

saraba



76

/The Anniversary Issue

February 2011

In Transition/

*With Dominique Malaquais, Emmanuel Iduma,
Suzanne Ushie, Sokari Ekine, Kola Tubosun and Adebisi Otusolape*

Please print in white and black and stack together

CONTENTS

PLANNING OBSOLESCENCE

Emmanuel Iduma & Dominique Malaquais in Conversation

THE BLANK SHEET: ON BLOGGING AND OTHER BOTHERATIONS (II)

Kola Tubosun

THE SERIOUS GUIDE TO BECOMING A SERIOUSLY UNFASHIONABLE WRITER

Suzanne Usbie

A NEW LITERARINESS

Sokari Ekine interviews Emmanuel Iduma

THE IDEAL HUSBAND

Adebisi Olusolape

A QUESTION OF AJAYI

E Iduma

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

Various

GOODWILL

Various

WRITING THE FASHION ISSUE

Publishers

ALL THE ISSUES

Publishers

THANK YOU NOTE



PLANNING OBSOLESCENCE

As an addendum to our previously considered speculations about technology in Issue #7, Dominique Malaquais, Senior Research Fellow at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris, serves as the perfect conversationalist. I met Dominique in 2009, at the Word into Art into Africa (WiAiA), a workshop organised by an organisation she directs – Space for PanAfrican Research, Creation and Knowledge, which is headquartered in the Africa Centre in South Africa. In that workshop, we sought to negotiate basic concerns about performance arts, with specific reference to Dance. What was striking, though, was our indulgence in what made a city. Although Lagos was our meeting point, each participant/facilitator became ‘aware’ of their cities. There was Yazeed Kamaldien speaking of South Africa; Amanda Epe speaking of London, Khadiatou Diallo speaking of South Africa and London; Sokari Ekine speaking of London and the Lagos she knew as a growing child; Qudus Onikeku spoke of the Lagos he grew in, especially the Lagos after the military left. Dominique herself spoke of various involvements in Cameroun, in Princeton, and in Paris.

Given this background, and the amount of technology involved in assembling us at the workshop, I suddenly felt open and engaged with the wider world. This openness did not disappear upon my return to Ile-Ife. In fact this conversation is a product of that openness. – Emmanuel Iduma

EMMANUEL IDUMA: *I desire that this conversation take a very experiential form, and maybe experimental. I know I am no expert, nor scholar. I am, perhaps, only a ‘user’ of technology. So, Dominique, do you think a conversation by ‘users’ would be apt, justifiable, or even moral?*

DOMINIQUE MALAQUAIS: *I think a conversation among users is a fine idea; well handled, it might prove to be quite interesting. It is, in any event, all that I can offer, as I am certainly no expert on the subject of technology myself.*

EI: *And what defines us as users? Indeed, I feel this is important because there seems to be an imbalance in the consideration of technology. More attention, in my view, is given to consumers, and lesser attention to producers. The producers produce, often not for Eureka! but for the intent that many would ‘use’ their technology. Is this a reasonable speculation?*

DM: *Yes and no. Certainly, producers – of hard- and soft-ware – put their expertise to work with the hope that users will employ their products. At the same time, it seems clear that those who make such ware(s), if they wish to stay in business, must create products that will need to be replaced. Planned obsolescence is essential to their practice. As regards companies as producers – Microsoft will do as an obvious example – this is self-evident (anyone who has ever used a Microsoft product long enough knows this from experience): such obsolescence is intrinsic to their business plan and to (late) capitalism more generally. How this plays out for individual producers – the people who design software, hardware, system architectures and so on – is, I suppose, another matter. Presumably, if you are a software designer, you work for Microsoft and you want to keep your job, creating a “Eureka!” product that will not need replacement is probably not a wise choice. Your job, whatever your personal convictions may be, is to produce programs that *will* need to be replaced. In the realm of FOSS (free open source software), arguably, the situation is different – though it is probably not as simple as it might appear on the*



surface. All of this, however, is a matter of theory, not practice, for, as we all know, there is no such thing in the realm of technology as a product that will not need, at some point, to be replaced, either because it fails or because something better comes along.

EI: *But then, is the idea of technology entrenched in the firm belief, by all of us, that there are no parameters - in the idea that technology has no end?*

DM: Technology, in all likelihood, has no end – no end, that is, as long as the human race (or more properly the system within which it functions at this time) does not deploy technology in such a way as to destroy both itself and the technology used to effect such destruction ... in other words, as long as we don't blow our planet to smithereens.

EI: *If this is ascertainable, I am deeply concerned. Limits are often talked of in relation to morality. Thus, it seems that the more we advance in the manipulation and development of new technologies we throw caution to the wind. That is, assuming no limits exist in the development of technology.*

DM: This, it seems to me, is a fundamental question. The answer – if such a thing exists – resides less in a discussion about technology than in one concerning economic systems. If we continue along the path we are walking now – if the logic of late capitalism plays itself all the way out – then I am fairly convinced that we will indeed blow our planet to smithereens – and that technology will play an active part in the process. I do not mean by this that we will necessarily, literally, blow ourselves up, though that is certainly a possibility. More likely, I suspect, will be a gradual descent into impossibility: a planet fallen prey to ecological disaster that eventually does away with most of us, the poorest first, and ultimately results in a state of affairs – ecological, social, economic, political – that is simply unsustainable. Such disaster, whatever form it takes, is first and foremost a function of economics. To change the situation – to alter our course – economic change is required.

Capitalism got us where we are and, if nothing takes its place, will lead us to our end. A different future will be a function of a different global economic system. What is that system? How might it come about? I do not know. What I do know is this. Capitalism is a young system; it has not been with us long and there is no reason to assume that it will be with us forever. To many, this may sound heretic – or simply silly. So be it. Imagine a feudal lord, in 12th Century Western Europe, say, being told that a mere 800 years later his descendents would have to pay their serfs, allow them two days off a week, and provide care when they fell ill. This would have sounded heretic to him as well – he probably would have called for the head of the person telling him such absurdities – and yet here we are... Systems change. Though I am not, by nature, an optimist, I choose to believe that humankind may manage to veer off the course of doom on which it has set itself under (late) capitalism. We are, I choose to trust, capable of positive change: we can birth a world in which everyone has food, shelter, access to healthcare, education, the ability to travel and the time and means to live creatively.

In such a world, there is no doubt that technology will play a crucial role – indeed, in all likelihood, this world I imagine will be a direct result of technological advance. But it will be technology of a very different kind from that which we know now. It will be technology that bridges rather than creates divides; it will be technology available to all in equal measure; and it will be technology whose sole reason for existing is the betterment of daily life everywhere. In this sense, I believe, there is reason to hold out hope for technology and, ultimately, for the possibility that it does indeed have no limits.



EI: *Do you consider that technology is all-embracing? Is technology the right word to use for advancement in nuclear technology, as it is the right word to use for mobile phone technology? Is the internet also technology? Or can we make a distinction between technology that destroys and technology that creates?*

DM: Again, yes and no. On a superficial level, yes, we can make a distinction. I could not function without the Internet; most everything that I do – in work, in friendship, in attempts to be a decent human being, in the daily business of sustaining a household – depends upon it in one manner or another. I choose to look at these uses of technology as non-destructive ones, as opposed to uses of technology to military ends, for example. The argument could very well be made, however, that the line between my use of technology and the use of technology to violent ends (again, for example, in a military context) is a lot thinner than I like to think. The same holds true for just about anyone who uses the Net to “peaceful” ends. What I mean is this: our use of technology, however benign its intent, in a world system that deploys technology to kill, maim and generally accentuate socio-economic divides, can be seen as a tacit acquiescence of that system. Does this mean we should cease and desist? The question is nonsensical: we cannot. And this, of course, is the “marvel” – read the horror – of the system: we are in thrall to it. If we want to function within it, even (especially) to denounce it, we must participate in it, use the weapons – the technology – that it deploys to sustain and grow itself.

EI: *And is technology an art-form? I know you have been involved in several arts-related events that cash in on 'technological advantages' (Can you mention some). As such, there is the interaction between technology and the arts. Is this true?*

DM: Technology itself is not an art form, but it can be put to use to artistic ends. Some of the very finest work being produced by artists today depends upon high-level technology – whether in the realm of video, film, photography, graphic production or performance (network performance, notably, though not exclusively).

You ask for examples. One is a remarkable project that SPARCK was invited to participate in by a Kinshasa-based entity called Mowoso (<http://www.eternalnetwork.org/mowoso/>). This was a network performance set up by Mowoso between Kinshasa and Berlin in 2009, in the context of *Transmediale*, an annual festival that explores the role of digital technologies in contemporary society. The performance took place in Kinshasa in real time, before an audience located in Berlin and across the globe (people plugged in digitally – via email and Skype – to the space in Berlin). The means of conveyance – what allowed the people in Berlin to see the performance in Kin – was Skype. The SPARCK crew was on hand in Berlin to dialogue with the Mowoso crew in Kin and to serve as an interface between the audience(s) and the performers. At the core of the project was the *failure* of technology: because of massive electricity shortages and, as a result, disastrous Internet connections in Kin, the image was a mess. This, as both fact and aesthetics, was the single most important aspect of the performance – even if the performance itself was in and of itself a great work of art. The point, for Mowoso, was to underscore the economic violence responsible for the impossibility to connect seamlessly between Kin and Berlin and what this violence means in daily social and political terms for people who live and seek to create in Kin. A fascinating aspect of the project was the response among members of the audience. Some people found the exercise brilliant – either because they “got” the economic/social/political point that Mowoso was making or because they found the aesthetics of the broken, distorted image and its relation to the actual, in situ performance



stunning (a point central to Mowoso's take as well). Many people, however, had a lot of trouble with the event: they could not get past the technological failure itself; the message was fine with them, but they wanted it brought to them in a clean, clear fashion – which was, of course, impossible given the circumstances that were the very theme of Mowoso's performance.

Works of art such as Mowoso's *Transmediale* performance are key to understanding and highlighting the role of technology in the making of art. It has to be underscored, however – and this is a core argument for Mowoso as well – that economic inequality/violence makes it increasingly difficult for creators outside well-funded “first world” circles to participate in the global art world. Today, to be a part of that world, it is increasingly important to be able to make work that requires high-tech production techniques and values. Take a look at any major biennale: its principal works are installations – notably video/sound installations – that cost a small fortune to create/mount because they require access to significant technological resources. Look, too, at the artists who – whatever one thinks of their work – sell best on the global art market: Jeff Coons, Ai Weiwei, Damien Hirst... This is work that is extremely expensive to produce, for these same reasons. The most brilliant photographers, graphic artists and video creators in Kinshasa, if they are to make a living from their work, *must* have access to external resources. They cannot produce or sell on their own turf – not if they want a chance to compete on the global market. And this, of course, is a synecdoche: a part for the whole of an economic system that is violently inequitable and, by definition, favors the “North”.

EI: *If this is in some way true, what are the dynamics of this interaction? What does it involve? How does it help?*

DM: As my previous response and the example of Mowoso's work suggest, the dynamics are profoundly disturbing because subject to violent economic/social/political inequities. At the same time – and here again the example of Mowoso is key – they are, counterintuitively, productive. The question “does it help?” probably has no answer. As I noted in answer to an earlier question, there is little choice: if an artist wants to function within our current world system – and what choice does s/he have, if indeed s/he wants to work? – s/he must, in some form or other, engage with technology. S/he is obliged to use the very weapons that the system deploys to sustain itself, to ensure the wellbeing of the few at the expense of the many – the many of which the artist in question may be one.

EI: *It is good you say an artist, within our current world system, must engage with technology. I must mention that I cannot imagine writing a short story longhand. And this has been the case for about five years. John Irving says he hates anything that makes the work and process easier. Sure, there is the question of Irving's generation, and mine. But there is also, perhaps, the question of credibility (I use this word with caution). I am simply speculating on whether my working with a computer keyboard does not make me less serious as a writer. And I know you do a lot with your computer.*

DM: The fundamental difference, here, I suspect, is that John Irving can afford to make the process as hard for himself as possible. First, he has “made” it. This allows the leisure for trouble. Second, the business of having it hard is intrinsic to the persona he has created for himself: the macho, hard-drinking, hard-driving, take-the-knocks man of letters. Norman Mailer, who was a hell of a better writer than Irving – and let me note here: I have read everything Irving has written and I like his work, so this is not a “diss” – would probably have said the same thing. Yes, it may be a generational thing, but one would want to add a small caveat: sure Irving (as Mailer did) may write longhand (does he?), but



someone, somewhere, inputs the stuff into a computer. That someone is probably a(n underpaid) woman and she *is* making the writer's process easier. Now, to your question as to whether using a keyboard might make you a less serious writer: the pleasure and the hell of trying to write – the sheer difficulty of the process – have little to do, as far as I am concerned, with what precisely the fingers are doing (holding a pen or clicking away at a keyboard). As for credibility, I agree with you: the word must be used with (extreme) caution. Dan Brown, after all, is considered highly credible and, boy, is he a lousy writer...

EI: *There is, also Facebook, and the social network question. In terms of publishing, young writers can simply post a note on Facebook, attracting numerous comments. I was involved in a conversation where this act was dismissed as cheap publishing, meaning that certain fundamental procedures attached to publishing had been cut away. Is this reasonable?*

DM: A great deal of what appears on Facebook is crap. The same is true of what appears on paper, in between cardboard covers, for sale in bookshops. I see no reason why one could not use Facebook as a platform for good writing. If it is possible to use blogs to this effect, why not FB? Cliché but true: it's not the medium, it's the matter.

EI: *I am a big fan of Samuel Morse. I know simply, that although a painter, he transmitted the first message via the electronic telegraph. The first message was "What hath god wrought." There is the contemplation, in Christianity, that in the last days knowledge would increase; thus linking the advancement in technology with the end of the world. Is there some logic in asserting this? Well, given the quickness with which new technologies are developed – new versions of almost every technology – and the frequency with which changes are made, isn't there some truth in this?*

DM: The answer to that, I suppose – given, indeed, the "quickness" of technology – is that the sooner one comes to an end, the less one will know of technology. As for the rest – what else one might or might not come to know as one's end approaches – I have no answer, save to hope (and, sadly, to doubt) that one gains in knowledge as one loses in minutes to live.

EI: *Well, I think the internet is a demon as well as an angel. Previously, we could do without checking our emails for days, weeks, or even months. Now, we are constrained to check everyday, every hour – Blackberry makes it no easier.*

DM: I can but agree.

EI: *It seems – pardon me if this is senseless – that technology often stuffs out the life off a process. For instance, an interview. There is the marked difference between an interview in print and an interview in paper; the sighs, silence, stammers, and all other expressions are often lacking. Is technology concerned with the taking away of life?*

DM: A complicated question, this. Let's begin with the simpler part. Interviews have long been conducted on paper. Email has perhaps made the practice more common, but it certainly did not bring it into being. Is an interview harmed, or made less interesting, by the opportunity afforded to the interviewee to answer in writing rather than in person? I suppose it depends on the interviewee(e). Some people have a great deal to say, are quite articulate on paper, and do far less well in person – because they are shy, because they need time to structure their thoughts in a manner that satisfies them and thus is likely to



satisfy the interviewer, because they are simply more comfortable with the written than the spoken word. Such people are likely to give a “better” interview if granted such an opportunity. Others may use the opportunity to protect themselves – to say less than they might if put “on the spot”. In such cases, presumably, the interview will suffer. If we imagine an interview with a politician, it seems fair to say that an in-person exchange will be most satisfactory for the interviewer: one is likely to learn more absent the mediation of the printed page (or the computer screen). Obviously, gestures, expressions, etc. tell us quite a bit. But if an interview is printed verbatim, without comment, what of those gestures and expressions? How do they come through? Is the “life” of the interview more present if “the sighs, silence, stammers” are made to appear in print – if by “verbatim” we mean “not a single ‘um’ or ‘pfff’ excluded”? I am not convinced that including such things in the written transcript of an interview is always the best way to go. In some cases – the politician, for example – it may be; in others, it may just get in the way or, if the interviewee is not a particularly articulate speaker but is nonetheless an interesting interlocutor, it may prove unfair to him/her.

Does technology itself do away with life – or, in any event, dim it? Probably, yes. This, certainly, plays a part in how I make use of certain technologies. I have dozens of Skype meetings every week, but I rarely Skype my dearest friend and, if I do, I tend not use the video camera function. I use Skype to call my mother when we are in different countries, but I use the technology as I would a basic telephone. It is the voice I want to hear; the digitized image troubles me: it does not bring her closer to me. I write hundreds of emails weekly. Those that I write my friends and family, however, are rarely written in telegraphic form. I firmly believe that one can have epistolary relationships – yes, in the 18th century sense of the word – by email: long letters, thought through for hours. In these, for me, there can be life as much as in classical (“proper”) letters. The difficulty, of course, is the immediacy of it all. I belong to a generation that remembers well the three-week wait for a loved one’s words to arrive by post, the daily visits to the mailbox, the pleasure-pain of the letter not yet arrived. Was it “better”? I don’t know. It certainly wasn’t the same.

EI: *Can you consider the following statement? “In our dash to do things faster and cheaper, 2005 to 2010 might be remembered as the “pasty period.” While the major manufacturers are working hard to improve the quality of skintones, future generations who look back at this period might need to be reminded that we were a little too hasty to adopt new technology and that the planet wasn’t crippled by an epidemic of eczema.” (In Monocle, Issue 11, Volume 02, March 2008). It was made in connection to the resistance movement against digital photography.*

DM: I would draw the commentator’s attention to the fact that the question of technologies and skin tones predates the advent of digital photography. Anyone who has paid a little attention to the photographic medium more generally is aware of the fact that analog photography played havoc with the color of skin and that this had everything to do with the political (and the monetary) economy of racism. Briefly: Kodak film (just one brand example among others) was for decades notoriously problematic for the rendering of skin other than Caucasian. As late as 1997, I attended a lecture at Princeton University in which a Nigerian art historian had to explain to a surprised, largely Anglo, audience the reason for the remarkable number of overly dark images of African faces in anthropological and news photography shot on the African continent. Had the market for film *not* been primarily “Western”, the speaker pointed out quite rightly, this would not have been an issue: efforts would have been made to produce film that did a better job of rendering non-Caucasian skin tones. The problem has not disappeared, though things did to a



degree improve with the growth of the African-American middle class. That all is not well is clear from just about any blog on the subject – both because such forums point up the fact that much analog film remains problematic in this respect and because many of the points made by people blogging in are jaw-droppingly uninformed (see, for one example among many, <http://www.apug.org/forums/archive/index.php/t-77048.html>).

EI: *What's your place in technology? Does it overwhelm or underwhelm you? (I use technology in the overarching sense – in the sense that includes all forms of technology we're probably exposed to).*

DM: I have the dubious advantage of being a technological clutz: I'm just not very good with it. I know just enough – with computer hardware, some key software; with photography – to get done what I need done. What this means in practical terms is that some aspects of technology that would likely eat me alive by taking over all of my time escape me (or I escape them). Granted, this is in part a choice: there are many tech tricks I could teach myself that I eschew, precisely because I want to avoid their anthropophagic tendencies. Does the technology I do use and master overwhelm me? It has a double-edged effect on me. On the one hand, it allows me to get far more done than I would be able to do absent its presence. Because it allows me to get a lot done, it frees up space and time. That would be terrific were I not the workaholic, and ultimately the tech addict, that I am. The space and time afforded, I fill with more work ... and more technology. It's a vicious circle ... and I enjoy it, which makes it all the more vicious. Good? Bad? You tell me...

^

Dominique Malaquais (Ph.D. Columbia University, New York City) is a scholar and writer. Her work focuses on intersections between emergent urban cultures, global, late capitalist market forces and political and economic violence in African cities. She has taught extensively in the United States (Columbia and Princeton Universities, Vassar, Trinity and Sarah Lawrence Colleges) and is currently based in France, where she holds the position of Senior Researcher at CNRS - The National Science Research Centre, Paris.

Dominique is the author of two books and numerous scholarly articles, as well as essays, poems and short stories in English, French and Spanish. She is Associate Editor of *Chimurenga* magazine (South Africa) and sits on the editorial board of the journal *Politique africaine* (France). In 2003-2004, she was invited to lead a team of nine artists, scholars and activists in an eighteen-month multinational, trans-disciplinary reflection process around themes and approaches to be addressed by the Africa Centre. In 2010 she was engaged with the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African-American Research, at Harvard University.



THE BLANK SHEET: ON BLOGGING, AND OTHER BOTHERATIONS (II)

.....

Kola made a few relevant edits to his earlier piece in Saraba #7. We felt it was apposite to re-publish the whole piece, so that nothing would be lost – so that everything would appear on the blank sheet.

– Publishers

^

Let me tell you about how and why I blog, in these few words.

Up one night trying desperately to write something, I think it was an article for a newspaper's travel section, I stared for a long time at my pen and the vain scrawling on my many sheets of paper littered around the room, and sighed. There were experimental paragraphs and words here and there but the beginning didn't fulfill the right opening I had desired so I stopped. This article wasn't going to be written tonight. To divert my attention to something else less complicated than brainstorming an opening for an article, I logged onto my blog hoping to get it updated. Ten minutes later, I had written a few paragraphs. I looked at what I had written, and decided that it was what I was looking for as an opening for the article, and so promptly copied it onto a Word page, and continued it there. Since a long time now, it had always been my best way of breaking writer's block: get on the computer and pretend to be starting a blog post. Most times, the blog posts would be published as blog posts. At other times, they would be transferred to another portal to be continued as a longer piece. This is one of my experiences as a writer and blogger, but it all started back ...

...when I was a young boy of seven in a big house with nothing at the time to show as talent beyond restlessness, and a pressing desire to write a story, a book, anything that could be produced by typing well formatted words on a typewriter. The catalysts were many: a really large house half completed with too much unused space on its first floor with nothing but wood, dust, corridor mazes and plenty hornet's nests to stare at endlessly; then books in every bedroom of different stages of ageing, different sizes, and different contents – from physics, biology and chemistry to poultry, health, politics, literature, and just some really insane collection of old Readers' Digests, Denis Robin's novels, and very many "holy" books of different faiths; and a rusty typewriter that lay in my father's living room, visible through the window pane. Eventually, I would sneak back into the room at night while I thought he was sleeping in order to make the typewriter mine by typing my own words out onto the sheets of paper that he'd left there. The noise would wake him, of course, and he would come to kick me out back to bed.

I grew up trying to live up to the dream sustained from those many childhood encounters. I had learned to type at around twelve, and to use the computer at around fifteen, and blogging conveniently stepped in to complete the circle after my graduation from the university. The first blog I started was in 2006 on the way out of the mental quandary of a post-NYSC year. I desperately needed a way to connect with the larger world before being boxed into the routine of day jobs so I started a blog as a means of expressing of frustrations, fascinations, facts and fictions of everyday life, and a way to keep myself busy, or distracted, as the case may be. I have kept a writing journal in some way or the other for a long time before then, but as soon as I began the relationship with the electronic medium, it became a one way street into its long enticing corridors. I would write and wait for responses from a mostly invisible audience. Yet I never knew while starting the blog that I would one day get to a point of writing something almost every day of the year for



loyal readers across geographical boundaries. All I wanted to do was just to explore a way to connect to a wider world from the corner of my room.

So then came the KTravula blog started when I was heading out to the United States in 2009 at the beginning of an exchange programme. I was going out of a home environment, and I needed something solid to hold on to. It was either going to be keeping a private journal or keeping a public blog. I chose the latter after a few conversations with friends, but at the time, I didn't think of myself as doing something spectacular. That feeling came later when I heard nice things about words that I had written in relative ease and playfulness. Conversely, it was also becoming a way for me to find a much needed discipline of writing every day of the year, even when I didn't have much to say. It became a means to direct the creative energy of every morning into something productive before heading out to make something else out of the day. And yet I've been told that the words published on the blog have influenced, stimulated and pleased even when all I had intended was, simply, to express. I think that this is true for many bloggers as well. One can only delight in the chance to be the medium for such connection. In my first blog post, I expressed my optimism for a journey into an unknown land, and a warm anticipation of whatever comes next. It was a moment of mixed emotions as I was about to take a new positive step into the future, a step that came at a cost of leaving behind family and friends. Of course the first post got no readers, as expected. I only told a friend of the existence of the blog the next day on my way to the airport.

One of the things that amazed me along the way about the power of the blog was the way it made me write. Every time I sat in front of a blank page and thought of a hundred people in different parts of the world waiting to read what I would write next, a writing force always seem to take over. It never ever takes long after I've opened a new page to begin a blog post before the post is done, whether or not I had an idea in mind previously. In that, I think it has made me a better, more diligent and definitely more confident writer. It gave me the discipline to call myself a writer although I'd written creatively before I started blogging. I still write for newspapers as a freelance journalist, and send my poems to journals for consideration, and I would never turn my back on traditional routes of publishing, but having a blog has put me on a different path of steady progress in the development of the writing craft. See it this way: if you ever want to be a writer, the best advice has always been simply "to write." Now it doesn't matter what. Consistency, craft and creativity will always define the length to which the self can go. There are no limits, but endless possibilities.

Some people sing. Some dance. Some act on the stage, and some play musical instruments. I do many of these things too. But I also write. Blogging is journalism, opinion, news, literature and public relation combined. I remember the feeling of exhilaration when Western Union halved their transfer fees in response to some scathing thing I had written accusing them of insensitivity to the crises situation in Jos. In another blog post about the Red Cross's arbitrary discrimination against blood donation from Nigerians or visitors to Nigeria in the United States, I laid bare the hypocrisy in pretending to care about human lives enough to ask for blood donation while rejecting a certain nation of people for reasons that don't hold enough water. Even though the Red Cross policy never got overturned, something I wrote about the account of my visit to the blood donation booth on campus became one of the most read articles of that period. Till date, I still get comments about it. In another case, I also remember getting many laughs from real-life friends from one old post about culture shock in the aisle of an American supermarket while looking for



toothpaste. Even to me, that was one hilarious encounter beautifully captured, and it was one of my shortest. Through the blog, I was also able to raise a few hundred dollars early in the year to send to the Red Cross in Jos who were working to rehabilitate the victims of the senseless killings.

Writing a few paragraphs every day of the year is rarely a genius act, but if each word from it tugs at the heartstrings of humanity and is capable of making a change, it is a victory for literature, and arts in general. It is an art form. The progress of the world today and the rise of electronic portals of information consumption forces to imagine a different kind of future. I won't be surprised if at a not so distant future, a Nobel Laureate is chosen who wrote only for electronic publications. In my case, my blog has now almost fully evolved into a travel writing portal and I have had tremendous fun visiting places and writing about them. I've been to the Abraham Lincoln burial site in Springfield Illinois, the Slavery Museum in Badagry Nigeria, the World War I Museum in Kansas City Missouri, the Winston Churchill Museum in Fulton Missouri, and the Washington Monument in Washington DC among very many others. There are several other places too in between that are too numerous to mention, and I intend to visit even more places all over the world. The response has also been tremendously positive, and I've been amazed by the number of people who return to the blog every day, even on days when I don't have anything new posted, to see what I'm thinking or writing about on that day. I guess that is how one becomes a famous world travel writer. Start small, remain consistent, be serious, explore opportunities, be adventurous, have an opinion and a focus, then write, write and write.

The downside of sharing oneself with an audience of mostly unknown readers is the possibility of sharing too much than needs to be shared within a sensible conversation and thus losing the innocence of one's private personality. I have weighed the risk along with the direction of the future in an electronic age, and promptly adjusted, deciding that it might be worth it. But if it were possible to create a link in – no, more than just the desire – the compulsion to write and share oneself with the world every day in a way that might perhaps enlighten or entertain, I would go as far back as look closely at that little boy of seven that I was, peeping through a window pane. The only difference is that now, I live beyond the constraints of a loud rusty typewriter in the dead of night.

–*Kola Tubosun*

^

Kola Tubosun is a writer and Fulbright Scholar. His travel articles, poems, and photographs have been published variously in Nigeria, Britain and in the United States. He lives in Edwardsville, Illinois and blogs at www.ktravula.com and tweets at <http://www.twitter.com/baroka>



THE SERIOUS GUIDE TO BECOMING A SERIOUSLY UNFASHIONABLE WRITER

A few months ago a co-worker drew me aside.

‘Wow! I didn’t know someone like you could write a story as deep as that. I even scrolled back to the top of the page to confirm that it was you,’ she adjusted the frame of her glasses as she spoke.

‘Really?’ I asked.

‘Yes *now*,’ she went on. ‘You know you visit all those fashion blogs everyday. And you’re...’ I could see her struggling to find the right word ‘trendy. Honestly I didn’t know you could write like that,’ she said with a belittling chuckle.

I stared at her too-white teeth and felt like shaking her. But I didn’t. However I did say something about not judging a book by its cover and how I wasn’t a fashion guru or a celebrity stalker – which may or may not be true depending on who is telling the story.

The relationship between literature and fashion is a precarious one. The globally accepted style for the African female writer is terribly bohemian; confined to dreadlocks, afros, turbans, conspicuous wooden bangles and ankle skimming ankara skirts. The average person will assume that you’re vain the minute they discover you love fashion. It’s okay to overindulge in chocolate, books, cars or exotic vacations. But if you love clothes or shoes you stand the risk of being regarded as an airhead.

After the last book reading I attended, I got home heavy headed from loud debates about why the theme of solitude ran through Márquez’s novels and whether or not Mario Llosa deserved the Nobel Prize in Literature. Then I took off my six inch heels and flung them away like a crumpled sheet of paper. And as I watched them sail across the room, I felt like crying. My towering heels had done nothing to hide the fact that I was a dilettante as far as literature was concerned.

In my quest to be published, I have received letter after letter of rejection and acceptance. Some of the editors who bothered to reply were kind enough to explain why my story wasn’t selected. So I got a lot of: ‘I don’t think you’ve found your voice’ even though I wasn’t aware that I had lost my voice and ‘I’m afraid we’ll have to pass on this one, your writing is a bit too plebeian for our taste’ even though they didn’t say what their preferred taste was.

I believe the best writers write well because they read widely. Many will argue that it is impossible for me to write like Cheever, Achebe and Hemmingway if *The Devil Wears Prada* and *Confessions of a Shopaholic* are some of my best books of the twenty first century. It hasn’t dawned on them that I do not want to write like Cheever and co. Or that while there are certain authors I enjoy reading, I am not fanatic enough to become their literary doppelgangers.

Take the bustling Lagos social scene on the other hand. Just wear a playsuit or a jumpsuit or a birthday suit, grab a pair of coloured contact lenses – preferably green or blue - and the mandatory twenty inch Peruvian weave. Then attend the right social gatherings, master the art of contrived air kissing, appear in *Scene and Be Seen* and voila! A fashionista is born. If you flip through the airbrushed pictures in newspaper fashion inserts, while you’ll find a potpourri of professionals, business men, socialites and actors, you’re not likely to find any author in there. How can you be regarded as a ‘serious’ writer when you live in rabid fear of being photographed in the same outfit twice? How can you claim to be



an ‘African’ writer when you’re smiling for the camera instead of telling the kind of stories that will bring us foreign aid?

I give up. It’s no use willing the god of fashion to win the god of literature. So, to appease the latter, I’ve written a handbook to help me look more like a writer:

1. My Jimmy Choos have got to go. It doesn’t matter that I starved for months just so I could buy them on sale. Bye bye Jimmy Choos, Welcome sensible, label-free shoes suitable for the black and white portrait on my dust jacket.
2. I’ve forfeited my sixteen inch Brazilian weave for a brand new dreadlocked diet. I’ve also cancelled my eyebrow waxing appointment at the Day Spa. If Frida Kahlo could grow a unibrow, so can I.
3. My parents do not exist. But when I become a famous, critically acclaimed author they will appear. My mother will write a tell-all autobiography revealing that my baby doll was named Twiggy, not Amelia Jane like I claim and I’ll sue her.
4. My Estee Lauder Lipstick in Extravagant Red has gone AWOL. So has my Benefit Bad Girl Eyeliner. Swipe by swipe I’ve stripped my face clean of makeup. Now it’s easier for me to go about with the pained expression befitting for the heavy themes in my stories.
5. Sophie who? Marian who? Sorry, never heard of them. I am a serious writer who only reads serious, prize winning authors. I ordered Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom* from Amazon even though I still haven’t been able to get past page ten after a month. But I’m making progress.
6. It’s official. CNN is now my favourite TV channel. Who knew that *Inside Africa* presented such an inside view of Africa? Sure I’ll miss the Kardashians’ antics and Joan Rivers’ creative insults but whoever said a writer’s life is easy?
7. No more *Le Petit Marche*. No more *Sexy et Fabuleaux*. My GTB MasterCard lies frozen in my deep freezer. Note to self: remember, *Labyrinths* is Christopher Okigbo’s poetry collection, not the latest fragrance by Guerlain.
8. I’ll attend every edition of the BookJam at Silverbird even though I’m clueless about the guest authors. Never mind the time I mistook Chinweizu for a deity. I’ll blurt out Jhumpa Lahiri, not Carrie Bradshaw, when I’m asked who my favourite author is.
9. I’ll stop harassing my vendor for copies of *élan* and *ThisDay Style* every Sunday. I’ll get rid of the ceiling-high pile of *French Vogue* and *Italian Elle* in my bedroom. From this day forward, I do solemnly swear to read Okike, Granta and *The New Yorker*.
10. Public Notice: massive DVD auction of the complete seasons of *Sex and the City*, *Gossip Girl* and *Ugly Betty* going...going...gone!

If I still don’t bear any resemblance to a writer after following these rules, I’ll quietly relocate to another planet. Until then, I’ll just keep doing what I love to do most. Write.

— *Suzanne Ushie*

^

Suzanne Ushie’s short stories have appeared in print and online publications like *African Writer*, *Sentinel Nigeria* and *Open Wide Magazine*. She participated in the Farafina Creative Writing Workshop in 2008 and the British Council’s Talent Is Not Enough Programme in 2009. When she isn’t daydreaming about seeing her unwritten book on the New York Times Bestseller List, she reads, tweets and watches movies. She lives in Lagos, Nigeria.



A NEW LITERARINESS

'Saraba' is an online literary magazine created and published by Emmanuel Iduma and Damilola Ajayi, two students from the University of Ife, in Nigeria. Saraba has just published its sixth edition in just 18 months and has gone from strength to strength. There are a number of Nigerian-run literary blogs such as 'Bookaholic', and 'Wordsbody' by Molara Wood as well as websites like 'Sentinel Nigeria', and 'Nigeria Fiction'. But 'Saraba', for my mind, remains the most comprehensive and progressive literary journal, with the potential to move well beyond Nigeria. It is a work of the heart with very little funding and my hope is this short interview will encourage readers to support Emmanuel and Damilola in their work.

—Sokari Ekine (23 September 2010)

SOKARI EKINE: *Lets start with some background on how you came about the idea of Saraba. When and why did you imagine you could put together a literary magazine? Did you decide alone or did you have a series of conversations with friends? How long was it from the idea to publishing the first issue? How did you cover the costs?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: The idea of Saraba was born after a Colloquium of New Writing I organised alongside two friends, in late 2008 at Obafemi Awolowo University where we school and reside. So, basically, in late 2008, dissatisfied and disenchanted with the loads of rejection mails we were receiving, Damilola and myself felt we could start an electronic magazine with little or no sensibility and with support from emerging writers.

Of course, we had to immediately define 'emerging writers', and we took the phrase to mean young (or old) writers who have been published little or not at all, but whose writing showed promise and talent. This definition was necessarily from the viewpoint of ourselves and our writing, since we could be described as such writers.

The time between the decision to begin and our first issue was about three months – November 2008 to February 2009. We started by assembling a team of enthusiasts like ourselves – Ayobami Omobolanle, Itunu Akande and Dolapo Amusan. Dolapo was the technical guy, who helped design the first website. We got this at no cost. The cost of hosting the site was borne by myself and Damilola from savings.

What was most important was the drive. We were inexperienced with literary publishing. In fact, we felt so bad about our first issue that we had to re-issue it in September 2009.

SOKARI EKINE: *Why did you feel so bad?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: Well, we felt dissatisfied with the standard of the issue, especially because at that time we had begun to read other electronic literary magazines. The hyperactivity and exuberance that had greeted our first publication soon dwindled because, suddenly, we realized we had work to do, and that we were novices. 'Professional novices', I'd like to say. Also we did not know what it meant to distribute an online literary magazine. We just felt we could put it on the site without getting to the readers. By the time the second issue was to be published we had only one or two submissions. I think this was because we didn't communicate with writers who had submitted to the first issue. We didn't write them acceptance or rejection letters but just put their work on the site.



SOKARI EKINE: *But you have learned from that now. I know you have a proper structured submission process on your site.*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: Yes we do.

SOKARI EKINE: *You mentioned you were at university. Are you studying anything literature-related?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: No. I am studying law and Damilola is studying medicine.

SOKARI EKINE: *When did you discover that you had a love of literature and when did you begin to read seriously? Did you read much as a young child? If so, what did you read?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: Yes, I started reading quite early – say about eight [years old] – because my dad had a huge library of theological and philosophical books. I didn't read them, in the sense of reading. I simply glanced at their covers. Up until today I can tell the titles of most of my dad's books. When I began to have the idea that I wanted to write, I started reading novels. Mostly Nigerian. I read a lot of romance too at that point.

SOKARI EKINE: *Can you name just a few?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: I started by reading all of Achebe that I could find. Then the Christian romance series 'Heartsong', and the 'Left Behind' series by Tim Lahaye and Jerry Jenkins. Then John Grisham, John D. McDonald, Orson Scott Card, Michael Crichton, and so forth. Afterwards, in 2006, I started to read the kind of books I thought I wanted to write: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Richard Wright, Umberto Eco, Helon Habila, Salman Rushdie, Isabel Allende, Orhan Pamuk. Well, the list is endless. I acquire new books every month.

SOKARI EKINE: *What has been the response and support from established Nigerian writers, the new crop of writers and poets, from the arts in general and, of course, the general public? Do you think there is a need for this or even more Sarabas?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: On established writers, the response has not been kind of minimal. Yet, it's better than when we started. The first 'established' writer to support us was Jumoke Verissimo, our first guest editor, then Uche Peter Umez, then Jude Dibia, Tolu Ogunlesi, Eghosa Imasuen, and Lola Shoneyin. Yet, I think there's a need for us to try harder with getting the support of established writers, whose support would go a long way in increasing our respectability.

The new crop of writers and poets is our biggest asset. By this I mean that the response has been overwhelming. At present, we have published or are going to publish writers from India, Botswana, Malawi, the U.K., South Africa, Ghana, Turkey, Paris, etc. This is aside from the numerous writers in Nigeria we have already published. It's interesting because we feel unstarted, and being in school means we might have achieved more if 'Saraba' was done full-time.

The general public, well, [it] knows little or nothing about 'Saraba'. I assume the general public in this context means readers. I can safely say there's little known about 'Saraba', and the goodwill we enjoy comes mostly from writers and literary enthusiasts. This is no



fault of theirs. We have not exactly done good publicity, owing to schoolwork and financial constraints.

Of course, more Sarabas would be useful. The caveat in this regard would be that I hope more Sarabas would attempt to have a signature of their own. The market should not be laden with efforts that are only replicas of existing ones. What 'Saraba' has tried to do is have a signature of its own, separate and distinct from existing efforts. Anyway, I am open to any new Saraba, for I think we need to do this – to take our literary destiny into our hands.

SOKARI EKINE: *As the publisher of one of the few Nigerian literary magazines, what do you see your role (to be) and what is your impression of the calibre of new writings coming out of Nigeria, West Africa and the continent?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: My role is simple. I do not want to be looked upon as a messiah of some sort, but a young man with love for the literary arts. Again, as a preliminary remark, I'd like to add that it is somewhat difficult and demanding to give perfect and equal attention to writing and publishing. They are two roles that I think should not be fused. But increasingly, we find that we must make exceptions. And I think my life is that exception! I think we can have a conversation on the role of a writer as a publisher.

If I have any role, let it be one that has a definitive outlook. I desire to create a forum, a hub of expression, without limitation as to status or achievement in literary circles. As such, I wish to help create a symphony of simplicity and ambition, a place where writers meet unashamed, and well, without restraint.

I'd talk about calibre [from] two angles. The first angle is simpler. I think good writing is coming out of Nigeria, and many agree, so I don't need to spend time on this. The second angle is that I find many new writers seeking to conform to certain standards, or viewpoints, set and shared by newly established writers. Many seem to define good writing by the achievement of others, and feel that certain sensibilities must be reflected in a work before it achieves merit. I've had conversations with several of my peers and I feel this is a major challenge; and I also feel it is cautionable. The calibre of any writer's writing is self-defined, and such feet-licking is highly destructive. I think a writer is to define his ambition himself; whether he gets there or not is left to no one's judgment, but his [own].

SOKARI EKINE: *Nigeria has a growing publishing scene with Cassava Republic and Farafina being the most known. Is there a danger of these becoming the spokespersons for Nigerian literature and acting as the entry points for new writers in the same way that the established European publishers have in the past?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: I feel the need to extricate the issues, and you might want us to consider them separately. First, whether these publishing houses can become spokespersons for Nigerian literature is not a question of sentiment, but of fact. The facts that make this a reality outweigh the facts that do not. For one, these houses seem to have entered a market that is disfavoured – a forgotten market. It becomes necessary that they assert their presence – publish the writers they want to, whose writing would publicise the publishing houses. As such, it is easy for them to dictate to Nigerian literature.

Whether they do so rightly or not is another issue. I mean, look at what Farafina has done



with Adichie. They have literally told us that she's an Amazon, and fed us with what to imagine about her and her writing. I think this is only incidental to the fact that they came into the Nigerian literary industry at the time they did. They have to stay in business. But if this position remains the same after a decade, then they would have done worse to Nigerian industry than the military dictatorship.

The second issue is whether they have (or can) become an entry point for new writers. I assume new writers in this context relates directly to new Nigerian writers. This is more of a subjective issue. One, it is highly dependent on their structure, tenacity and commitment to new writing. Since 2004 when Farafina became prominent, this has not exactly been the case. New homegrown writers published by Farafina and Cassava Republic, if any, have not been accorded the same respectability and assiduousness accorded to writers who are 'West-grown.' This is only, as I said earlier, incidental. The risk is enormous.

But, that said, it is only unfortunate that these publishers are unwilling to take the risk to promote homegrown writing. We are not talking here about workshops or events, we are talking about books and what makes a book successful. I wish these houses would commit their resources to finding new talent, getting manuscripts and publishing them. Ambition is risky; mediocrity is safe. These publishers, in my opinion, have been mediocre. We support what they are doing, with caution, only with the hope that they become ambitious. A book might fail, but not all books would fail in the market, eventually. And yes, they seem to assert their 'literary right' to serve as entry points. Can we blame them?

SOKARI EKINE: *Over the past few years there have been regular writers workshops run by well-known writers such as Adichie all of which aim, encourage and support writers. Last year you attended the Word Into Art Into Africa (WiAiA) workshop in Lagos run by SPARCK. However as we both know, for example, from our joint SPARCK experience, you as participant and myself as one of the facilitators, that there are serious problems with these kind of events – not just during the workshops themselves but what happens to the writer afterwards. What are you left with? Or rather, what should they be left with?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: Every workshop, in whatever capacity it is organised, should leave a young writer with the temerity and ambition to write. I use 'temerity' because young writers like me are generally faced with the challenge of being overwhelmed by the market, by the success of established writers and the failures of some; by the question of publishing, and the question of the essence of writing.

In a workshop, however, the young writer is told that he can write, that there is no such thing as a writer who does not know how to write; he is encouraged. He is therefore left with courage, determination, and in some cases, dissidence. Of course, his reasserted courage is directly proportional to his ambition. If he can be encouraged, his ambition soars.

These are the two-fold essentials that I am left with after every workshop I attend. It might not have a universal appeal. But I think they should, and organisers of workshops should direct their attention to them.

We must question and address the aim of these workshops. I do not propose superficial questions, which would produce superficial answers. Instead I propose questions that linger, such as the post-workshop experience, and the sincerity of the organisers. We must also question the mode of selection. If you want to train writers, do not anticipate made



writers. Isn't it possible to have workshops where writers are selected on the basis of their work on the internet, and pre-recognition? Writing samples (800 words, for instance) appears to me as restrictive. For example, being selected for the WiAiA workshop was proof that 800 words do not express my talent. And I know many others with such experience. In the end, persons who get chosen for 800-word-workshops seem to be those with 'short' interest in writing. This is as far as I can get.

Residing on a university campus, I understand how unfulfilling it can be for writers to have no support for their writing. Almost all, if not all, campuses in Nigeria are guilty. There is no support, to the extent that I know, for literature in Nigerian universities. There are stultifying literary courses which, most of the time, are outdated, inundated with retrogressive and unenthusiastic tutors.

If I had sought inspiration from my university's literary indulgence, I would have stopped writing a long time ago. In school however, we took our destinies into our hands, organised workshops, wrote on wooden boards, found peers who shared our passion. Our university does not notice, has not attempted to appreciate our efforts. It is disheartening. But when I consider that nothing in our educational system has been 'heartening' I am somewhat consoled.

SOKARI EKINE: *Recently you started a long discussion on Facebook following your comment on literary tyranny – whether we mortal souls have the right or dare to critique well known writers such as Adichie. Could you expand on what you were alluding to and why you think this is important?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: Although you have given the short note a new twist, which was not what I intended, let me see if I can attempt an explanation.

I do not presume that we do not have the right to question such writers as Adichie. I was attempting a sarcastic rendering of how I felt about how she's been handled, by the majority of her admirers, and what this holds for the literary landscape well after she's gone from the scene. My consideration of this was from the lenses of her book, by which I did not exactly feel overawed. I have reservations on the book, which I think is too sentimental to be clearly written. I must say, however, that I respect her craft, her talent. It has never been a question for me.

But in talking about literary tyranny (although it seems the word was not carefully chosen), I meant that it appears Adichie is being considered an icon that cannot be critiqued, a person of whom all talk about must be in praise. I am against this. We are humans first, and then writers. No one writes a perfect book since no one is a perfect individual. If we continue in this manner, the tyranny I perceive is that we would all be shut up and fed trash. Good, she has written good books, her stories are great, but it does not mean that when we have a grouse with what she has written, we should remain silent.

I say this because I perceive the general feeling is that she is too good to a fault; even those who have not set their eyes on her books think this! She is a writer, and we measure her by her books, not her face or the appeal that Farafina, for one, has managed to attach to her name and personality. This is the tyranny I speak about. It's nothing personal, I assure you. I do not, as my senior peer Eghosa Imasuen tried to suggest on the note, begrudge the artist her success. It is deserved (although I am not sure – I have no personal rapport with her).



When I grow up I want to be like her! But the note seemed to show the fact that we must talk about what we have to talk about, and defend it thoroughly.

SOKARI EKINE: *When it comes to awards and prizes, Nigerian writers rely on those given by foreigners. Why do you think we do not have say an Achebe or Amos Tutuola award for literature?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: I cannot say. I think, however, that it appears we lack the temerity to do so. But you know, prizes are emerging. I appreciate the work of Myne Whitman, of ANA, JLF and so forth. The fact is that prizes come last. We are still in the stage of re-developing our craft, our 'literariness.' 'Saraba' would institute a prize, I'm certain. We should take our time on prizes. They are too sensitive – see what has happened with the NLNG Prize [Nigeria Prize for Literature]..

On prizes given by foreigners, I can say nothing! I have no facts.

In sum, we need our own prizes because we have our own writing and sensibilities, separate and distinct from the foreign.

SOKARI EKINE: *So where next for you, Emmanuel and for 'Saraba'? You have hinted at the possibility of instituting a prize sometime in the future and expanding the magazine to include writers from across the continent. I want to return to your first anniversary (Issue 4) in which you reflect on the first year. You titled the piece, 'A short history of modern fools.' You start off by saying you are not fools, then completely contradict yourself by saying maybe you are. Which are you? Or are you neither?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: Of course, the contradiction was intended. Looking back, I felt we had done so much without experience. But I suddenly realised that experience was gotten on the job. I stand by my affirmation that we are modern fools, because it seemed to me that sometimes we acted too spontaneously, without thinking. I'm sure, albeit, that we've done all passionately, without once being limited by resources and experience.

That said, the future is hazy, although daily clarity is bestowed upon us. There's no plan to institute a prize just yet. But we hope to increase awareness and public knowledge about 'Saraba'. Although we are constrained by financial wherewithal, which sometimes affects how soon we upload a new issue, we are more concerned with increasing awareness than making profit. Profiteering is something we are taking our time to plan and prepare for. We hope to go commercial by this time in 2011.

For me, the road is long. I feel small, too small. I'd have my degree in October, in Law, and proceed to the Nigerian Law School. During this period I hope to complete a novel – hopefully! Ah, I cannot say much, I can only say I know I want to write. As much as possible, I'd also try to avoid the public fora. Sometimes, it seems deafening. And who wants to be deafened?

SOKARI EKINE: *I read your poem 'Dream Machine.' We all have dreams but the distance between the dream and realizing the dream is often long and hard. Why do you think you have succeeded in your attempt to create a space in Nigeria's/ Africa's literary landscape? What have you and your partner Damilola got that makes 'Saraba' work?*

EMMANUEL IDUMA: I cannot call what we have success. It is too early for that. What we have might only be an attempt, and if we have succeeded in this attempt, fine. I must



however add that it seems we have a space in the Nigerian/African literary landscape. It was gladdening to us when Akin Ajayi included 'Saraba' on The Guardian's website as one of the three prominent literary journals (in Africa). Such recognition meant that there was a Saraba that could be referred to; for that we are grateful.

If I must speak about qualities, I'd prefer to speak about Damilola. Partnerships, today, would often fail for conflict of ideas and whims. There has been nothing like that. Damilola has given me the room to make 'Saraba', and I hope I've given him room, too. It's amazing that we've never had an argument in almost two years, even as friends. This essential quality – simplicity – is well known to me as the secret of progress. Even more amazingly, Damilola thinks we have not begun, and he says this so often that I feel idle and of no use. Of course, it's his tenacity and energy that I admire the most.

First published on Sokari's blog: www.blacklooks.org, and then on Pambazuka (www.pambazuka.org)



THE IDEAL HUSBAND

Resistance is a form of collaboration

I

For three quarts of blood
the brain and perineum are
unequal bulbs
in an unfair hourglass

When it goes down
perish the thought
only a pump can send it up
and it takes effort
to turn things upside down

We were young; we were dumb
but we had heart

If only we had cancer
of sadocells
in a masochistic body

Let her add on the name of another man
to the name of an older man
the length is a statement
of carbon atoms
of the protein patriarchy

II

Sauce for the goose
is not sauce for the prepuce
is it?

And lobotomy, is it circumcision?
No, not the pudenda

It is in the brain
or where are we similar?

— *Adebisi Olusolape*

^

Adebisi Olusolape is a journeyman collagist engaged in the search for mastery. He is Saraba's poetry editor and lives in Ibadan, but is oftentimes in Lagos and Abuja.



A QUESTION OF DAMILOLA AJAYI

Those who have shared moments with Mr. Ajayi agree that he is infectious. It is not his ebullient mind or his love for Harp that allures. I do not know what it is.

If you have spent time with Mr. Ajayi you would find that he is alluring for no exact reason; his charm is fixed to inexhaustible parameters.

In seeking to review his poetry, he argued that he had no body of work. Ajayi Kolade quickly responded in my favour, noting that what I sought to do was akin to what Pius Adesanmi has called “anthem poetry” whereby a single poem can stand for social, political, religious and moral considerations.

But I discovered that it would be restrictive, somewhat, to consider Ajayi’s poetry in terms of his works alone. It would be best, in my thinking, to consider what I’ve witnessed about his creative process. And to see if there’re poems that illustrate my speculations.

A Question of Ajayi would begin from what I’ve called his inexhaustible contemporariness. Thus, in “Love Songs III” he writes,

“Your breath is the podcast
of what transpired when D.J. Nature
auditioned at Glitz Nightclub.”

And in “Calling Credit” (in Saraba #7):

“...I poked my mum last night,
a good evening on Facebook;
she returned a buzz on Gtalk,
then I sent Ebay to the market
to fetch me vegetables.”

This might be called ‘designer poetry.’ No thanks to Olusolape. But beyond this, when we look back at our generation of (Nigerian) writing, we might find Ajayi giving poetry in the language of our age. His poetry, thus, is “even here and now.” Such that in Graffiti, written for a Doctor who passed on in damnable circumstances, he writes, (in IfeMed Journal)

“The Corpse from the expressway
Came in the boot of a police car,
Yes he did.”

And in reference to this, Tade Ipadeola says his poetry tells us what it means to be human. I know Ajayi and Olusolape might argue that my poetry tells what it means to be ultra-human! But each Ajayi poem is like a voice in the traffic jam, speaking the language of Blackberry/Ipod users, and everyone who cares to become existent in a world that denies existence.

So, we find him dipped in social realities. He emerges unscathed for now. He writes that “A housewife’s most prized anatomy/Is her back./It plays roles -



implicit, explicit./ in “Domesticated Couplets”; “So tell me of a tomorrow/different from today,/Of facilities lurking in/The eaves of midnight./Of flurry and encomium/Poured from gourds of integrity/Into paper cups for the masses” in “Diagnosis.” Social realism is hallmarked in his ode to Gani: “Today, our flag must/Droop. It must refuse/To flutter, even at half-mast.”

A final consideration would be his “Clinical Blues” a series published on African Writer. In thinking about his influences, given the stature and prolificity of the poems, I have much regard for a gentleman who transformed his discipline into a subject matter for artistic dialogue.

He declares ambitiously,
 “I am a lonesome observer,
 the clinical sentinel
 who sits still to wage
 wars against infirmities” (I)

And then you hear the voice of an insider, one who knows the travails of his colleagues:

“I know clinical heavens
 Where the hopes of doctors
 Levitate when they die.”

There is no end to a consideration of Ajayi. For as our world evolves, giving us new language (Tweet, Ping, Pique, Poke), Damilola Ajayi would evolve too.

He would confer art upon our normalcy. We'd stand naked and bare, awaiting the hush of his breath, and the definition of our lives.

He once said to me, “You are great. Like Ife.” But, I say to him today, “You are as great as Ile-Ife and greater.”

May his head remain larger than an open hole. May he always remain with us, forging, working, and interpreting.

—*Emmanuel Iduma*

^



BOOKS OF THE YEAR (2010)

When a book speaks to me personally and I find myself savouring the words and phrases, I say this is a book which I need to keep close to my heart, one which I will walk with. These are two such books.

Migritude by Kenyan activist and performance poet, Shailja Patel: A gendered personal memoir woven alongside a historical critique of colonialism and a call for social and economic justice in the present. Beautifully written with words that dance and sing.

Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work by Haitian American writer, Edwidge Danticat: A collection of essays on the Haitian condition and the responsibility of the artist to speak to truth. Without being confrontational, Danticat's words, like Shailja's, sing and dance along with resilience and resistance. And in the face of unspeakable brutality, remind us that we must all bear witness.

— *Sokari Ekine*

My best books in 2010 are (where shall I start from?) Alice Walker's *By the Light of My Father's Smile* and Niyi Osundare's collection of Poems *The Word is an Egg*.

— *Oyindamola Olofinlua*

Toni Kan's *Songs of Despair and Loneliness* and Jumoke Verrisimo's *I am Memory*. I know they are 2009 books but they stayed with me throughout 2010.

— *Kafayat Quadri*

I Do Not Come To You By Chance by Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani: If you ever saw a girl reading this book in say, a supermarket, and laughing, it might just have been me. After reading it, I harassed all my friends until they read it too. Adaobi's style is unique – chick lit that is yet literary. I don't know how she does it. But one thing I do know is that it works for me.

Her Fearful Symmetry by Audrey Niffenegger: After a staggering debut like *The Time Traveler's Wife*, it must have been hard to live up to expectations; but Niffenegger did. The book begins slowly until subtly, the quirky characters bring the silent sheets to life. The complex plot is handled deftly, giving the story a haunting, believable quality. I enjoyed this book.

— *Suzanne Ushie*

I think it was Kate Chopin's 1899 book, *The Awakening* that first caught my attention. What intrigued me, however, was the assertiveness of the prose, the sublime telling of the universality of feminine love, triumph, and failure.

Then, Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* was spectacular. This is a book with many signs and symbols inscribed in the heroic villainy of three women – Brown should take a lesson in symbols! The story establishes how weighty grief is, the depth and depthlessness of friendship, and the extraordinariness of the life of coming-of-age women.

— *Emmanuel Iduma*



4 GOODWILLS

Saraba Magazine represents a beacon of hope for the literary life of this “unreading” generation. Saraba, for me, is a revelation of the bright future that beams large for Nigeria in spite of all the negativity that abounds. I particularly love the fact that Saraba is a platform where writers with different styles of writing are “umbrella-ed.”

— *Oyindamola Olofinlua*

Saraba is a wonderful initiative. It is a breath of fresh air. Keep the flag flying.

— *Kafayat Quadri*

Saraba, to me, is a blend of art, poetry and fiction in a brave, distinct way. While I’m easily a fan of its diverse content, I find the illustrations comforting after reading lines and lines of text. So, here’s to many more great editions – where hopefully I’ll be published again – of Saraba.

— *Suzanne Ushie*

Saraba, once domiciled with us in associative propinquity, now rides on the wings of an electronic portal conveying the purveyors’ (the bard and the playwright, the reporter and the literary critic and such) purview in beaded, artistic, concrete, concise, objective, fair and reality a la journalese.

— *Samson Ademola*



WRITING THE FASHION ISSUE

Suzanne Ushie has given us a template – we wish to negotiate perpetual concerns that intersect between our sense of fashion and our humanness. This intersection, like Ushie has written, might be as diverse as our literariness, our family life, our economy, and all the other possible features that could be envisaged.

We want fashion, in Saraba #8, to become a visage – a human face. The human life is as fashionable as it is not, and this stems from a range of possibilities; including clothing, media, entertainment, internet technology, feminism, masculinity, law, and so forth. It is the endless possibilities of fashion that we wish to engage in discourse.

So send us everything you think conforms to this theme. Our agenda is short. Yet we hope our discourse would be extensive and detailed. Send submissions through our online submission system on Submishmash. Please include your bio in the body of your work. As usual, we shall be publishing content that does not conform to the theme. But note that our quota tilts in the favour of theme-compliant submissions.

Your expression can be in genres as diverse as photography, illustrations, as well as the traditional fiction and poetry. See www.sarabamag.com/submissions for general guidelines.

Deadline is March 1, 2011.

—*Publishers*



ALL THE ISSUES & CONTRIBUTORS (2010)

^ #5: The (Niger) Delta Issue (*March 2010*)

In the Publishers' Note, we wrote: "We are no heroes. The heroes of the Niger Delta are slain martyrs, their blood spilled in dark waters. The masses, their livelihood frittered into oily creeks. Ours is to reproduce their echoes and let it resonate through cyberspace. We are giving them back their voices and lending ours too. We are creating unending voices." Yet, we took the risk to publish the works of Adebisi Olusolape, Amanda Epe, Damilola Ajayi, Ekiko Ita, 'Emeka Iduma, Emmanuel Iduma, Eromo Egbejule, Felix Orisewike Sylvanus, Kaine Agari, Kara Mukoena, Lawal Opeyemi, Niran Okewole, Nwilo Bura-Buri Vincent, Sokari Ekine, Tade Ipadeola, Temitayo Olofinlua, Tobi Aso, and Uche Peter Umez. The rich blend of writing about persecution, activism, hope and social change – via creative models – makes the issue one of our most successful to date.

^ Voices on the Four Winds – Poetry Chapbook (*April 2010*)

In Olusolape's introduction to the Chapbook, he wrote: "It might seem a cross-purpose that an institution with an aim to create unending voices produces in its third anthology of poetry, titled *Voices on the Four Winds*, a collage of surrealistic illustrations and verse from all over the globe. This is akin to a troubadour creating through the technique of appliqué a tapestry which becomes a grail for posterity."

To further assert the quality of this Chapbook, which brought together poets from four continents, Jumoke Verrisimo in her online-only introduction, wrote: "The mathematical precision of poems per poet in this third edition of Saraba's chapbook gives it the character of the wind—speed and direction. There are eighteen poems, three each, from six poets across the globe. The poets in this edition move us into their world, our world. And though I may not be able to decide in absoluteness the thematic and structural preferences of the poets in this collection, I can ascertain that despite the variation in themes, individually and collectively, the poems in this chapbook are capable of springing surprises, as well as communicating valid emotional truth to the reader."

The poets were: Richard Ugbede Ali (Nigeria), Azadeh K. Taj (UK), Olalekan Ilesanmi (Nigeria), Jayanathi Manoj (India), Kyle Hemmings (USA), and Benson Eluma (Nigeria). The Guest Illustrator was Danijel Zezelj (New York).

^ #6: The God Issue (*June 2010*)

As a postscript to the Publisher's Note, we state the following, simple yet profound: "We could not define God. Our trial was our error." To tackle this fact, we collected works from writers working in the field of journalism (Yazeed Kamaldien), travel writing (Pelu Awofeso; from writers in faraway places like India (Ram Govardhan), Malawi (Dango Mkandawire) and U.S.A (Mike Berger). Other works were provided by the highly celebrated Tolu Ogunlesi, Kola Tubosun, Ivor W. Hartman (in conversation with Tubosun), Chinelo Onwualu, Ekweremadu Franklin Uchenna, Emmanuel Iduma, Damilola Ajayi, Olalekan Ilesanmi, and Oluwafisayo Awi.



^ Giovanni's New Room – Poetry Chapbook (September 2010)

Arguably our best poetry chapbook to date, this chapbook themed on love. Unoma Azuah writes in the blurb that the Chapbook "...has a touch of magic. It is a compelling read." For Damian Kelleher, "These authors capture the universal aspect of the emotion while retaining a specificity that is purely theirs; the poems drip with local colour while continuing the long literary tradition of poetry as a method for communicating the irregular beating of the heart." And for Tolu Ogunlesi, "Giovanni's New Room may or may not have anything to do with the old. I suspect it doesn't. It does."

The chapbook featured the (love) poems of Dadepo Aderemi, Zino Asalor, Uche Peter Umez, Adebola Rayo, Dami Ajayi, Emmanuel Iduma, Olubunmi Ajayi, Akin Leo Akinwumi, and Numero Unoma. The surrealist art of Chris Bianchi added a distinctive flavour to the collection.

^ #7: The Tech(nology) Issue (November/December 2010)

In a period that brought change for us, we published an issue that explored the ever transient face (phase) of technology. In this issue, we declared that "We think of technology as a basket of broken eggs, which must hatch into chicks. Our contemplation is that we must accept disadvantage as advantage, that we must lead ourselves into a den of a lion, and sleep close to its mane." To achieve this, we solicited for memoirs, short stories, poems and new journalism. Interestingly, the response was as diverse and international as the theme itself – 'Yemi Soneye (*Nigeria/Poetry*), Vladimir Gerasimov (*Russia/Interviewed by E. Iduma*), Unoma Azuah (*USA/Memoir*), Uche Uwadinachi (*Nigeria/Poetry*), Sylva Nze Ifedigbo (*Nigeria/Fiction*), Sokari Ekine (*USA/New Journalism & Memoir*), Dr. Rosetta Codling (*USA/Critical Essay*), Ram Govardhan (*India/Fiction*), Omale Abdul-Jabbar (*Nigeria/Fiction*), Olusola Akinwale (*Nigeria/Poetry*), Nancy A. Caldwell (*USA/Fiction*), Myne Whitman (*USA/Memoir*), Mark Olalekan Lalude (*Nigeria/Poetry*), Kola Tubosun (*USA/Memoir*), Emmanuel Iduma (*Nigeria/Poetry & Short Fiction*), Deji Toye (*Nigeria/Poetry & Fiction*), Damilola Ajayi (*Nigeria/Poetry*), Chiedu Ifeozo (*Nigeria/Essay*), and Adebisi Olusolape (*Nigeria/Flash Fiction*).

You can download all these issues free from our website.

Our Free Issues would expire in the course of the year. Get yours.



THANK YOU NOTE

.....

The following is an incomplete list, ordered without priority.

In our second year, things did not happen so fast. Travails and triumphs came to us slowly. Yet, the desire to match slow-paced action with responsibility – obligation with difficulty – set for us the standard for 2010. Compiling a list of those individuals and organizations that defined our obligation is therefore imperative.

- ^ Of course, all contributors
- ^ All subscribers
- ^ Gbenga Sesan/ PIN Nigeria
- ^ Sokari Ekine/Black Looks
- ^ Richard Ali
- ^ Dominique Malaquais
- ^ Dr. Kim Stone
- ^ Dr. Rosetta Codling
- ^ Unoma Azuah
- ^ Tolu Ogunlesi
- ^ Unoma Giese
- ^ Kola Tubosun
- ^ Abimbola Odeleye
- ^ Temitope Adepetu
- ^ Opeyemi Awoyemi
- ^ Tosin Afolabi
- ^ Pambazuka
- ^ SPARCK
- ^ Myne Whitman
- ^ Chuma Nwokolo
- ^ Qudus Onikeku
- ^ Sola Osofisan
- ^ Ivor W. Hartman
- ^ Vladimir Gerasimov
- ^ Danijel Zezelj
- ^ Bisola Binuyo
- ^ Olamide E. Okeleji
- ^ Ife Medical Journal
- ^ Tade Ipadeola
- ^ Niran Okewole
- ^ Lola Shoneyin
- ^ Eghosa Imasuen
- ^ Joe Agbro/ The Nation Newspapers
- ^ Deji Teye
- ^ Jumoke Verrissimo
- ^ Jon Claytor
- ^ Damien Kelleher
- ^ Folashade Adejumo
- ^ Olaniran Osotuyi
- ^ Ennovate Nigeria
- ^ Ifeh Agbonmire
- ^ Jude Dibia
- ^ 234Next
- ^ Others too numerous
- ^ You



Saraba is published three to four times a year by *Iroko Publishers* on www.sarabamag.com. Copyright is held by Saraba Electronic Publishers and individual authors and artists of work published herein. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is strictly prohibited. Enquiries for reproduction can be directed to sarabamag@gmail.com. Interested contributors can visit the website for full submission guidelines for the electronic magazine and chapbooks. The views expressed by contributors are those of the authors and not necessarily those of *Saraba Magazine*.

The Illustrations published herein are those of Illa Amudi and published with permission. All rights reserved.

This issue is published on A4.

^ *Publishers*

Emmanuel Iduma & Damilola Ajayi

^ *Poetry Editor*

Adebisi Olusolape

^ *Fiction Editor*

Arthur Anyaduba

^ *Non-Fiction Editor*

Temitayo Olofinlua

^ *Online Editor*

Ayobami Famurewa

^ *Design*

Illa Amudi

illa.amudi@gmail.com

^ *Website*

Ope Awoyemi

Ennovate Nigeria

^ *Contact*

ph: +234 (0) 806 005 0835

+234 (0) 806 703 3738

e: sarabamag@gmail.com

w: www.sarabamag.com

www.facebook.com/sarabamag

www.twitter.com/sarabamag

Issuu.com, Scribd.com, 4shared.com

Creating unending voices ^

Saraba is created to serve as a hub that stimulates young emerging writers and artists to creative intellectual activities beyond known capacities.