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Creating Juvenalian Mirrors in Reading Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*

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ABSTRACT

A great deal of African literature attempts to create Juvenal mirrors in addressing topical issues that confront aspects of society itself. Postcolonial African society is characterised with political, social, economic and cultural issues. These issues coalesce and impact positively or negatively in the lives of both the individual and the community as a whole. It is against this backdrop that most African literary writers explore these issues by telling the stories of Africa and highlighting the potential threats the issues pose to the development of the society. This essay argues that Okpewho's *The Last Duty* employs Juvenal satires in exposing the follies and foibles of the society. Okpewho presents detailed description of the inhuman and devastating issues, including corruption, wickedness, dishonesty and injustices that bedevil the society. Okpewho employs the candour and perceptiveness of narrators and characters to depict the suffering and violence in African society. These pertinent issues Isidore Okpewho explores in *The Last Duty* parallel that of Decimus Junius Juvenalis's themes classified as Juvenalian satires. The data of the study was collected based on textual approach which employed a qualitative analysis to generate interpretation. The study examines selected Juvenal themes such as Corruption, Cruelty Verses Compassion, The Luck of the Army, The Female Sex: Decay of Feminine Virtue and The Vanity of Human Wishes. This paper concludes that the position of the satirist on social issues such as corruption, greed, injustices and so on, emerges as global attacks which derive their continuing force from the conception of authoritarianism among leaders.

Keywords: Juvenalian satire, Corruption, Feminine Virtue, Compassion, Vanity.

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1. Introduction

Generally, authors reveal their vision through the use of rhetoric and grand style in the writing of their oeuvre. The analysis of a work of art sometimes raises important questions about an author's social milieu and the nature of his art (Gallia 2016: 1). Highet (1954) posits that authors struggle to conceal their identity; for "everyone who writes betrays himself- by the subject he chooses, by his language, by his allusions to people and events, by the energy or gentleness, clearness or difficulty,

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sadness or humour, of his view of life” (2-3). Most writers attempt to satirise striking issues in their society by exposing the ills of the society. Rosen (2012) writes on the efficacy and meaning of ancient and modern political satire and notes the numerous examples of satires across the eras. Rosen describes how writers of satire expressively “fire up their sense of indignation, mobilize their verbal or gestural skills, and mock whoever or whatever it is that irritates them” (p.1). The relevance of writing satires cannot be underestimated in the sense that the remarkable surge on the nature of satire is supposed to effect social change (Rosen 2). Courtney (2013) compares the satirist to the orator who enters a protest in public and addresses an audience with a view to “changing its attitudes and disturbing its complacency” (28). Clearly, the propensity of the satirist is to inflict self-mockery (Moodie 2012:93) and to attack the machinations of the wicked and unworthy individuals (Courtney 2013:28). Modern satirists perceive satire as a “powerful artistic form used to critique specific human behaviors” (LeBoeuf 2007:1). LeBoeuf (2007) traces the history of satire from Aristophanes’ comedies in Ancient Greece to modern satire as found in the comic strip *Doonesbury*, the cartoon *South Park*, and the television show “*The Colbert Report*” (3-4). This paper examines how the narrator in *The Last Duty* uses satirical voice in the narrative and establishes the fact that Okpewho employs Juvenal’s style to deliver his satire.

2. Origins and debates on Juvenalian

The concept of Juvenalian satire provokes a darker kind of laughter; addresses social evil, and points with contempt to the corruption of men and institutions through scorn, outrage, and savage ridicule. This form is often pessimistic, characterised by irony, sarcasm, moral indignation and personal invective, with less emphasis on humour (Wollacott 2003). Juvenalian satire alludes to the Roman satirist Juvenal (Decimus Junius Juvenalis), who, in the 1st century AD, denounces the Roman society, especially, the rich and powerful. For him, vices such as the corruption of power, pomposity, avarice, the immorality of women, the decadence of rulers and immorality seem worthy of exposure. Juvenal said “It is difficult not to write satire” which is ironically the title of his first satire (Ethereal Chronicles 2007). Juvenal wrote sixteen (16) poems which were compiled and published in five books. In Highet’s view, the first six poems which were published in Books I & II are full of appalling violence and hatred while the collection of the poems in Book III is milder and more general. Book IV talks about the dangers of ambition and Book V is more trivial as compared to the first book (1954:3).

Critics describe Juvenal’s satire as bitter “savage indignation” (Kimball 2003). For them, Juvenal’s language appears as a bold and noble attack in the sense that he employs exaggeration and the grotesque humour of images in presenting his satire (Plaza 2006 3-4). Additionally, Courtney (2013) describes Juvenal’s language as aggressive tone which includes “rhetorical style to give concrete embodiment to the vices which he wished to attack” (9). Likewise, Braund (2007) considers the literary analysis on Juvenal’s third book on satires and argues that Juvenal uses subtle language instead of his aggressive tone in his early satires. Gallia (2016) examines the “Prejudice in Juvenal’s Third Satire” and reveals striking issues which bring about the segregation between the lifestyle of the urban class and the unprivileged class. Moodie (2012) looks at the drunken bully as a satirist in Juvenal’s Third Satire. Michael Ritter (2019) examines the implications of persona theory on Juvenal’s early satire and argues that a “strict application of persona theory isolates Juvenal’s satirist from his volatile contemporary climate by excluding him from the reality” (250).

Several English works have been modeled on Juvenal themes. George Orwell and Aldous Huxley created Juvenalian mirrors of their own societies to address what they saw as dangerous social and political tendencies. Orwell’s *Animal Farm* is a good example of Juvenalian satire. In the 20th century, Karl Kraus’s indictments of the prevailing corruption in post-World War I Austria were in the Juvenalian tradition. Modern satirists including Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and *South Park*’s Matt Stone and Trey Parker mount Juvenalian attacks on a wide range of social themes. William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954) is a good example of Juvenalian satire. Also Samuel Johnson’s poems *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* have been modeled on the third (3rd) satire and the tenth (10th) satire respectively (The Editors of *Encyclopedia Britannica*). This study suggests that Okpewho’s *The Last Duty* demonstrates Juvenal themes which include Corruption (Satire II & IV); Cruelty Verses Compassion (Satire XV); Luck of the Army (Satire XVI); The Female Sex: Decay of Feminine Virtue (Satire VI) and The Vanity of Human Wishes (Satire X 10) (Highet 1954; Courtney 2013; Anderson 1982; Braund 2007).

3. Methodology

The methodology procedure of this study looks at qualitative approach which makes use of the content analysis descriptive design. Content analysis deals with making inferences from data. Merton (1991) paraphrases the essential elements of content analysis as “a method for inquiring into social reality that consists of inferring from features of a nonmanifest context from a manifest” (cited in Krippendorff 2004). Basically, the main method of collecting data is the reading and interpretation of the novel. Krippendorff (2004) states that qualitative approaches require close reading of relatively small amounts of textual matter. The study investigates the content of Okpewho’s novel, *The Last Duty*.

4. An overview of *The Last Duty*

The Last Duty is a narrative in which Okpewho describes the mess in Urukpe town with the invasion of rebels from a close town called Simba. Urukpe is a border town between Igabo and Simba towns. The town Urukpe is liberated by the federal troops sent by the Government there by forcing the Simbian army to flee. Major Ali Idris, the new commander of the XV brigade of the federal troops in Urukpe, takes over the mantle from Major Akuya Bello, one year after the war. The rebels plan several air raids and guerrilla attacks and by the efficiency of Major Ali, the situation is brought under control. In another twist, Toje Onovwokpo, a wealthy, educated and influential rubber farmer and a member of the council of chiefs in Urukpe, implicates a promising, young man, Mukoro Oshevire, a soldier, under the commandership of Major Akuya Bello as a traitor who masterminds the activities of the rebels. Oshevire happens to be Toje’s rival in the rubber business and he seems to be doing well in the rubber business even though he is a novice in that field. Toje becomes jealous and through his connections with the federal soldiers, he is able to convince the commander to arrest Oshevire and detain him at Iddu. At Iddu, Oshevire is in detention with other people who share the same fate as him. He is optimistic about his predicament and even defends himself alone without the help of a lawyer before the tribunal.

The love subplot represents Toje’s advances on Oshevire’s wife, Aku, after Oshevire’s detention. Toje pretends to be Aku’s benefactor; he showers her with gifts through Odibo, his nephew, who has a problem with his right hand. Ignorantly, Aku is lured into Toje’s love proposal due to her inability to feed and clothe herself and her son, Oghenovov, and also for protection from the local people who hate her because she hails from Simba. The suspense heightens when Odibo develops intimate affection for Aku and her son. Toje begins to suspect Odibo and Aku and decides to track them down. Toje meets Aku in Odibo’s house in a suspicious mood and starts a fight with Odibo which ends them in serious mutual injuries. Oshevire returns from detention after three years and meets Aku at the military barracks only to learn that Toje and Odibo injured each other because of his beloved wife he left behind. The narrative ends tragically as Aku’s humiliation results in Oshevire’s death.

Critics have made astute and sagacious remarks on *The Last Duty* in several ways: the depiction of war, the role of the hero, Marxist reading and the use of language. On war, Chinaka (2013) explores the Memoirs of the first Nigerian masquerades and cites *The Last Duty* among other Nigerian writers as a narration which portrays the war as a futility. Gbemisola (2003) fictionalises the war in the novel from the viewpoint of six characters - Ali, Toje, Odibo, Aku, Oghenovov and Oshevire. Chukwumah (2014) compares Oshevire’s role in *The Last Duty* to Okonkwo’s role in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and recognises Oshevire as the hero who is neither superior to other men nor their environment. He asserts that Oshevire, unlike Okonkwo, is “neither a leader, nor a god, in Frye’s categorisation, but a commoner who is common enough to possess a parcel of land he bars Toje, an avaricious usurper, from forcefully snatching away from him” (79). Sanka (2019) offers a Marxist reading of the novel and the role of patriarchy as a domination over women. On language, Palmer (1993) posits that the distinguishing aspect of the novel’s artistry is the deft manipulation of language and point of view. In the same vein, Roberts (2014) and Nnaji (2014) examine the use of language from varying perspectives. Clearly, none of the studies above has examined the influence of Juvenal’s style on Okpewho’s *The Last Duty*. We would like to move off from the scholarship on the novel by looking at Okpewho’s creation of selected Juvenalian themes in the novel.

5. Corruption: Juvenal Satires II & IV

Juvenal writes a lampoon to suggest that the imperial court was corrupt which Domitian's regime find offensive and punishes Juvenal for attacking his reign (Highet 1954). Juvenal also describes "Rome as the centre of corruption for the whole civilized world" and Roman women as hopelessly corrupt (Highet 121, 101). Like Juvenal, Okpewho attacks the subject of corruption which seems prevalent in *The Last Duty*. Okpewho dwells on his characters to reveal the corruption that characterises the people of Black Gold State. One major character whose name cannot be left out in discussing corruption is Toje Onovwakpo, a rubber magnate in Urukpe. Toje's corruption can be viewed as a moral corruption. Arthur Lyon Dahl's "Corruption, morality and religion" defines corruption as "just one expression of the priority given to oneself over others, of egoism over altruism, of personal over collective benefit" (2016). For Dahl, moral corruption involves one's attempt at manipulating either a business or community for "self-enrichment, the distortion of truth and denial of science to manipulate the public for ideological ends, and even the misuse of a religious responsibly to acquire power and wealth" (2016). In the novel, Toje employs manipulations when he uses his status and influence to exploit Mukoro Oshevire and his wife, Aku. Toje claims to be the richest and the most important person in the whole of Urukpe and therefore, presents himself as the one on whom the name of Urukpe hangs. Toje boasts about the recognition of his name, "A town is worth nothing if it has no names on whom its very credit hangs. I am one of those very few names that mean anything here in Urukpe" (5), "And I am a big man here" (6). Toje levels an allegation against Oshevire, for he believes Oshevire is a threat to him in the rubber business. So Toje falsely accuses Oshevire as a rebel collaborator just to get rid of Oshevire and take control of the rubber business. Consequently, Toje succeeds in his wicked conspiracy against Oshevire, for he capitalises on his status in Urukpe. Toje admits his manipulations in the extract below:

But I can admit it to myself: I called Omonigho Rukeme to my house and in secret elicited his cooperation in incriminating Mukoro Oshevire... Yes, I exploited the situation and secretly reported Oshevire to Major Bello and thereafter Oshevire was whisked off in detention at Iddu (120).

Toje continues to ensure that Oshevire remains in detention so that his plot to take control of the business comes to pass. Toje uses Rukeme as an agent to actualise his plans. Rukeme's willingness to collect money (One fifty pounds) from Toje to bear witness against Oshevire is a typical case of bribery and corruption in the novel: "I called Omonigho Rukeme to my house and in secret elicited his cooperation in incriminating Mukoro Oshevire" (120). In discussing corruption in Africa, Monyake & Hough (2019) state that the "experience of bribery affects the willingness to engage in protests against corruption in the African context" (283). They posit that the experience of "paying bribes acts as a mobilising grievance, and that an increase in the frequency of paying bribes will lead to an increase in the willingness to use protests as a means to tackle corruption" (283). Clearly, Okpewho ridicules protests against corruption in the way he presents Oshevire as a victim of Toje's diabolic plan and egoistic interest. Toje's exploitation against Oshevire is summed up in these words: "And why did I do this? For a number of reasons, bearing not only on civic concern but also on pride of place and on plain old survival, if the severe truth should be told" (120). Toje also exploits his workers in the rubber business and adulterates his latex. He under pays his workers and exploits the rubber business through the adulteration of the latex.

Morally, both Toje and Odibo's corruption is seen in their flirtation with Aku, Oshevire's wife. Odibo takes advantage of Aku's circumstances and lures her to warm his bed. Odibo rejoices over his corruptible action as: "For after that woman let me into her body, and I experienced a release of my long pent-up passion. I felt my whole body-my whole personality-loosened and my entire being change" (179). Similarly, Toje takes advantage of Oshevire's absence to seek carnal pleasure with Aku knowing very well the deplorable situation Aku finds herself. Toje believes it is an ideal period for him to test his potency which he expresses so strongly. He thinks his victory and "mission of self-reassertion" (130) must win at all cost. Toje's sexual relationship with the slut at Iddu is also a corrupt practice which cannot be overlooked, something which he thinks is the cause of his impotence, "the reckless adventure with the slut at Iddu" (23).

The complexity of the narrative is revealed as Toje's impotency makes him to consult Emuakpor, the medicine man, who also exploits Toje. Emuakpor's exploitation against Toje is against the backdrop that Emuakpor is aware of the extravagant and promiscuous lifestyle of Toje in Urukpe

and its environs: “He is fooling around with prostitutes at Iddu” (166). Emuakpor takes advantage of Toje’s situation and concocts medicine for Toje which he knows very well cannot cure Toje’s impotency. Metaphorically, the concocted medicine rather leaves on him a nasty smell like a “buzzard’s crotch” (173). Emuakpor’s action parallels that of Godinheaven, another medicine man, who also exploits his fellow citizens in times of war in the novel. He claims to possess medicine which can cure epilepsy, paralysis as well as protection of soldiers against bullets. Unfortunately, the efficacy of the herbal medicines is in doubt revealing the corrupt practices of these medicine men.

Another example of corrupt practice among nations is revealed through the eyes of Ali, the Brigade Major in Urukpe. He asserts that during the war, the rebels get support from Europe. The Europeans involve themselves for their own selfish interests and this is corruption at its highest level. Ali says that “...neither the Chief of Staff nor the Military Governor of the Black Gold State” is present at the town square during execution of Sule because “the civil war is still on”, so these officials need to be alert. Ali remarks, “Guerilla attacks have been visited on us, and now that the rebels have acquired increased air power from Europe we are the target of occasional air raids – like the one that occurred just recently” (20-21). They give in to the demands of the foreigners against the wishes of their own people. This unveils the unresponsive attitude of some African leaders who are in league with foreigners to exploit the ordinary people. According to Achille Mbembe (1992), the banality of power in the postcolony draws attention to the nature of power in postcolony. Mbembe characterises a postcolony simply as those societies which have recently emerged from the experience of colonisation and exhibit the violence which the colonial relationship par excellence involves. For him “post-colony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion ... [and]... a series of corporate institutions and political machinery which, once they are in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence” (Mbembe 1992:3). Okpewho demonstrates Mbembe’s description of power in the maltreatment meted out to the masses by the rebels. A case in point is Agbeyegbe, once a teacher at Okrukpe, who rhetorically reveals the maltreatment by the rebels in the Black Gold State as:

Do you think that God has created mankind with the intention that one section of it should be subjected and enslaved by others? Do you think it was God’s intention that some people should recline in comfort and abundance while others forever are hewers of wood and fetchers of water, destined only to minister to the shameless debauchery of those sitting over their heads, while they themselves languish in penury and pain? Do you think that some people are born to rule, as some have claimed for reasons best known to themselves, while others are born to be ruled, manipulated and exploited for the benefit of their oppressors beyond all reasons and justice?(143)

We see that those who wield power manipulate, exploit and oppress the ordinary people. This is revealed in the use of pattern repetition employed by the repetition of rhetorical questions in the extract: “Do you think ...” which syntactically and semantically highlights the suffering of the unprivileged in the society and the oppressive rule of the cruel rulers.

6. Cruelty verses compassion (Satire XV)

In this satire, Juvenal reveals a conflict between two Egyptian towns which ends in cannibalism. There is an attack on human lives as it is contrasted with the value placed on animals (Courtney 2013). In *The Last Duty*, Okpewho presents characters who show no compassion towards their fellow humans. With the exception of Major Ali S. Idris who really shows extreme sympathy and concern for other people, almost all the characters behave otherwise. Ali cares for Aku so much that he says: “I am putting Mrs. Oshevire under your protection” (58). However, we can find characters such as Toje, Rukeme, Emuakpor and the Private whose behaviours can be seen as people who are not compassionate.

Okpewho presents Toje as an egocentric character who shows no compassion towards others. Toje hurts the feelings of others to satisfy his self-centeredness. A case in point is his manipulation against Oshevire to achieve his selfish desires. Toje finds himself in competition with Oshevire in the rubber business and thus uses Rukeme to level false charges against Oshevire, leading to the detention of Oshevire at Iddu. Toje desires to monopolise the market as the only person to sell goods and receive more customers than any of his competitors: “All that concerns me is Mukoro Oshevire stays in

detention... I can in safer circumstances establish a commercial lead in the rubber business too comfortable to be threatened by him” (32).

Toje’s uncompassionate attitude is also revealed in the way he exploits the lonely and helpless Aku thereby using her as an agent to test his potency. Toje in his quest to find out whether his manhood is functioning or not uses Aku, a married woman; he has no compassion on a woman in such situation but rather capitalises on it. Toje devises a cunning scheme by enticing her through foodstuffs, money and clothes. As he admits, “it’s only a fair exchange. She needs food, clothing, maintenance and protection badly... I am in need of self-reassurance” (133). In her condition, naturally, anybody who is compassionate could be moved by human sympathy to have assisted her without expecting anything in return. We see that Toje capitalises on Aku’s handicap instead of showing compassion on her.

Okpewho presents Toje as an inconsiderate person who uses the disability of a person to degrade that person. A case in point is how Toje verbally assaults his nephew, Odibo who happens to be a cripple. Clearly, Odibo’s condition desires pity, love, compassion or sympathy; however, Toje rather humiliates him as worthless, “what use is that awkward mass of body”, he says, “if you cannot help yourself”. “And you have no mind”. “No sense” “Nothing” (160). Okpewho displays imagery of valueless, uselessness or emptiness in Toje’s description of Odibo. The metaphor “awkward mass of body” connotes the strange physique and deformity of Odibo. There is also a pattern repetition in the phrases “no mind” “No sense” “Nothing” which semantically represents emptiness of mind. Toje’s insensitivity is evident in the sense that at one point, he engages the services of Odibo to woo Aku for him, but when the tables turn, he debases him with insults.

Toje’s opportunistic lifestyle is again depicted in his dealings with Rukeme. Toje cunningly wins the attention of Rukeme, knowing well that Rukeme dislikes Oshevire. Toje lures Rukeme to bear witness against Oshiever as he soliloquizes, “[w]ho could have been better qualified than Omonigho Rukeme to argue a case against Mukoro Oshevire, knowing full well that this was his best and indeed only good chance to avenge the disgrace brought upon his father by Oshevire’s” (119). Toje desperately manages to get Rukeme to bear false witness against Oshevire to keep Oshevire in detention so as to keep his rival out of business. This, Toje achieves through bribing Rukeme with an amount of 150 pounds. Both Rukeme Omonigho and Toje are portrayed as incompassionate due to their quest for vengeance on Oshevire. Rukeme condones the diabolic plans of Toje to press false charges against Oshevire at the tribunal at Iddu and later confesses: “[b]elieve me, Mukoro” he says stuttering, “it wasn’t my fault I was pushed into it. Please, please, believe me” (195). The attitude of Toje and Rukeme seems unsurprising, for people who are compassionate and always seek the welfare of their fellows rather than subjecting them to suffering.

Lack of compassion for people sometimes results in murdering one’s opponent. We read about the Private who takes the life of his superior (a sergeant) and his girlfriend upon realising that his girlfriend is cheating on him with the sergeant. Although the girlfriend realises her folly and begs for forgiveness, “She called his name and begged to explain. One look of contempt down her lewd figure told him what had happened, told him he had to put an end to it all” (17). Due to the anger taking all over his sense, he shoots them ‘tat-tat-tat-tat’. Clearly, Okpewho exposes the awful attitude of the military who are entrusted with guns to protect the nation. Instead of their core roles, the soldiers assume irrepressible powers over the masses.

7. The luck of the army (Satire XVI)

This satire details the advantages of the life of a soldier. Juvenal describes the powers of soldiers to the extent that “assaults and extortions by soldiers could easily go unpunished and increase civilians’ dislike of them” (Courtney 2013:613). Juvenal states that “A standing army is always privileged/... all ranks regard themselves as far superior to civilians” (qtd in Hight 1954:155). In *The Last Duty*, which was written after the Biafra war, one cannot overlook certain relevant events which give credence to the powers of soldiers who ruthlessly maltreat victims of war in executing their duties. Okpewho portrays soldiers as above the law when a fight erupts between a private and a sergeant over a woman. As discussed above, the private resorts to shooting the sergeant instead of using dialogue to resolve the issue. The private, however, shows no remorse for committing this crime even on the day of execution. Ali suggests that “the condemned soldier was unrepentant as ever, indeed defiant” (22). Ideally, soldiers are supposed to ensure peace and order in a civil manner. In the novel, Okpewho

satirises a young man who goes through an inhumane experience just because he constantly interrupts proceedings at the tribunal. In an attempt to put this man to silence, a soldier mistreats him, "... this time applying the butt of his gun on our man's shoulder to bring him down on the bench." (39). It did not stop there but the soldier really hit hard till the point of the man collapsing.

Furthermore, mention should be made of the harassment Toje's men go through at the hands of soldiers at the various checkpoints. Toje is the man contracted to provide food for the Federal troops but in the course of discharging his duties, his men go through a lot of torment from the soldiers. Toje complains bitterly "...it's therefore of grave surprise to me for the quartermaster to be so inconsiderate, even insolent... can you see how he cancelled the bills?" (45). Toje goes ahead to make a demand from Major Ali which projects soldiers are above the law especially in times of war. Toje asks Ali to use his influence to overcome the situation. Knowing Toje's character is cunning; one cannot but conclude that he is not into any sincere business. Toje therefore asks Ali to "...let one or two soldiers ride with my men each time, so as to avoid these endless delays at the military checkpoints?" (47). With this request, he is implying that, with the presence of a soldier in the truck the law can be done away with even if there is any fault.

Another convincing evidence in the novel that suggests soldiers are above the law is seen in Oghenov's perception about soldiers. He observes that soldiers wield power and therefore conceives that if one is privileged to become a soldier one surpasses everybody. This can indeed be referred to as an effect of war on children. All they think of is violence. He also thinks becoming a soldier, will make him superior to his friend, Onome, who had earlier called his father (Oshevire) a thief. "i want to be like a soldier, so that i can give onome a good beating" (114). He repeats this several times to buttress the superiority of a soldier. This same impression can be seen in our experience in our community today. Children see soldiers as supermen that upon no provocation can beat and molest people.

The shooting of Oshevire is another classic example of lawlessness of soldiers. In the normal sense one will expect a soldier to shoot another person in the case of self-defense. But in the novel Oshevire who is seen exiting the town after setting his house ablaze, meets his untimely death when he is shot by a soldier. In the middle of the bush, a voice shouts "stop! stop!... don't move..." (242) but Oshevire refuses to heed to the command and unfortunately "Kr-r-r-r, Kr-r-r-r, two times and then the sound of something dropping... mukoro! my mother screams again... i look up at the soldier,... his two eyes are like those of a black cat..." (243). Oshevire did nothing wrong to warrant the shooting by the soldier. Okpewho uses the theme "soldiers are above the law" to create an imagery of violence and inhumane treatment by soldiers who trample upon the rights of the masses.

8. The vanity of human wishes: Satire X (10)

"The Vanity of human wishes" is the title of Samuel Johnson's poem (1749) of twenty-five stanzas which explores the desires and wishes of human beings. Johnson describes the meaninglessness and futility of human desires. Juvenal attempts to answer the question, "what should we pray for?": "Nothing, then: shall we pray for nothing? Let me suggest- /leave the gods alone, let them determine what/ will be most suitable and help us in our lives" (qtd in Hight 1954). Courtney (2013) summarises the title as "The Right and Wrong Objects of Prayer" which juxtaposes both the positive and negative sides (446). The theme of the vanity of human wishes brings to mind men's craving for power, wealth and recognition which Okpewho portrays through the character Toje who initially boasts about his possessions and even capitalises on his wealth to exploit other innocent people. Toje projects himself as a powerful and highly respectable person in his community. His arrogance is expressed as "I am a big man and there's no question about that even if I have to say it over and over recognition must be given to where it's due and goes without any question" (4-5).

Okpewho highlights the theme through the character, Toje. At the peak of his life, he exerts power, recognition and wealth but lacks the true definition of an African man. His manhood keeps failing him which really bothers him. He wishes to prove himself as a man is continually flawed and this is revealed in the following words: "however, I think it is not enough for me that I have just one night of failure with her... only to find that my manhood deserted me" (26). It is clear that Toje reveals vanity and hopelessness as he tries all avenues to restore his manhood, such that he allows the quack native doctor, Emuakpor, to ridicule him by giving him 'sheep's dung' to use as medicine: "Well it should be to

you. If you are so worried about wearing a decent smell on your person... I can vouchsafe that bit of information – it's got dung in it, sheep's dung" (174).

Toje further deepens his woes when he publicly engages in fisticuffs with his "imbecile" nephew Odibo. This only is not a dent on his dignity, but it ended him in the hospital through the escort of the federal soldiers: "When Odibo fell down, Toje came vigorously on him, cutting twice on the back... After the cutlass fell from his hands and he too dropped on the floor" (217).

Okpewho portrays the essence of family in the African setting. Culturally, Oshevire's family and marriage was that of a perfect one. What could be more devastating than a perfect family torn apart by war, lies, deceit and injustice? Okpewho creates a distinctive picture of the vainness of human wishes when Oshevire's family and marriage is consequently destroyed and this makes the marriage ridiculous. Oshevire himself describes the mockery, sneer and shame they would have to live with when he soliloquizes:

...they should know that the dishonor brought upon my wife- on my household- was totally unjust... And what kind of life will I be living in this town with my family, when we know that our days are hunted by an indelible shame? What kind of a life is it, to walk about this town every single day of your life knowing that every finger, every sneer and every mockery is directed at you? ... And what man will choose to be alive to face every day the ill-conceived fruit of shame? (237-238)

Aside his family being destroyed, the author affirms the wise saying, good name is better than riches. It is obvious that, absolutely all is lost when man loses his dignity. Oshevire's dignity as a man, husband and a father is dragged in the mud, when he is unjustly detained for three years. The shame and embarrassment is not limited to him only but it trickles down to his wife and son. Oghenove feels the pinch of his father's shame when his friend calls his father a thief (15). Oshevire admits the fact that without his dignity he has nothing to live for, as he reveals in the pattern repetition of the noun phrases: "every single day" "every finger", "every sneer" and "every mockery" is diverted to you?" (237-238).

As a rubber magnate, Oshevire wins the hearts, and markets in his industry. This sudden overtake of the industry infuriates his major and once monopolistic contender Toje. The puzzle seems to fall in place for Toje when he takes advantage of the war, which causes the detention of Oshevire hence losing his business. Toje comments "the absence of Mukero Oshevire therefore gives me the opportunity to set things right. It gives me the opportunity to re-establish my prominence, my power..." (122). Okpewho helps readers to understand the importance people attach to material things to the detriment of human life.

Okpewho portrays the character, Aku as a perfect wife and a virtuous African woman. Oshevire even sings a ballad praising Aku as 'a jewel of wife'. The ballad says:

it is with no small joy therefore that my brooding mind has sought constantly to recreate for itself the pride that I once knew in possessing her – remembering how hard she proved to win; and, once won and wedded, what a painful but proud picture she cut on that first night when she made me realize that I was the first to burst open her gate;... a very jewel of a wife. A matchless queen, whose courage and nobility demand only demonstration of fortitude from me now as always". (209)

It is obvious that the praises a proud husband Oshevire showers on his beautiful wife Aku seems worthless. Aku reduces herself to a whore and mistress to two unworthy men, Toje and Odibo. Aku herself exclaims when she accepts that she lives now to satisfy the sexual desire of Toje just for food, clothing and protection "... How much longer do you think I can endure this condition, if I am reduced to Toje's plaything..." (76). Toje also admits that "She needs food, clothing, maintenance and protection very badly..." (133).

The Last Duty makes us understand that life is not a bed of roses and the wishes of human beings are like flowers. It blooms in the morning and withers by night. Chief Toje a titled chief and a business magnate with seven children and a wife to whom he is married for twenty-five years allows himself to be noted by greed, selfishness and malice to rule his heart and ends badly for him. Oshevire on the other hand invests his time, life and youthful exuberance into family, marriage and business. Aku the idolized African woman and wife is seen and regarded as a perfect wife who allows frustration and starvation to degrade her level to an adulteress.

9. The female sex: Decay of feminine virtue (Satire VI 6)

In this satire, Juvenal lambasts the immorality of Roman married women and states that “not every Roman married a noblewoman” (Courtney 2013:218). The poem is sometimes called the satire on the female sex, “A Legend of Bad woman” in which Juvenal admonishes those about to marry (Highet 1954: 91). Okpewho highlights the theme “the female sex or decay of feminine virtue” through the female characters. Aristotle (2001) identifies two kinds of virtue: intellectual virtues and ethical virtues. Intellectual virtue engages in reasoning or the use of the mind which includes practical wisdom, theoretical wisdom, etc. On the other hand, ethical virtues are virtues that develop as character such as temperance, courage, etc. John Burrow notes that virtue “gives mastery over the flux of circumstance and one’s own weakness,” by cultivating habits of self-control, courage, and military prowess (qtd in Harrington 2001:35). Naturally, a woman is supposed to lead an exemplary life, however, the attitude of women presented in the novel contravenes the expectation of society. In the case of Aku, decisiveness as a virtue was lost. Aku fails to take bold decisions concerning her relationship with Chief Toje and claims that “[f]rustration has driven me to the point where I would rather live the fact than the fiction of sin. Loyalty and devotion had been strained beyond all possible endurance...” (184). Another instance of Aku’s indecisiveness is linked to her inability to control her emotions: “before long I was dressed and ready. I took one more look at myself, and I swear if I could help it, I would have stayed from” (65). Aku is not decisive enough even though she had an option to stay under her own roof and cater for herself and her child. Her indecisive nature leads her to commit adultery with Odibo. She is unable to set standards with regards to love relationships. Aku accepts Toje’s proposal but ends up in an amorous relationship with Odibo which suggests an evidence of incest.

It is clear that attenuating circumstances force Aku to undermine her integrity to safeguard her chastity. In Aku’s bid to protect her son from suffering from the unpleasant news of her husband, she ends up perpetuating untruthfulness to her son as she reveals “for every time a gift like this comes from Toje I have told him that it was sent by his father who is away on a journey to Iddu” (13). Again Aku fails to tell her son the truth about the source of the clothes and the other gifts they received from Toje, but rather lies to him that it was from his father: “for every time a gift of this comes from Toje, I had told him that it was sent by his father.” (13).

Moreover, circumstances beyond Aku’s control compel her to lose the virtue of endurance being a virtue a woman should possess. Aku was not able to endure the pressure and pains she was going through during her husband’s detention: “it seems I am having to pay the price for the assistance that he’s rendering ... and what a price he seems to ask” (12). Additionally, another feminine virtue which Aku could not hold on to is patience. Aku tells Oghenovo, her son to retaliate whenever Onome, his friend, makes any bad comment concerning his father. As a mother who possesses a virtue of patience, she should have exhibited the virtue of patience rather than teaching her son to retaliate whenever his friend offends him.

Chief Toje’s wife is impatient to assist her husband who confronts her with his predicament, “she broke out, eyes gleaming as though she would split my head in two and spill my brain that very minute. Toje’s what are you saying”? (24). Then Toje tells her to calm down, “calm down woman ... Be calm woman, no need to shout about it” (25). The woman should have been patient with her husband in discussing crucial matters. She rudely speaks to Commander Ali who goes to visit Chief Toje in his house. The woman harbours her anger against the husband and transfers it to the visitor.

Another weakness is unfaithfulness on the part of the private’s girlfriend which leads to the fight between the private and the sergeant. This lady proves to be unfaithful to her lover. Religion and culture enjoin a woman to marry only one man; however, the lady pawned her dignity by flirting with two men. This results in the death of both the sergeant and his girlfriend. The lady is thus described as a ‘harlot’ which is a foul language used to demean her (17). Aku exhibits good virtues throughout the detention period of her husband but later compromises and allows Toje and Odibo to seduce her, after which Oshevire, her husband is released from detention. Aku’s impatience leads to lack of dignity on her part. She confesses her loss of patience in the anticipation of her husband’s release that: “... three years and more of waiting for you to come back, without the least chance that my prayer will be answered, have steadily nibbled away my patience” (184).

Also Okpewho satirises prostitution which leads to lack of dignity and self-respect on the part of some prostitutes at Iddu from whom Toje contracts his impotency. Although every society frowns upon prostitution, O'Neill's (1997) study on "Prostitute Women Now" argues that transactional sex is a way of eliminating poverty and "selling sex is often the last resort, the body one's commodity" (12). She perceives prostitution as an employment opportunity especially for young girls who need financial security. Smith (2009) also discusses intimacy and exchanges in romantic love relationship and asserts that "it stands for a more subtle reality in which the very expression of love involves gifts, economic support, and a range of material exchanges that both solidify and build on sexual and emotional dimensions of intimate relationships" (164). Okpewho portrays prostitution as sex and money exchanges with no emotional attachment as Toje reveals: "in search of a prostitute only to lay" (23). Okumage, the herbalist also refers to prostitution as time wasting as he tells Toje, "... to all the way to Iddu and starts scrumbling around with prostitute"? (23). In a way, these women who engage in prostitution lack self-esteem to the extent that the prestige of womanhood is reduced to the lowest ebb.

10. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that Okpewho's *The Last Duty* parallels some of Juvenal's satires. Like Juvenal, Okpewho ridicules the issues of corruption, greed, injustices and so on from several angles and entices his readers to think about the consequences if not curtailed. We have also established that most African writers employ satire as social commentary considering the elements of style which cut across their social, political and cultural issues. From the foregoing, it is clear that the rich and influential people capitalise on their status and authority in society to dominate the unprivileged, and we have described the corruption in the novel as a classic revelation of chaotic experience among the people especially, the less privileged. The other issues discussed such as immorality, lawlessness, craving for wealth and power, attempt to destroy the peace and stability of the innocent people who have to sacrifice their lives for the welfare of others. It is our hope that the work of the satirists will continue to play a part in unveiling the ills of the African society in undermining corruption and contribute to defeating the global attack on injustices, avarice, and lewdness.

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