

Odun Balogun, *Adjusted Lives*, (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 1995) pp. 114.

This collection of stories is by a literary critic who has made an extensive study of the form of short stories. Thus, Odun Balogun brings to bear on the narration of these stories a reasonable critical insight, a measure of interesting scholarship and an effective imagination. These three elements are important in these stories as this critical insight enables the author to prune his technique; the scholarship clearly influences his vision and, of course, his imagination takes the stories beyond the basic cultural, social or economic aspects of the theme of adjustment at the center of the work.

These stories could be perceived in one sense as a critic's response to the snide remark that critics are failed writers. At the same time it is an illustration of those literary elements that have fascinated Odun Balogun throughout his career. These stories have been successful with the critics; *Adjusted Lives* was awarded the Association of Nigerian Author's Prize for fiction in November 1995.

This collection of nine stories is divided into three sections entitled the "Philosophy," the "Heresies," and the "Restoration" with three stories in each section. The theme of adjustment that features in the lives of the characters is reflected in their attitudes, notions and ideas, and it is portrayed from the local to the international levels. The first story, "Hyphenated Celebrants," recalls the origin of adjustments in African lives at the time of the first contact between Africa and the West. The villagers preparing for an *Omoge* festival are brutally killed and forced into slavery. Balogun ends the story with the comment that

those killed like Adunke and Olusengun who survived the middle passage and ended up in the different plantations of America had to deal with an ever more severe form of structural adjustment to their lives in a horribly brutal and alien environment, an adjustment that proved ineffective before the monumental and unending pain of the incompleteness they felt at having been torn away from the core of their essence. (p. 15)

It is the effect of this coming to terms with the essence of life that is also demonstrated in the story, "Parable of the Great Grandson," where the children of a descendant of a Shango High Priest, whose wife is a white woman, are unable to speak or understand the language of their own people.

At another level, the poignant story, "Mother and Son," illustrates the pain and disappointment associated with filial relationships. The inability of a son to return on time to see his mother because he is engaged in higher studies results in his feeling that he has betrayed his mother. This feeling of betrayal results in the psychological breakdown of the young man. Through this story the author not only creates a picture of a filial relationship that is touching, but he also projects a didactic vision that yields insight on human nature.

The second group of stories consisting of "The Apprentice," "The Gods Will Call Again," and "The Hyde Park Preacher," extend the thematic perception of adjustments further. Although these stories center on varied issues like the misunderstanding of Obatunde's talent as a blacksmith by his two rival masters, the mythical reunion of Ife and Ogunmola's doubts about his presence in London far away from his own country, there are equally significant allegorical elements. In some ways, the dilemma of Obatunde could be perceived as the dilemma of most talented individuals existing among insensitive and unappreciative people; while the act of Ogunmola, who resolves to "update the knowledge about the nature and character of *Ogun* in order both to learn how best to serve the god and to make him fulfill his responsibilities in the efficient manner to his modern worshippers," (p. 68) parallels the essential resolutions that Africans need to make while residing in foreign lands. These stories also parallel the three stories in the third section of the collection.

In the story entitled, "The Escalator," a housewife abandons her husband and children in order to establish a new life in America. Although Balogun does not judge the housewife, Tinuke, through authorial commentaries, his portrait of this woman makes her grossly obnoxious. Thus her act in abandoning her family is brutal and disgusting because it is not motivated by either oppression or suppression. However, the other two stories, "Professor's Focal Adjustment," and "Permutations of Triple Zero," present the human

angle to poverty and economic deprivation. The Professor is forced to seek employment outside his country while a female student known as Remi in "Permutations of Triple Zero," is forced to resort to the old profession of prostitution. However, what leads to complications is that Remi is in love with a fellow student known as Jagun. The way that the author weaves the strands of this story does justice to his technique as well as exhibiting the consequences of adjustments in the lives of the characters. In the story Jagun strives to retain his pride by rejecting the proceeds from Remi's prostitution, despite his indigence. Nevertheless, Remi deserves sympathy rather than censure for her prostitution is as a result of harsh economic conditions. The story is concluded in a way that projects into the future with an indication that personal efforts can always be made to live ennobling and moral lives despite unpleasant social realities.

Balogun has created parabolic, allegorical, didactic, and of course partly realistic stories in *Adjusted Lives*. This is a collection which challenges the contemporary perspectives on life and society. At the same time the stories capture the intricacies and complexities of human relationships with insight and a measure of warmth. Although some of the stories possess more authorial commentaries than dramatic elements, Balogun successfully chronicles the path of African development and at the same time anticipates some aspects of its future.

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