while the actors endowed with the responsibility of sailing the ship of state comfortably go to sleep. The poem reads in part:

Happy in Dependence  
that's what you are  
oh sleeping giant  
comfortable in your coma  
relaxing in recession (VC, 54)

The country's ruling class appears complacent and unruffled by the numerous challenges that confront her on a quotidian basis. Rather than put on their thinking caps, the ruling class resorts to blaming past administrations for the numerous woes that befall the nation, a clear indication that they have absolutely nothing to offer as far as providing workable solutions to the nation's multifarious problems is concerned. The despaired poet presents his dissatisfaction thus:

playing the blame game  
shirking responsibilities  
living a lie  
married to propaganda  
bound to untruths  
given to insincerity  
driven by greed (VC, 54)

The cardinal opinion of the poet is that leadership determines the socio-economic and political health of any nation, hence, when a country has it right leadership-wise, every other thing logically falls in place. But the tone of the poem does not seem optimistic, rather, it is sceptical about the future of the nation given the level of unmitigated corruption, extremism, and divisive politics that engulfs it. Perhaps, the poet's rhetorical, though sarcastic question – "...when will you awake?" – at the end of the poem, is his own way of not losing hope after all.

Education is the greatest weapon against superstition, ignorance, and all semblances of ineptness. It is the most effective tool for development. It unfetters not just the individual but indeed the entire society. An educated society is certainly a liberated one. During the early days of colonialism when western education was gradually being introduced, communities where schools were established were deemed to have been very highly privileged. Such communities were sure to have their members educated, which education was bound to positively affect their society. In Nigeria, Ibadan is one of the few cities to have played host to early western education. In fact, it plays host to the first university in Nigeria, having started off as an affiliate of the University of London. Ordinarily, one would have expected Ibadan



to be one of the most well-planned, serene, aesthetically conscious, economically viable, and socially productive/prospective cities in Nigeria given the fact that it played and still plays host to a mass of intelligentsias from the pre-independence days up until now. On the contrary, however, the city is most times adjudged one of the filthiest in the country given the nonchalant attitude of its administrators and of course, its dwellers towards the environment. This is what bothers the e-poet in another of his poem titled “Another Ibadan”. The poet's choice of the title is perhaps informed by the fact that J.P. Clark-Bekeredemo had earlier written a poem on the city and titled it “Ibadan”. In the latter's poem, Ibadan is described as a “running splash of rust and gold”, indicating that while the city had its own challenges, there existed some satisfying or pleasant sides of it. But in the former's poem on the city, Ibadan is depicted as an inert, socially and economically static, and a languidly unambitious city.

There was a time  
when you were running  
but now you are  
that

so still  
stillness is shocked (VC, 40)

Perhaps, it is what affects Nigeria as a nation that also affects Ibadan – a situation where the dregs of the society oversee and dictate for a community that has a mass of the best minds; a situation where illiterates, fakes, and desperadoes find themselves in the corridors of power only for the elite class to be swept to a corner. For the e-poet, the University of Ibadan, for example, is supposed to be consulted by various tiers and agencies of government in the event of any meaningful economic policies or physical planning because it has the requisite authorities. This is however not practicable because of the calibre of persons in power whose stock-in-trade is self-aggrandisement and perpetuation. Etim dolefully presents the scenario more succinctly thus:

You have a fountain of wisdom  
but your nobles fail to drink from  
You have wise elders,  
but no

there.  
one visits them for counsel (VC, 40-41)

In Nigeria, Ibadan can rightly be described as the city or home of many firsts. Apart from hosting the first university in Nigeria, Ibadan played host to the first indigenous television station in Africa; the first (tallest) commercial buildings in Nigeria (the Cocoa House), and the first football club in Nigeria (the Shooting Stars), among others. One would have expected the trailblazer city to continue to hold the aces and serve as an inspiration to many other cities and states in Nigeria given its

impressively pioneering antecedents. This is, however, not the case; the city, the bard notes, now thrives in its old glory apparently because of its failure to take advantage of the intellectual goldmine in it and accordingly hand itself over for an all-round transmogrification. The poet presents this perspective on the city thus:

You who is now a shadow  
of your past.

You have a fountain of  
wisdom but your  
nobles fail to drink from there (*VC*, 40-41)

Thus, for the postmodern poet, the 'fountain of wisdom', apparently the University of Ibadan, appears a mere monument on the largest city in Nigeria given its seeming neglect by relevant government authorities which would have tremendously tapped the limitless potentialities of the highest citadel of learning for the overall benefit of the city and indeed the larger society.

Generally, government exists for the wellbeing of the masses. Its various institutions and agencies are aimed at making life meaningful for citizens, without which the essence of government would be questioned. In civilised climes, government evolves policies and programmes that directly impact on the wellbeing of the elderly, the youth, women, children, orphans, and indeed the entire populace. This, however, appears the reverse in Nigeria. Here, government agencies, policies and programmes are formulated or created for the sake of it even as those who are supposed to benefit from them are grossly ignored, neglected or abandoned. This is the thematic thrust of the next poem titled "I am the Land". Rather than provide succour to citizens through pragmatic, altruistic, and purpose-driven leadership, representatives of government in Nigeria appear bent on agonising, inconsiderate, and egocentric approaches to leadership, with flawed demonstration of willingness and capacity to deliver services to society. The result is utter disillusionment on the part of the citizens which culminates into and despair. The poet is, however, consoled by the fact that there is a reward for every deed done to man by fellow man under the sun. For him, nemesis awaits all whose actions and inactions exacerbate rather than ameliorate the plight of the suffering masses. This conviction is re-affirmed thus:

I am the human  
that you dehumanised,  
In death, I am your Nemesis.  
A ghost, I have  
returned to haunt you...

(*VC*, 74-75)

In Nigeria, the first day in the month of May every year is usually set aside by the federal government to celebrate the nation's workers – their loyalty, dedication, and sacrifice to the advancement of the nation's bureaucracy in particular and the overall development of the country in general. Also referred to as Workers' Day, the first of May is usually observed as public holiday to enable workers to reflect on their welfare vis-à-vis contemporary socio-economic realities. Conversely, however, rather than reflect with joy the gains of workers over time, May Day in Nigeria aggravates anger and pains as workers hardly have anything to celebrate given the hyper-inflationary rate of goods and services in the country and indeed the overall (harsh) economic realities before them. But since it appears a tradition, workers have no option but to file out in their numbers and march before their oppressors amidst mumbled voices – indeed the ambivalences of a smiling and suffering people whose entitlements are either deliberately delayed or denied outright. So, rather than being a day to celebrate, May Day in Nigeria is disillusioning and gloomy. The poet laments the forlorn condition of the nation's workers and retirees on a typical May Day thus:

A day of nightmare  
 When the termites line up  
 To march in solidarity to  
 The  
 suffering,  
 anguish of the retirees,  
 The frustration of the teachers  
 And the despair of the pensioners. (VC, 84)

Ordinarily, many workers would not want to identify with such seeming hypocritical solidarity by joining in the march-past, but the fear of being sacked would certainly coerce them into doing so especially when they consider the confounding level of unemployment in the country. The poem harps on this in part:

Remember that monster,  
 Unemployment,  
 Out there beyond the  
 terra firma  
 Of this  
 termitarium. (VC, 85)

In another of his poems titled “Ode to 2016?”, the poet reminisces on the state of affairs in Nigeria barely a year and a half after the taking over of power by the opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). It would be recalled that the former came with the “change” mantra as their campaign slogan. Nigerians, who were eager to see an end to corruption, ethnic clashes, terrorism, and all forms of reprehensible experiences and other such issues that had eaten deep into the soul of the nation, fully keyed into

the “change” pledges and supported massively the opposition party resulting in the defeat of the then ruling party. However, rather than the anticipated change, the country, sooner than expected, progressed from bad to worse, as no categorical action, policy or programme indicated that there was any hope in sight. In fact, it was in 2016 that the country witnessed a full scale recession after many years. The poet's “ode” to the year 2016 is therefore a sarcasm deployed to lament the ineptitude of the class of those who came on the banner of “change” but ended up putting the ship of state in a reverse motion:

Time has defeated the year  
that promised so much but  
gave so little. You are the  
of upsets. Your

guru  
mischiefs  
have left humanity breathless. (*VC*, 90)

A society's state of economic austerity can pose a serious hindrance to creativity or the rate of creative output. Put differently, as an endowment, the resourcefulness in one is capable of being undermined by the economic condition of the society of the artist. The result is that rather than a creatively robust environment, society is confronted with a dearth of creative productions. Thus, there appears to be an inverse or disproportional relationship between economic recession and creativity. This is the issue Etim appraises in another of his poem titled “Poetry in Recession”. In the seven stanza poem, the postcolonial bard bemoans the unusually harsh economic climate that engulfs the entire country resulting in creative writers finding it difficult to showcase their know-how. The poet recounts the impact of the state of the nation's economy on creativity thus:

The waves of creativity recede  
Thoughts currents cease to flow,  
The river of ink dries up,  
Poetry is

now a scarce commodity. (*VC*, 115)

The poet also laments the dismal state of the country's currency which loses value on a daily basis as opposed to other developed countries' currencies whose value constantly appreciate. The implication is that creative writers in Nigeria end up poor and disconcerted while their counterparts in developed climes make an earnest living from same. This is why creativity in Nigeria is unwittingly in recession, as the bard howls:

Poetry is not worth much in Nigeria,

When the rate of exchange drags  
Between the bard and the  
Who sing for

bad minstrels,  
dollars and pounds. (VC, 115)

The situation is so appalling that the poet persona makes a case for relevant institutions of government to legislate or pave way for creative artists to access loans from foreign nations in a bid to keep creativity afloat. This, the poet believes, will enable the artists to continue to execute the task of serving and saving society.

Let's plead with the little gods of laws,  
Let them grant us permission  
To borrow lexes from  
Let's

foreign gods,  
build the craft with loan words  
To cause a change where there is none. (VC, 115)

In spite of the limitations the harsh economy poses on creativity, the persona, however, remains poised and undeterred in his avowed resolve to volubly confront realities even as he charges others in the same line of calling not to be dissuaded by the seemingly gloomy status quo but to continue to use the artistic medium to educate and emancipate society.

In "Ode to a Good Dictator", another of Etim's poems, the bard decries the kind of democracy practised in Nigeria that is veiled in dictatorship. The oxymoron of a poem also bemoans the ineptitude of the ruling class which breeds hunger and hardship. To the poet, it is absolutely difficult to come to terms with the basis of the paradoxical situation in Nigeria in which the intellectual virtuosos of the society are governed by its mediocrities, its intellectual dregs. The poet captures this lamentable irony thus:

You are the best  
Who govern the worst,  
But where are the fruits  
of good

governance?  
There lies the irony,  
A metaphoric paradox... (VC, 95)

*Nemo dat quod non habet* is a popular Latin maxim which means that no one can give what they do not have. So, expecting a great deal from a ruling class that has absolutely nothing to offer would be tantamount to 'waiting for godot'. It therefore behoves the voting masses to be a bit more circumspect whenever opportunities

arise for them to make some fundamental decisions or choices that border on leadership.

For Wole Soyinka, the act of recording societal events and experiences by creative writers without an affirmative or categorical vision for its redemption bespeaks a low level of commitment. Thus, for the Nobel laureate, the writer should aim at attaining a vision – a categorical prescription or option for societal emancipation other than a mere cataloguing of its problems (Ejiofor and Kamalu, 173). This is perhaps Etim's shared philosophy when he proposes revolution as a panacea for the country's redemption. In one of his poems titled “Revolution”, the poet first and foremost appraises the risky and dreadful nature of revolution especially when brutes and despots are on the seats of power.

Revolution  
is as deadly  
as sniper.

It  
is suicidal  
to invoke it  
in frustrated climes. (VC, 121-122)

In spite of the risk-laden nature of revolution, the bard is unequivocal about its effectiveness in defeating tyranny, injustice, and all forms of despicable experiences that are immanent in the polity. It is, for him, the only option a strangled society has at its disposal if it must break the shackles of endemic corruption such as the one in the poet's vision. Revolution, the poet believes, is the most certain pathway to freedom.

Revolution  
is the highway  
to freedom. And  
like freedom,  
Revolution is the  
most dangerous word  
alive! (VC, 122)

It is indeed the poet's conviction that complacency on the part of citizens is highly inimical to the realisation or evolution of a better society.

For Romanus Egudu, the writer is a god-sent gadfly to his society with a mission to persistently endeavour to awaken it from its social, political, moral and intellectual slumber (quoted in Julie Agbasiere, 71). Here, the writer assumes the role of an alarm bell which does not only announce changes per time but also reminds the



neighbourhood about the need to arise or wake up to their respective duties and responsibilities. This opinion is also canvassed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o when he notes that "being a kind of sensitive needle", the writer "registers with varying degrees of accuracy and success the conflicts and tensions in his changing society" (71). Indeed, the writer has a lot of roles to play for the evolution of a free, sane, and progressive society. Apart from serving as the chronicler-in-chief of permutations occurring in society as articulated by the duo above, the artist functions, very fundamentally, as the righter of obnoxious practices that go on in the society whether at private or public domains. This is the position of Niyi Osundare when he notes that one of the greatest expectations of the artist is to "right" the wrongs prevalent in society through their artistic output (6). Of course, literature is not an accidental eruption; it is a thoughtful outflow that is given impetus, shape, direction and thematic borders by the prevalent socio-economic dynamics in the society. In other words, it is the totality of what constitutes the writer's experience in the society that he finds himself that shapes what is produced as literature. Impressively, creative writers in Nigeria have striven to live up to these numerous roles imposed on them by the society. Like their counterparts in other developing worlds, the Nigerian writers have deployed the resources of literature to engage the various social and economic challenges facing the nation in anticipation of a better society. This is what Eyoh Etim's *VirtualChants* has accomplished.

### **Conclusion**

The dynamic nature of society, particularly the ginormous scientific innovations and discoveries, has resulted in new methods of conveying or sharing information, ideas, and knowledge. Thus, rather than rely on or wait for printing presses for the release of hard copy texts, creative writers now take advantage of the plethora of social media platforms to put across their artistry, and in the process educate people across the nooks and crannies of the world with a reduced effort. Literature, especially the poetry genre, is one of the subjects in the humanities in which its practitioners have taken full advantage of this heart-warming innovation to educate the masses. Artists have utilised this medium not only to exhibit their ingenuity, but also, very fundamentally, to examine cardinal issues of contemporary interest in the society. This paper examined virtual media poetry as a sub-genre of electronic literary scholarship that is the trend of contemporary times, and utilised to liberate society from the forces of tyranny, servitude, socio-political and economic incubus, and all-round underdevelopment. The writer is indeed the conscience of the society who courageously identifies and attacks its ills and imperfections with a view to proffering solutions.

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