

TITLE PAGE

THE USE OF HISTORY IN DRAMA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF T. S. ELIOT'S
MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL AND AHMED YERIMA'S *ATTAHIRU*

BY

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DECLARATION

I Ado Magaji Mansur, hereby, declare that this study entitled “The Use of History in Drama: A Comparative Study of T. S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* and Ahmed Yerima’s *Attahiru*” is my effort under the supervision of Prof. Mustapha Muhammad of the Department of English and Literary Studies, Bayero University, Kano. All material used have been duly acknowledged by means of reference.

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APPROVAL PAGE

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my mother Hauwa'u Magajin Maskaya (Saraki) and my grandmother Amina (Gwaggon Talle) for their love and care.

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Abstract

This work studies two historical plays, T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru*. A number of academic studies have examined each of the plays, looking at their different aspects. In most of the studies, the plays are compared with others too. However, there are little or no current studies that combine both. The affinities between the two works in terms of their use of history have been overlooked by critics. The main objective of this research is to find the theatrical connection between the two dramatists in terms of how their selection and handling of the historical material is largely influenced by the context of writing. As a tool of investigation, the research employs New Historicism, a theory that emphasizes studying literature in relation to its socio-political and historical context. The work finds that, in spite of the periodical gap as well as geographical distance, there is a theatrical connection between the two plays as both demonstrate the dramatization of history to explore the issue of self-mortification. The work addresses a gap in comparative research and could shed more light on comparative literature and the nexus between literature and history.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

The discipline of Comparative Literature makes it possible to compare texts that are distinct in nature, culture and history. It facilitates understanding of relationships by comparing one literature with another or others, and literature with other fields of knowledge such as history, politics, religion and philosophy. In line with this, the work employs the theory of New Historicism and studies T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* in relation to the socio-political and religious circumstances of their writing in order to evaluate the playwrights' adaptation and handling of the historical material as well as the manner by which they use it to respond to certain ideology or trends prevalent in their time.

Literature has adapted, recreated, documented as well as reconstructed history in different societies all over the world. In other words, the socio-political, religious and historical events in different societies have been serving as the source materials for creating drama and indeed literature in general. In his paper "Towards a Historiography of the Text: The Plays of Ahmed Yerima", Akoh (2007) stated that:

Over time, history has remained a dynamic source material for play creating and play-writing. Whether the focus is on distinguished figures or event, the historical material is adopted, recreated or subverted to serve a purpose, depending on the social vision or ideological persuasion of the individual writer (Adeoti, 2007; 97-98).

It is in line with this that, the work examines the two historical plays, T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* that recreate specific history of two past historical figures and also examines the inter-play of both religion and politics that characterized the two

periods the two plays are set. Thus, what Eliot and Yerima did, in their works can best be understood from New Historicism perspective. In his description of New Historicism, Bressler (1994:187) stated that the critics in this school “believe that all texts are really social documents that reflect but also, and more importantly, respond to their historical situation.”Both Eliot and Yerima adapted the historical facts of two figures in the history of their respective societies to create their fictional works. Both of them rely on the historical materials provided by the socio-political and religious contexts surrounding the life of the two important personalities in their societies in order to offer their own interpretation on their respective subjects.

Eliot was commissioned by George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester to write a play for the Canterbury Festival of 1935 and chose to recreate the events surrounding the martyrdom of Thomas Becket (1118-1170) the Archbishop of Canterbury (Coghill, 1965:9). On the other hand, Yerima was asked by his colleague, Alhaji Shehu Suleiman to recreate the history of one of the anti-colonial heroes in Nigerian history Caliph Attahiru who lost his life fighting against the British imperial forces in 1903 (Yerima, 1999: 7).

As such, this work argues that, although the two playwrights came from different cultures, they share so many things in common in terms of their dramatization of history in the two plays under study. Both chose the struggle for domination between political and religious power. Moreover, this work argues that in both occasions, the playwrights were influenced by the socio-political and historical order underlying the societies of their time. This is in line with Soyinka’s argument that, “the artists or the ideologue is quite free to reconstruct history on the current ideological premises and, thereby prescribe for the future through lessons thus provoked” (1998;126).

1.1 On T. S. Eliot (1888 – 1965)

Thomas Stearns Eliot a poet, dramatist, critic and Nobel prize winner for outstanding work in the world of literature, was born in America and later moved to England in 1918 and became British citizen in 1927, the same year he converted to Anglicanism. He is considered as one of the most influential poets of the twentieth century. Eliot's literary career extended over forty-five years during which he dominated the English literary scene with his versatility in poetry, drama and criticism. On his greatness, F.R. Leavis (1936:1) remarks that "Eliot's genius is that of the great poet who has a profound and acute apprehension of the difficulties of his age."

Eliot's conversion to Anglicanism in 1927 is considered to be one of the turning points in his life on which he famously proclaimed that he is "classicist in literature, royalist in politics and Anglo-Catholic in religion" (Alexander, 2013:350). This spiritual change shaped many of his works including *Murder in the Cathedral*. The conversion came at a time when decline in religious values was pervasive in his English society due to the changes that characterized the modern period which Xiros Cooper describes as "an age increasingly devoted to the secular panaceas provided by the mechanized production of wellbeing through the wonders of chemistry, commodity consumption, and psychoanalysis" (Cooper, 2006:27).

As such, this work argues that *Murder in the Cathedral* which according to Stephen (2000:324) is "explicitly religious" serves as Eliot's response to the society of his time. When he was commissioned to write a play for the Canterbury Festival in 1935, he saw an opportunity to adapt the historical facts of the martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas Becket in order to comment on the present. This work then tries to demonstrate that in recreating the history of Becket, Eliot is more concerned with the revival of religious values needed in his modern society, a poetic which is captured in Cooper's argument that,

Undoubtedly, he (Eliot) was interested in the fate of his soul, but he was as equally concerned about the fate of a society moving inexorably towards thoroughgoing secularism and the materialism which accompanies it (2006; 26).

Eliot's study in anthropology at Harvard introduced him to the socio-cultural importance of religion as a primordial binding force in society. As such, he was deeply convinced that there is a close relationship between art and religion. This motivated Eliot to introduce religious elements in his poetry and drama in one way or another. This is an aspect that is going to be examined extensively in chapter three of this study

Apart from *Murder in the Cathedral* under study here, Eliot's works include *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), *The Wasteland* (1922), *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *The Hollow Men* (1925), *Ash Wednesday* (1930), *The Rock* (1934), *The Four Quartets* (1936), *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948).

1.2 On Ahmed Yerima (1957 -)

Ahmed Parker Yerima, the Nigerian playwright and scholar was born in Lagos in 1957. He attended St. Bernadette's Primary School at Abeokuta and later moved to the University of Ife where he obtained a certificate in Dramatic Arts and later a Bachelor of Arts in 1981 before moving to the University College, Cardiff in 1982 where he did his post-graduate diploma in Theatre Arts. Yerima holds a doctorate degree in Theatre Studies and Dramatic Criticism from the prestigious Royal Holloway College, University of London (Adeoti (Eds), 2007:xix-xxi).

Yerima's educational experience and interest in theatre made him specialized in play writing and acting. Adeoti (2007:xi) described Yerima as "one of the most notable dramatists to have

emerged on the Nigerian literary stage in the last decades of the 20th century.” Following in the footsteps of other prolific African writers such as Ngugi and Soyinka, Yerima wrote many plays that revisit the African glorious past in order to recreate, reconstruct and revive it for the socio-cultural, political as well as historical awareness needed in our post-colonial African societies.

His historical plays that include *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*, *Erelu Kuti*, *Ameh Oboni the Great* and *Attahiru* are works that demonstrate his concern for the socio-cultural, political and historical awareness in contemporary Nigerian society, and indeed Africa. Yerima uses the medium of drama to comment on the Nigerian socio-economic and political situations. In his preface to *Muse and Mimesis; Critical Perspective on Ahmed Yerima's Drama*, Adeoti contends that,

His (Yerima's) central focus is Nigeria. Indeed, life as lived in post-independence Nigeria as well as the history, culture and tradition of the people constitute the “muse” that inspires his “mimesis”. He treats history with freedom and imagination. He is more interested, not in historical accuracy on stage, but rather in a critical rendering of history, locating the gaps, distortions and impositions therein (2007: xiii – xiv).

It is in line with this that the study argues that *Attahiru* is motivated by Yerima's desire to contribute towards providing socio-political awareness in his society through recreation of historical past; a task he calls “giving life to the past ... to the dead, so that it makes new and more immediate meaning to the present” (Yerima, 1999: 6). The play recreates the history of one of the Nigeria's anti-colonial heroes in order to highlight the sacrifice made by their people in the appreciated past with the aim of drawing lessons for the contemporary society.

Apart from *Attahiru*, Yerima's other plays include *Three Plays in Transition* (1980), *The Silent Gods* (1996), *The Bishop and The Soul* and *Thank You Lord* (1996), *The Trials of Ovoramwen*

Nogbaisi (1998), *Attahiru* (1999), *The Sick People* (2000), *Kaffir Last Game* (2001), *Dry Leaves on Ukan Tree* (2001), *Tafida* (2001), *The Lottery Ticket* (2002), *Yemoja* (2002), *Otaelo* (2003), *The Twist* (2004), *Limam and Ade Ire* (2004), *The Angels and Other Plays* (2004), *Hard Ground* (2006), *Ameh Oboni The Great* (2006), *Idemili* (2006) *Aetu* (2007), *The Wives* (2007), *Tuti* (2008), *Akuabata* (2008), *Mojagbe* (2008) and *The Little Drops* (2009).

Yerima has also written and edited several other works like *Theatre and Democracy in Nigeria* (with Ayo Akinwale) in 2002, *Fragmented Thoughts and Specifics: Essays in Dramatic Literature* (2003), *Basic Techniques in Playwriting* (2004), *Ideology and Stagecraft in the Nigerian Theatre* (with Olu Obafemi) in 2004, *Modern Nigeria Theatre: The Geoffrey Axworthy Years(1956-1967)* in 2005 and *Gender Politics: Women Writing and Films in Northern Nigeria* (2012).

1.3 On the Primary Texts

Murder in the Cathedral (1935) is a play written on the adaptation of the historical events surrounding the martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket (1118 – 1170) the Archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered by the knights of King Henry II (1133 – 1188/9) in 1170. The play which is written in verse is one of the dramatic works that recreate the conflicts that characterized the power relationship between the state and the church in the English society during the middle ages. It explores the struggle between spiritual power and temporal power represented by Archbishop Becket and King Henry II respectively.

According to Nevill Coghill (1965:9), Eliot was commissioned by George Bell, Bishop of Chichester to write a play for the Canterbury Festival of June 1935 and chose for his subject matter the historical facts of the martyrdom of the famous English Saint, Thomas Becket, who

was the Archbishop of Canterbury between the years 1162 and 1170 when he was brutally murdered in his own church. The play was first performed in the 1930s when the importance of the church in the individual's life was in the decline. Already, writers such as James Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) had begun to express dissent against the Catholic Church. As such, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot who is "Anglo-Catholic in religion" seized the opportunity of the Canterbury Festival and recreated or re-imagined an important event that took place in the twelfth century to highlight some lost religious values such as martyrdom, sacrifice, sainthood, sincerity, dedication and commitment to the twentieth century audience/readers. Through, the protagonist who refused all temptations, Eliot attempts to revisit the historic past in order to revive and instill some lost philosophical concepts and values into the minds of the people of that age whose psyche has been ravaged by industrialization, war and materialism.

On another level, the play which also deals with an individual's opposition to authority can be seen as a reaction to the era it was written which witnessed the rising of fascism in central Europe. Specifically, the play casts a comment on the use of propaganda as portrayed by the prosaic speeches delivered by the Four Knights in their attempt to justify the assassination of the Archbishop.

Like *Murder in the Cathedral*, *Attahiru*, the other primary text of this study is an adaptation of the history of Caliph Attahiru I of the Sokoto Caliphate in pre-colonial Northern Nigeria. The author, Ahmed Yerima wrote the play when he was requested by his colleague who is from Sokoto to turn the history of his ancestors into drama. In response to this challenge, Yerima chose the historical events of the final stage of the British conquest of the Caliphate in the early 1900s (Yerima; 1999:7). The playwright dramatizes the clash between the British imperial forces under

the command of Lord Lugard and the gallant patriotic Muslim army which results in the heroic death of Caliph Attahiru I, the eponymous hero and hundreds more of his followers at the final battle of Burmi. The play captures the height of the scramble for and partition of Africa by the European super powers which took its momentum after the Berlin Conference of 1884. The British who are eager to take Sokoto ahead of their chief rivals, the French who are fast approaching from the North, advance after they failed to deceive the Caliph with their crafty friendship request. The Caliph after consultation with his warriors chooses to go to war which resulted in the defeat of the Muslim army and his eventual martyrdom together with many of his warriors.

However, unlike T.S. Eliot who was motivated by his desire to reestablish religious awareness amongst his readers, Yerima's writing of *Attahiru* is more informed by the burning desire to reconstruct the distorted version of the history of pre-colonial Nigeria, and indeed Africa. He is motivated by the post-colonial discourse on African history on which many African literary writers such as Achebe, Ngugi and Armah devoted their attention. As such, more than the religious aspect of the history, Yerima's *Attahiru* emphasizes the politics surrounding the post-colonial African literature that attempts to reconstruct the history through presenting the authentic versions of it for better political awareness among the people in contemporary Nigeria.

Therefore, through revisiting the reservoir of the history of pre-colonial Nigeria, Yerima presents to his contemporary readers an organized political system led by patriotic leaders who sacrificed their lives in defense of their societies against the foreign invaders from Europe. Like in *The Trial of Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1998), Yerima once again recreates the hitherto distorted version of Nigerian and African political history. However, this new historicist reading of the

play would attempt to place it in its religious context in order to demonstrate its affinity with the other of play of this study.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

This thesis is a comparative study of historical plays, T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru*. A number of academic studies have examined each of the plays, looking at their different aspects. In most of the studies, the plays are placed within the premise of comparative studies. However, there are little or no current studies that combine both. Mostly each of the plays is compared with another work from the same socio-cultural background; that is *Murder in the Cathedral* with other European works and *Attahiru* with other African texts. The affinities between the two works in terms of their adaptation of historical facts of the two important spiritual and political leaders have been overlooked by critics. As such, this work aims to investigate the two plays seeking to reveal the socio-political order that influenced the playwrights' selection and handling of the historical material. Finally, through the study of the use of history in the two plays, the work also demonstrates the nexus between history and literature.

1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to conduct a research on *Murder in the Cathedral* by English writer T. S. Eliot and *Attahiru* by Nigerian playwright, analysing critically the use of history in play-creating. In the same vein, the work also examines the role of drama in bringing socio-political, religious as well as historical awareness in our societies.

The objectives of the study include the following:

1. To examine the socio-political, religious and historical contexts of the plays;
2. To compare and contrast the literary purposes of the playwrights;
3. To examine the influence of patronage in the adaptation of the historical figures in each play;
4. To compare the use of history in each play;
5. To examine how the two texts contribute to societal reorientation and socio-political and religious awareness in their respective societies.

1.6 Research Questions

1. How does the context provide the source material for each play?
2. What are the socio-political, religious and philosophical ideas that informed the writing of the plays?
3. How do the playwrights present the historical figures in the plays?
4. What differentiates between the playwrights in terms of their use of history?
5. How do the texts contribute to or shape the understanding of the history, culture and ideologies they represent?

1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The research is limited to the two texts, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru* in terms of their use of history to comment on socio-political, religious and philosophical ideas in the societies that produced them. Hence, New Historicism is used to examine the relationship between the

plays and their contexts. And since the playwrights have written other works, this research is limited to the two selected plays only, however, where there is need, reference to other works can be made.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies primarily from its comparative nature, with its focus on T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru*. It thus attempts to address a gap in comparative research between the two playwrights in terms of their use of history, literary purposes as well as their sources of influence in writing the plays despite the temporal and geographical spaces of their contexts.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The discipline of Comparative Literature makes it possible to compare texts that are distinct in nature, culture and history. Comparative literature aims at comparing one literature with another or others, and literature with other fields of knowledge such as history, politics, religion, philosophy and economics. Comparative Literature moves beyond the borders of any one country or linguistic community to study literature across languages, geographies, time periods, and genres. Comparative Literature also examines the relationship between literature and other forms of cultural expression and human experience, including anthropology, history, philosophy, political science or religion.

Comparative literature, according to René Wellek and Austin Warren (1978), refers to “the study of relationships between two or more literatures.” Following on this, Kumar offers a simple and vivid definition of the term,

The simple way to define comparative literature is to say that it is a comparison between two literatures. Comparative literature analyses the similarities and dissimilarities and parallels between two literatures. It further studies themes, modes, conventions and use of folk tales, myths in two different literatures or even more (2000: 1).

According to the theorists in this field, comparative literature can be interdisciplinary; comparison between literature and other fields or intra-disciplinary; comparison between two or more literatures. As such, this study is considered intra-disciplinary since it compares not only two literatures but two play-texts. The work makes it possible for us to draw comparisons between two plays of a cross-cultural nature and seek to reveal the close affinity between them. *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru* represent not only literatures from different historical periods, but also different cultures and motivation. Again, since the work focuses mainly on the use of history in the plays, then it can also be considered as interdisciplinary as it compares the veracity of literature in relation to history.

Henry Remak (1971) provides another fairly straightforward definition of ‘comparative literature’ as,

The study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g., painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, the social sciences (e.g. politics, economics, sociology), the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression (cited in Shalaby, 2013:1).

This definition applies to what the present study intends to address as its objective: first, to explore the link between the two selected works in terms of their use of history and second, to find their relationship with their respective socio-political and religious contexts. From this perspective, the study is placed within the field of comparative literature.

Since the focus of this research is to conduct a comparative study of two historical plays T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* in relation to their respective socio-political contexts, it is then relevant to use New Historicism as the tool of investigation. According to Charles E. Bressler (1994: 187), New Historicism critics "believe that all texts are really social documents that reflect but, also, and more importantly, respond to their historical situation."

New Historicism is a theory applied to literature which developed in the 1980s, primarily through the work of the American critic Stephen Greenblatt, and gained prominence in the contemporary literary world. The scholars concerned with New Historicism gave this body of criticism a number of names including "critical historicism", "historical materialist criticism" and "cultural poetics" (Zengin, 2007:1). The theory suggests that literature must be studied and interpreted within the context of history in order to evaluate how the work was influenced by the socio-political and historical order underlying the society of its time. As such, it draws attention to the close connection between cultural texts and history.

The critics of New Historicism consider the year 1980 as the beginning of New Historicism and also consider Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) as the work that announced the chief characteristics of the theory. Although in this essay, Greenblatt preferred to call the theory "Cultural Poetics" but he later coined and inaugurated the

name New Historicism in his introduction to *The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance*,

Many of the present essays give voice ... to what we may call the new historicism, set apart from both the dominant historical scholarship of the past and the formalist criticism that ... the New Historicism erodes the firm ground of both criticism and literature (1982: 5 – 6).

New Historicism developed as a reaction to formal criticism such as New Criticism and Russian Formalism that propose formal analysis and see literary work as self-sufficient object that can be properly interpreted in isolation; independent of the biography, social and historical contexts, politics and other extrinsic matters. New Historicism emphasises that a literary text should be considered a product of the time, place and circumstances of its composition rather than an isolated creation. New Historicism focuses on the contexts of all kinds in which a work of art is produced. Instead of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicist reading focuses mainly on “the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meanings, its effects, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations” (Abrams, 1999: 182-183). The main objective of New Historicism argues Bhat,

... is to see a literary work in the historical background and to focus in socio-cultural circumstances ... it places a text within the totality of socio-cultural institutions and practices that make the history and culture milieu of a particular moment of time and place (2014:12-18).

New Historicism differs from its old counterpart “old historicism” in the sense that, unlike previous historical criticism that limits itself to simply demonstrating how a work is reflective of its time, New Historicism advances further on how the work is influenced by and influential on the time in which it was produced. It also examines the social political sphere in which the author

moved and any other factors influential on the work of art. On this, the current study aims at evaluating how Eliot's and Yerima's selection of the specific historical moments and figures to recreate are greatly influenced by certain socio-political and ideological factors prevalent at the moments of their writing. This work argues that while Eliot is influenced by the decline of religious values in his English society and the political conflict in Europe, Yerima's writing of *Attahiru* is clearly influenced and motivated by the burning desire to contribute to the African post-colonial discourse that aims to reconstruct the distorted African history for political awareness needed for the ongoing struggle against European imperialism.

Moreover, New Historicists are not alone on this idea of placing literature in its context. J. Hillis Miller though regarded a formalist, states that,

Works of literature do not simply reflect or (they) are not simply caused by their contexts, they have a productive effect in history. This can and should be studied. To put this (in) another way, the only thing that sometimes worries me about the turn to history now as an explanatory method is the implication that I can fully explain every text by its pre-existing historical context. But the publication of these works was itself a political or historical event that in some way or another changed history. I think that if you don't allow for this, then literature is not much worth bothering with (1991: 152-153).

Miller's argument above shows the importance of placing literary work in its socio-political context and also demonstrates the complex relationship between text and context of which New Historicism differs from the "old historicism" because the former seeks to show that in the same way that context shapes a literary work, the text also influences history. In other words, "the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer" of the context it reflects (Abrams, 2012:183).

Furthermore, New Historicists aim simultaneously to understand the literary text through its historical context and to understand the cultural and intellectual history through literature. The American New Historicism, Louis Adrian Montrose coined the terms “the historicity of text” and the “textuality of history” as key phrases in New Historicism to emphasize how a literary text is bound up in its historical context and how history itself is like a text in the sense that it is not a list of objective facts; an idea that is influenced by post-structuralists’ tendency of turning things on their heads. This definition of New Historicism by Montrose captures the relationship between literature and history both in terms of documenting the past as well as the interpretation of it. With this argument, New Historicists then have made a return to history in literary criticism, accepting history itself as a text and considering that the historian himself is trapped within his own historicity. Therefore, in a new historicist reading of *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru*, it is essential to understand the socio-political, cultural as well as religious order of the societies that produced the two plays.

Again, one of the significant peculiarities of New Historicism is its refusal to separate literary texts from non-literary texts. The critics in this school recognize all texts, literary or non-literary, as cultural artifacts. New Historicism is interested in history as represented and recorded in written documents, in history as text. In his conclusion of *Literary Theory: An Introduction* Terry Eagleton proposes two ways by which a literary theory distinguishes itself; one is its method; the other, its object of investigation (1983: 197). The method of new historicists is “historical” and according to Jerome McGann “the governing context of all literary investigation must ultimately be a historical one” (1979: 1025). This post-structuralist idea of text is central to the new historicist perspective which according to Zengin (2007: 14) “accepts that the past exists only in texts”, and thus the past can only be known by their written texts.”

Veeseer in *The New Historicism* (1989) outlined the following key assumptions of new historicism in order to show how this theory approaches literary texts, culture and history and to define their concerns with each other:

1. that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices;
2. that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
3. that literary and non-literary “texts” circulate inseparably;
4. that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature;
5. that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe (Veeseer, 1989: xi).

Finally, on the close affinity between history and literature, Hayden White (1978: 5) contends that, “the discourse of the historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other.” Thus, in this study, the two plays *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru* are going to be treated as the works of dramatists responding in literary terms to the process of history. Also, through evaluation of the selected works and how the playwrights creatively use the historical materials, this work suggests that drama is similar to history.

CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the related literature. And since this work is concerned with comparative study of two historical plays, Eliot *Murder in the Cathedral* and Yerima's *Attahiru*, it is important then, in the first place, to review the relationship between history and literature. Furthermore, since many scholars and researchers have written on both Eliot and Yerima's works generally, and specifically, their two plays under study here, this study also reviews some relevant works on the playwrights and their use of history to comment on socio-political milieu of their respective societies.

2.1 Literature and History: The Intersection

Like the two plays under study here, many literary works have the features of history and literature; history in the sense that the works are records of man's life and literature in the sense that it is an imaginative recreation and realization of experience. Both the playwright/novelist/poet and the historian, in their different ways, "are concerned with presenting and representing human experience" (Owundinjo: 1991). It is widely held view in New Historicism, and in other literary theories like Marxism and post-colonialism, that literature, relies on history for its creative or source material. Hugh Webb (1980) agreeing with Georg Lukacs' view of literature's reliance on socio-political as well as historical event argues that "each work of art arises out of the particular alternative of its time."

The relationship between literature and history is an area that has been explored by many scholars both ancient and modern. Bhadmus (2002) in his paper "Myth, History and Literature in Osofisan's *Morountodun*" observes that,

The conflictual, if not outrightly dubious relationship between history and literature, dates back to the antiquity. Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, who in their treatises such as *The Republic* and *Poetics* tested the boundaries and veracity of factuality.

Also commenting on the relationship between literature and history, Taylor argues that,

History and literature are complementary, not merely in that, they are both testaments to man's growth through the centuries, but in that they are the products of a common vital urge on the part of human beings to explain those intangible forces of life, which, in the ultimate sense, become the most tangible of all motivations (1938: 459-479).

The importance of socio-political and historical contexts in literature is also recognized by many critics. The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues that,

Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and these other forces cannot be ignored... (1981: 23).

It is in line with the afore-mentioned arguments that many playwrights from different parts of the world and across different historical periods adopted, recreated and rewrote history in their fictional works. Their dramatic works are based on certain historical facts or events. In other words, the playwrights document, and therefore respond to their socio-political experiences in a process aptly captured in Ogude's argument that, "every literary work is a response to a definite historical and socio-political condition" (Ogude in Ikonne et al (eds) 1991; 1-9).

This close connection between literature and history, or drama and history ushered in the evolution of a genre called "historical drama" or "historical play" which is based on historical events and recreates certain historical events. Some examples of this are the historical plays

written by the English writer William Shakespeare, whose plays like *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV* and *Julius Caesar* which dramatize history of the European society. A historical play, therefore, is the one in which the setting, events and characters are taken from the past. Eziegbo (1991) cites David Daiches' three conditions of historical fiction; its setting should future real events and people its setting should be at least two generations from the time it was written, the narrative past should be related to the present. In contrast to the historical novel, however, historical drama is very ready to place real people at the foreground of the action. In both *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru*, the playwrights revisit historical past to recreate historical figures. Both Archbishop Becket and Sultan Attahiru I are real people that played important roles in their respective societies. They both occupy privileged and revered positions in the minds of their people. Therefore, Eliot and Yerima employ the medium of theatre to recreate the specific histories of these great men in order to comment on the socio-political and religious milieu of their time. As such, we can say that the two plays fall within the description of historical plays by Mario Klarer,

These plays portray a historical event or figure but, through the addition of contemporary references, transcend the historical dimension and make general statements about human weaknesses and virtues. In many cases, the author chooses a historical pretext in order to comment on contemporary socio-political misery... (2004: 42).

In line with this, we can argue that, the intersection of history and literature is at the heart of historical plays such as *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru* that attempt to recreate, rewrite, reconstruct and therefore, interpret history.

At this point, it is important to note the relationship between drama and reality. The British playwright, Edward Bond (2006) in his “Freedom and Drama” shows the relation between the two:

Creativity enacts human reality because although drama uses fiction it activates the core self which is the foundation of our reality. Drama is not fiction – it works on the border between fiction and reality. In any serious understanding, drama *is* reality – not because it takes its subject from street reality but because it enacts the core self, which is the means by which we entered into reality (2006: 209).

This shows that literature is an integral part of the cultural terrain demonstrates how the contemporary practice of revisiting historical events brings forward new layers of meaning into our culture.

Although New Historicism tries to acknowledge that history and literature provide material to each other, however, in the dramatization of history then art functions as a means to interpret the world, rather than as a medium that mirrors existing realities only. As such, in his fictional recreation of history, the dramatist will have his own interest in the events and characters he deals with, and this interest is likely to be psychological, political, religious or ideological. Drama, therefore, enables assessment and reevaluation of historical claims and/or reconstructing and rewriting of history as the case may be. As such, it serves not only as medium, but also an interpreter.

Many playwrights utilize some historical events as their source of materials for their creative drama and the significance of the use of history in drama is captured by Dorcas Ewojobi,

Using history as a tool in drama is of great significance to the theatre, the audience or readers and the society at large. For the theatre, the playwright has more materials to work with. Because he is dealing

with reality as against abstract ideas... for the audience, a play built from history is not only entertaining. It is educating and informing. It refreshes the brain of those who had been born when the incident happened and provides a platform of a close to life experience for those who did not witness the incident (2012: 256).

Moreover, contrary to some views by scholars that try to emphasize the subordination of art to history, many literary scholars argue that art cannot be seen as such but rather be seen on the same plane with, or even higher than, history. On this, Victoria Adeneyi posits that,

History which is written in the form of drama is, on a higher plane, more intense, more universal, and more philosophical than history which is written in a chronological manner and is more particular. A historical drama (therefore) deals with a particular point in the history of the society. It gives insight into what life was like at the particular period chosen by the playwright as focus (2007: 97-98)

In support of this argument above, Frank Ankersmit (2010: 45) further contends that, “history is mostly occupied with saying what the past was like,” but fiction, which also includes drama, “focuses more on showing the past, as it is open to various interpretations to depict the reality”. Moreover, in terms of responding to the flux of social and political experiences, playwright, poet and novelist are not significantly different. The main difference, however, is in the medium through which they operate. Playwright, whose channel is theatre, which is a symbolic form of art has an edge over his counterparts. Nwahunanya contends that,

The playwright has the added advantage that after writing down his analysis of and response to society as a text; he has the opportunity to actualize his message through a stage enactment. Like a preacher on a pulpit, he is able to confront his society (the audience) (1998: 50).

The abovementioned argument leads us to another level of this comparative study, that is, of Eliot's and Yerima's use of history to tackle religious and political issues of their time. And, this provides another basis of comparison between their two selected plays. I will take the religious aspect first.

The history of literature clearly shows that religion has always been a rich source of material for the world of art in general and for drama in particular. Scholars have noted that the origin of tragedy itself could be traced back to religious rituals performed for the appeasement and celebration of ancient Greek gods (Baldry: 1979, Crow: 1983). On this robust relationship between drama and religion which has flourished for centuries, and has generated much discussion Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood (2013) argues that "in the eyes of the fifth century audiences... tragedies were, among other things, a discourse of religious exploration" (cited in Shalaby, 2013: 78). The treatment of religious themes was also basic feature of all forms of literature from different parts of the world. Many artists relied on the religious context for their creative materials or we can say that they utilize the medium of literature, for theological purposes as well. Mineke Schipper (1989: 55) in her "Origin and Forms of Drama; The African Context" argues on the origin of drama that, "it developed from religious rites because of example of such development are found in different places of the world, in Africa and elsewhere."

Using this aspect of religion, the present study examines and analyzes the issue of sacrifice and martyrdom as religious motifs in Eliot *Murder in the Cathedral* and Attahiru. The work tries to find a correlation between the two plays in terms of treatment of religion and religious elements an aspect that was largely overlooked in Yerima's play by many other researchers mostly due to

the circumstances that informed the writing of the play which are more socio-political than religious.

Since from the early development of drama many playwrights have utilized religious materials for their play creating *Oedipus Rex* by the Greek tragedian, Sophocles can be seen as one of the precursors of creating drama based on religious materials and rituals. Likewise its African adaptation by Nigerian playwright, Ola Rotimi, in *The gods are not to blame* (1971) which follows the same trend, as the playwright uses elements from his own native Yoruba religion to produce the tragic story of Odewale.

Moreover, in many instances playwrights across different cultures revisited history in order to treat religious issues in their drama works. The British playwright George Bernard Shaw recreated the history of St Joan of Arc (1412 -1431) in his literary drama, *Saint Joan* (1923) to provide a critical view of the role of the church in the British society of his times. The play which is “a powerful expression of hypocrisy and pretensions inherent in the institution of Church” (Bahir: 2015) rewrites the history of the tragic heroine to comment on the state of religion at the time of its writing. Like *Murder in the Cathedral*, the play is based on the materials adopted from the history of Christendom.

Here in Africa, the well-known African dramatist and playwright Wole Soyinka in his plays like *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) employs many practices from the traditional religion to present a Yoruba world view as part of the ongoing discourse against the imposition of the European values on African people. He uses the play, for instance, to reject the view that the idea of sacrifice belongs to the European world but rather “noted in African religion” (Cited in Shalaby, 2013; 81). *Murder in Baghdad* (1972) by the Egyptian poet and playwright, Salah Abd al Sabur explores many Islamic religious themes such as martyrdom, sacrifice and heresy

through rewriting the history of the tenth century controversial poet, philosopher and religious figure, Al Hallaj (858-922) who was executed for standing against the authorities.

Like the plays cited above, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru* can also be seen as historical plays that revisit the past and comment on the religious issues in their societies since both the historical protagonists in the two plays are spiritual leaders among their people. Even if their history has to do with politics as more in the case of *Attahiru*, but it is religion that serves as the backdrop of most of their actions. Their response to the difficult circumstances they found themselves is highly informed not only by their religious beliefs but also their spiritual positions.

The next aspect of this study is the use of history or rather socio-political contexts in the two plays. Both Eliot and Yerima were clearly conscious of the socio-political dimensions of their respective societies, and as such, they utilized the medium of drama to confront their people. However, in the case of *Murder in the Cathedral* the politics that characterized the struggle for power, dominance, control and supremacy between the Church (ecclesiastical authority) and the state (temporal authority) in the history of English and European societies during the middle ages is utilized by Eliot in order to revive some lost values among his modern English audience.

Historically, monarchs of England had a sour relationship with the Church, and according to Seagrave (2013), they have especially a sore spot in Canterbury. From Archbishop Anselm's Victory over investiture to Thomas Becket's conflicts with King Henry II and the political conspiracy involving Archbishop Crammer and Henry III, the history of England recorded a number of crises between the two most powerful institutions. Eliot and many other writers used this in their fictional works. *Murder in the Cathedral* chronicles one of these crises that is of Thomas Becket who was assassinated by the men of King Henry in the Canterbury Cathedral in 1170. The story has been adapted by many other playwrights like Alfred Lord Tennyson in

Becket (1884) and Jean Anouilh also in *Becket*. And this conflict between clergy and monarchy in European history is a theme of Ken Follett's novel *The Pillars of the Earth*, in which one of the last scenes features the murder of Thomas Becket. Again, Geoffrey Chaucer also alludes to the history of Becket in *The Canterbury Tales*.

On the part of Ahmed Yarima's *Attahiru* it is the socio-political milieu that characterized the Africa of nineteenth century which provided the material for writing the play. This period in African history witnessed the conquest and annexation of African nations by the powerful European nations like England, France, German and Portugal after a long period of human and material exploitations through the inhuman slave trade and the so-called legitimate trade. Specifically, the play chronicles the history of the Sokoto Caliphate's resistance against the British forces which began in the late nineteenth century and ended in 1903 after the martyrdom of the Muslim leader Attahiru I and many of his followers that marked the defeat of the Caliphate (see Ikime (ed): 2012). As such, the play follows the same trend of other works in which the history of Africa's colonial struggle is revisited and recreated for the purpose of reconstructing it for the contemporary audience. Adeyemi (2006: 17) contends that "the dramatization of history is a conscious attempt by dramatists to recapture the past, use it as an analytical tool to reflect on the present and to preserve it for posterity." Moreover, the use of this particular historical experience of colonialism in fictional writings is informed by the realization by the African artists the urgent need to provide an "insider's view" of African colonial history in order to correct the crooked "outsider's version" which was created and sustained by European writers. Works that are produced along this line are considered as "protest literature" of which the main concern is resistance. Abu Alfa described this resistance as,

The type of resistance, which emerges after the loss of the national sovereignty and the destruction of the collective historical conscience which then forces the

people to adopt the ideals of the colonizers to liberate themselves from colonization (2000: 13).

Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of the leading figures in this dramaturgy of adopting colonial history with the aim of reconstructing it. In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1977) which he co-authored with Micere Mugo, the historical facts of the Mau Mau resistance against the British colonialist in Kenya is revisited by the playwrights, specifically, to reconstruct the image of the protagonist, Kimathi, and present him as a patriotic and sincere African leader in contrast to the colonial image of him as a terrorist. In their own words, the playwrights aim to "reconstruct imaginatively our history envisioning the world of Mau Mau and Kimathi..." (Ngugi and Mugo, 1977: ix).

Another playwright that also revisited or adopted Africa's political history and used it to make points relevant to the present is Ola Rotimi in *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974) which reflects the British expeditions against Benin City during the last decade of nineteenth century. Apart from *Attahiru*, Yerima himself also wrote another play on the same subject, *The Trial of Oba Ovonramwen* which chronicles the fate of the Benin monarch in the hands of the British government and thereby providing some form of correction with regard to Rotimi's contested characterization of the monarch.

At this point, it is important to note that in the dramatization of history, a playwright may select a particular episode and represent it to his audience in such a way that it would serve his purpose. For example, contrary to what Murray Last (1967: 140) recorded that Sultan Muhammad Attahiru was not popular when he was made caliph, in the recreation in *Attahiru*, Yerima shows that the caliph is widely accepted by his people. This is of course due to the authorial freedom which allows a playwright to force on the historical event his thematic pre-occupation. In the case of *Attahiru* then the reconstruction of the image of pre-colonial African leaders is what

informed the selection and handling of the historical material. As such, Ahmed Yerima highlighted the specific episodes that suit his literary purpose.

2.2 Literature on *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru*

On the two plays in this study, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru*, the researcher is aware of a number of previous studies on both of them that the current research tries to add a layer on. The works have been reviewed from different perspectives ranging from form, plot structure, characterization and thematic pre-occupation. On some instances, the works are also used in comparative studies with other texts. Hence, the purpose of this study is to bring some of these reviews into this discussion in order to identify the gap which the present study aims to fill in. In most of the previous studies, the researchers either confine their interest in comparing each of the two works with other texts that share the same socio-cultural background; *Murder in the Cathedral* with another “Euro-Christian” drama and *Attahiru* with another African play. This study intends to break this socio-cultural barrier by studying these historical plays are concerned in order to show the theatrical link between them despite the temporal and geographical spaces. Moreover, in most of the previous studies which this work intends to add a layer on, the researchers concentrates on surface conflicts between the recreated historical figures and the institutions they represent (Church-State and Colonizer-Colonised in *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru* respectively). In addition to this, the current study goes further to explore the inner conflict of the two historical protagonists in their struggle with their own selves. In other words this work explores the issue of “self-conquest” which Becket and Attahiru achieved in their search for salvation which demonstrates the close affinity of the two plays.

Although T. S. Eliot is more famous with his poetry, but his plays such as *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Four Quartets* have also attracted large number of studies across the literary cycle. According to Xiros Cooper (2006) T. S. Eliot developed interest in the theatre from his first introduction to the Elizabethan dramatists. According to him, Eliot plays which are all written in blank verse, helped to create a taste for verse drama from the mid-1930s to the late 1950s and also helped to “reinvent for the twentieth century a dramatic practice of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries” (89). Hence, *Murder in the Cathedral*, continued cooper “made Eliot one of the pillars of Anglicanism at a time when the church and religion in general had entered their long decline (ditto). As such, the main interest of this study, as per as Eliot’s dramaturgy is concerned, is not the form but rather the socio-political vision of his works in general, and *Murder in the Cathedral* in particular. In relation to this, Scott (1994) believes that “Eliot should be remembered more on his critique of complacent liberalism, corporate exploitation, and secular vision of progress.”

Eliot’s dramaturgy can be said to be gradual. After his experimentation in verse drama in *Sweeney Agonistes*, he later came to write *Murder in the Cathedral* in which he demonstrates his versatility with a strong character, a strong narrative, and an important personal theme. Cooper argues that,

The play dovetailed neatly with his work in support of the Church of England and made him one of the pillars of Anglicanism at a time when the Church and religion in general had entered their long decline. Eliot fought passionately against this trend and published an important statement about the centrality of religion to society in 1939 in *The Idea of a Christian Society*(2006: 88).

Again, Kearns in his essay “Religion, Literature, and Society in the Works of T. S. Eliot”, comments on Eliot’s recourse to religion in his works,

During the years of his maturity, Eliot's Christianity became the major source of his work, enabling such brilliant accomplishments as *Ash-Wednesday*, "Song for Simeon" and "Journey of the Magi," and such innovations as *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion*. Christianity also generated *Four Quartets*, perhaps Eliot's greatest poetic achievement, a sustained experiment in dialogic and meditative poetry that is at once the culmination of a certain tradition in the West and the potential point of departure for a new mode (1994:77-95).

On the close affinity of literature and religion, which is of the interest of this study, Eliot believes that their association is "easy and natural" (Kearns in Moody (ed) 1994). In line with this, many studies were conducted on Eliot's works of which I will cite only those on his play in this study. Bahir (2015) compared the play with George, Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* in terms of their use of history to highlight some lost religious values in their societies. As such, by comparing the play with *Attahiru* in this respect, this work intends to demonstrate how the philosophical and ideological inclination of the playwright informed the handling of the historical material in the two works. In the same vein, the work also aims to compliment other studies like that of Al-Husseinawy (2009) who compares the play with other poetic play on Becket by Tennyson, *Becket* (1884) based on their plot, structure and characters only. Again, Kline (1968) studies it in terms of the pattern of movement in modern religious drama of which the play is a good example. The researcher concludes that the little movement in comparison to other plays in the study is primarily because the play begins so near to the climax, that is the martyrdom of the Archbishop. Other studies include Kohzadi and Mohammadi (2011) that examine the play in terms of the traditional image of the turning wheel and the still point and Manuja (2015) that concentrates solely on the role of the chorus in the play. These are some of the reviews which the present research intends to add a layer on. And as indicated in the beginning of this section

almost all the previous works compared *Murder in the Cathedral* with its fellow European or English texts and mostly concentrate on the surface conflict between the Archbishop and King Henry without dwelling much on the inner between the body and the soul, between mundane/corporeal and spiritual desires of the man of God. This work explores this issue of self-mortification of the historical protagonist by comparing it with that of another religious leader (Caliph Attahiru) who represents a totally different socio-cultural background.

And now on Ahmed Yerima, whose dozens plays are generally categorized into historical, religious and socio-political realist plays (Julius–Adeoye: 2013) and is considered one of the most vibrant and committed playwrights in Nigeria. His plays that focus on contemporary, political, social, economic, religious and cultural issues in Nigeria have received a number of reviews. Yerima’s historical plays, in particular, which include *Attahiru*, *The Trial of Oba Ovanramwen* and *Ameh Oboni*, revisit the past in order to facilitate understanding the present so as to help in shaping the future in what he calls “giving life to the past... so that it makes new and more immediate meaning to the present” (Yerima, 1999: 6). On this Adeoti (2007: 34) also submitted that Yerima’s historical plays “not only seek to dramatize history, but also to redefine it, interrogate it, draw a connection overtly or covertly between the past and the now with a view to shaping the course of future actions.”

As such, *Attahiru* can be seen as Yerima’s nationalistic attempt to reconstruct the European imperial misrepresentation of African history for better understanding of the history of our people needed in our contemporary society that is stuck in socio-political confusion as a result of insufficient understanding of its past, a task that rests on the shoulders of the “sensible needles” of the society; the writers. In his argument for historical plays, Ola Rotimi posits that,

Most of us Africans are ignorant of our history. When I was in secondary school, we learnt tangentially African History and usually from a myopic, jaundiced

perspective of Western scholars... My second mission is, of course, to see whether we could emulate some heroic figures in history(cited in Julius-Adeoye, 2013: 59).

Ahmed Yerima is one of the most notable dramatists to have emerged on the Nigerian literary drama stage in the last decade of the twentieth century (Adeoti: 2007). His works that include dozens plays have received quite a number of researches. *Muse and Mimesis*, edited by Gbemisola Adeoti (2007) serves as a collaborative research on Yerima's plays. The work comprises selected essays that focus on Yerima's "artistic vision" and "socio-political mission" which define his art in relation to other African dramatists. Out of these essays, at least five focus on his play *Attahiru* and therefore considered relevant to this work.

It is clear that most of the reviews on Yerima's historical plays focus mainly on his use of history. For instance Akoh (in Adeoti: 2007) examined Yerima's faithfulness to full text of the historical events which the plays recreate (121). He concludes that Yerima's *Attahiru* serves as admonition to Africa with regards to the antics of European imperialists and their African agents through re-presenting or re-writing of Africa's history.

On the use of history by Yerima in *Attahiru* and *The Trial Oba Ovonramwen*, Effiok Bassey Uwatt (2007) contends that it is for specific purpose of "either absolving the Nigerian monarchs from alleged guilt of complicity or celebrating their heroism in resistance of imperialism (in Adeoti: 2007). Another aspect that Uwatt discussed which is of relevant to this study is the issue of 'tragic strains' on which he posits that the source of conflict in *Attahiru* is the British undermining of the power of the religious institution of the Sokoto Caliphate.

In his paper "Historical Drama in Nation Building: *Attahiru* and the Relevance of Interpretation (in Adeoti: 2007), Umar-Buratai points out clearly that the play is quite relevant in the

interpretation of Nigeria's pre-colonial and colonial history needed for the re-assertion of the peoples' confidence in the quest for nation building. As such, the re-writing of history by Yerima in the play is seen as his nationalistic contribution towards the quest for better understanding and mutual respect needed in our contemporary society.

Emmy Idegu (2007) focuses on the reconstruction of the image of Caliph's Attahiru through the projection of the glory, honour, pride and valiant deeds of the eponymous protagonist in the face of resistance against colonial incursion and domination. The paper argues that the play therefore resisted and corrected the notion that the pre-colonial leaders of Northern Nigeria encouraged European colonization.

Similarly, Bilkisu Abubakar (2014) studies *Attahiru* alongside Tomoloju's *Aminatu Queen of Zazzau* and Ladan and Lydersay's *Shehu Umar* as dramatization of Northern Nigerian history and concludes that the adaptation of the history of the eponymous hero, *Attahiru*, in the play is a continuation of the ritualization of the protagonist as a historical personage whose historical contribution to the sustenance of Islamic faith in Northern Nigeria was significant. This provides a basis for comparison with *Murder in the Cathedral* which also dramatizes the history of Archbishop Becket in order to highlight some lost Christian values in his modern society, a correlation which was largely overlooked by many researchers. Such as, the present study looks at the manner in which the Caliph responds to the difficult situation he finds himself when he is confronted with power-craving imperial agents and then further compares his struggle with that of Thomas Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*.

Mubarak Ibrahim Lawal (2015) on the other hand, sees the play along Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* beyond the mere reflection and documentation of history to its revolutionary

postcolonial resistance of which African theatre is inclined to. Thus, he places the play in the light of Ngugi and Mugo's view of "good theatre" which in their argument should be "on the side of the people" (1977: iv). This provides the political motivation that informed the writing of plays like *Attahiru*, an aspect that this research intends to compare with the Anglicanism that largely inspired Eliot's handling of the historical material in *Murder in the Cathedral*.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the relationship between literature and other fields of knowledge and beliefs. It tackles the intersection between literature and history and also looks at the various literatures on the chosen works of this study, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru*. The chapter also reviews some previous researches on the two plays. From these reviews it can be seen that most of the earlier studies on these two play-texts concentrate on the surface conflicts between the political/temporal power and theocratic/spiritual power. Going further, this work aims at exploring the issue of self-search which serves as one of the important theatrical links between the two plays. And since most of the previous researches limit the comparison of each of the two plays with other texts from their same cultural background, this work fills a gap in comparative research that cut across two different cultural backgrounds.

CHAPTER THREE

THE USE OF HISTORY IN *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL*

3.0 Introduction

Murder in the Cathedral is written for religious occasion and T.S. Eliot, who was at the time an “Anglo-Catholic in religion”, chose to adapt the history of Archbishop Thomas Becket intentionally to respond to the state of religion at his age. Using new historicism, this chapter examines the use of history in the play. The chapter discusses the play as historical drama and then examines the treatment of religion through the dramatization of the historical events in the play.

3.1 *Murder in the Cathedral*: Plot Summary

Murder in the Cathedral is a modern play that chronicles the last episode of the life of Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury in the twelfth century. Thomas was dedicated to his service as the Archbishop to the extent of refusing to pardon the monarch of that time, King Henry II. The two used to be good friends to the extent that Henry appointed Becket the important position of Archbishop. However, after the appointment series of clashes ensued between the two mainly revolving around the conflict between the church and the state, the two most powerful institutions in the English society of that age.

The play is divided into two parts with an interlude in between. Part I opens with a chorus, comprising women of Canterbury gathered at the Archbishop’s Hall of the cathedral with a strong intuition that something terrible is about to happen. They reflect on their lives of suffering in the absence of their Archbishop, Thomas Becket, who has been in exile from England for seven years as a result of his conflict with his old friend and now his King, Henry II.

After the chorus, three priests enter the hall and also lament the Archbishop's absence and debate on the ramifications of his return as well as reflect on his time as Chancellor of England, when he served as secular administrator under King Henry. Through this lamentation of the priests, we learn the cordial relationship that existed between Thomas and Henry prior to the appointment of the former by the latter. However, the romance between these two powerful men turned sour when the Archbishop refused to submit to Henry's attempt to compromise the power of the church as he stood firmly in his belief that the state had no authority over the church. Shortly after the return of Thomas to his church, he is confronted and haunted by four successive temptations. The first three tempters confront him with the obvious temptations of anyone in his position; worldly pleasure, power and treason. The fourth and the final tempter brings something that proves so problematic to the man of God; the temptation to do the right thing but for the wrong reasons. However, Thomas is able to conquer each temptation in turn.

In the Interlude, which comes in between part one and two, the Archbishop preaches in the cathedral on the morning of the Christmas day. The sermon is all about the idea of Christmas as a period of both rejoicing and mourning. Thomas also examines the questions of peace and martyrdom and finally shows that he has conquered the fourth temptation of seeking martyrdom for the sake of pride. He hints at the end of the sermon that he may soon follow the way of martyrs.

In Part II of the play, Four Knights who claim to be acting on King's order storm the church and accuse Thomas of betraying Henry and the state. They try to persuade him to reconcile with Henry by absolving the suspended bishop or to proceed on another exile. Thomas remains difficult and refuses to accept their forceful suggestions. The Knights leave the church and later return armed and brutally kill the Archbishop who refuses to yield to the Priests attempt to bar

the door of the church in order to prevent the Knights from entering. After the murder, the Knights feebly try to justify their atrocity by telling the people that they killed the Archbishop for not being loyal to the state

3.2 *Murder in the Cathedral*: A Historical Play

Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* is set in the twelfth century England. It is a historical play that dramatizes the historical facts of the conflict between the church and the state. The plot of the play involves the well-known dispute between King Henry II and Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket. The story is well documented by many historians and the same story has also been utilized by fictional writers, notably playwrights, as their source material for their historical drama. Apart from Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* under study here other playwrights that recreate this conflict between these historical figures include Alfred Tennyson in *Becket*, Christopher Fry in *Curtmantle*, George Daley in *Thomas a Becket* and Jean Anouilh in *Becket*.

The history of the conflict as recorded by various historians is that Henry II wanted to strengthen his hold over the English church and thus have his friend and dedicated Chancellor, Thomas of London, appointed as the Archbishop of Canterbury. However, after his appointment, Thomas took his Archbishopric responsibility with dedication and became a strong supporter and upholder of the church's interest, an act that inevitably fitted him against Henry, who expected to capitalize on Thomas' loyalty to him to compromise the church's powers.

According to the historical sources one of the major causes of the dispute between Henry and Thomas was the enactment of the famous Constitutions of Clarendon in 1164 which primary goal was to deal with monarchy's problem with the church and conveniently curb its power for his own to increase. According to Walker Williston some of the articles enacted in the constitution aimed at,

Limiting the right of appeal to Rome in ecclesiastical cases, restricting the power of excommunication, subjecting the clergy to civil courts, and putting the election of bishops under the control of the King to whom they must do homage (1970: 258).

The enactment of this constitution is seen by Thomas as monarchy's attempt to intrude in the ecclesiastical issues of the church, as such, he resisted it, especially the clause concerning "criminous clerks" which was meant to give royal courts the chance of punishing clergy who were being tried in ecclesiastical courts by "benefits of clergy". Thomas' resistance of this constitution put him in a serious dispute with the King which eventually led to his exile in France for seven years. And on his return from the exile, he refused to absolve the Archbishop of York and other participating bishops, who he had suspended for taking part in the coronation of Henry's son (ditto). Finally, the conflict reached its climax with the assassination of the Archbishop in 1170 by four knights acting on the orders of King Henry.

It is evident from the reading of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, that he utilizes these historical facts in his writing of the play. It is also very clear that he is well-informed about the details of the event and the participants. However, as a dramatist he creatively selected the materials that would serve his literary purpose as he is "quite free" as an artist to "reconstruct history on the current ideological premises" (Soyinka, 1988; 126).

At this juncture, it is important, as per as new historicist reading of the play is concerned, to examine the correspondence between the history of this conflict and its recounting through dramatization in Eliot's play. This will help in revealing how much of the historical materials of this conflict Eliot employed in his play in order to test the veracity of literature in relation to history. Although the play begins with the final episode of the Thomas-Henry conflict, that is Thomas' return to Canterbury and his eventual murder by the Knights, but audience/readers are

updated about the development of the dispute. This work then examines and demonstrates how much of the story is also revealed through his characterization of the key participants of the history, the dialogue and other dramatic techniques used by the playwright.

Although the play begins with the return of the Archbishop from his seven year exile in France, but through the poetic dialogue of the characters a lot of the perceived omitted details unfold to the reader/audience. Even though Eliot ignores the formative years of Becket and the details of the circumstances that led to his appointment as Chancellor, but the play provides a glimpse of his origin as revealed in the first appearance of the Knights when three of them in unison present their “urgent business” to the Archbishop: “This is the man who was the tradesman’s son/the backstairs brat who was born in Cheapside” (66). Also from the apology of the Second Knight, readers/audience are taken back to the period of Henry’s predecessor and reveal the commendable work done by the King in restoring order in the land: “During the reign of the late Queen Matilda and the irruption of the unhappy usurper Stephen, the Kingdom was very much divided” (85). It is true that during the period, the two institutions, crown and church, used to check the excesses of each other. In the absence of the Archbishop during his exile, the King was able to exercise his atrocities and the masses suffered as the Chorus recounts:

Seven years we have lived quietly
...
Living and partly living
There have been oppression and luxury
There have been poverty and license,
...
There have seen minor injustice,
We have been afflicted with taxes, (Eliot, 1965:29-30)

Again, the Chorus also re-echo their worst fears toward the end of the play when the death of the Archbishop looms large after refusing to succumb to the Knight’s pressure to reconcile with the

King. The Chorus, who play the role of the masses of Canterbury, becomes agitated as a result of the hardship they expect the death of Thomas, their defender, would bring them:

We know of oppression and torture,
We know of extortion and violence,
Destitution, disease,
The old without fire in winter,
The child without milk in summer,
Our labour taken away from us,
Our sins made heavier upon us.
We have seen the young man mutilated,
The torn girl trembling by the mill-stream. (Eliot, 1965:51)

This clearly shows that, of the powerful institutions at the age, the masses are more on the side of the Church as they are afraid of the consequence of its weakened power which Thomas is trying to protect.

Another aspect of the history of Thomas Becket that is recreated in *Murder in the Cathedral* is the great friendship between Thomas and Henry prior to the appointment of the former as the Archbishop. The play reveals through the temptations faced by Thomas, the chancellorship of the protagonist and his cordial relationship with Henry. The First Tempter informs us about this great friendship: “Your lordship won’t forget that evening on the river / When the King and you and I were all friends together” (34). It was this good understanding between the two that King Henry tried to capitalize on to contain the power of the church by appointing Thomas as the Archbishop. According to the historical sources, Henry wanted Thomas to combine the office of Chancellor and that of the Archbishop so that he could have his way with the church. However, Thomas relinquished his chancellorship in order to dedicate his service to the church and therefore undermined the King’s original plan. Eliot reveals all this through the Second Tempter who rebukes Thomas’ decision: “The Chancellor that you resigned / When you were made

Archbishop - that was a mistake". This is also reflected in the Second Knight's apology speech after the murder of the Archbishop, that Henry in his attempt to restore the legal system,

Therefore intended that Becket, who has proved himself an extremely able administrator... should unite the offices of Chancellor and Archbishop. Had Becket concurred with the King's wishes, we should have had an almost ideal state; a union of spiritual and temporal administration under the central government. The moment that Becket... has been made Archbishop, he resigned the office of the chancellor. (Eliot, 1965:86)

Thomas resignation from the office of the Chancellor marked the beginning of his dissent as the Archbishop against the monarchy as he immediately became a champion of ecclesiastical claims and led an exemplary life (Kyzlinkova; 1995: 101). His dedication to the service of the church is also captured by other playwrights like Tennyson in *Becket*,

I served Theobald well when I was with him
I served King Henry well as Chancellor
I am his no more and I must serve the church.
(Cited in Thurston: 1912)

Thomas went ahead to oppose Henry's attempt to compromise and marginalize the power of the church as exemplified in his refusal to agree with the famous "Constitution of Clarendon" which the Monarch drafted and meant to define the relationship between church and state. On this *Murder in the Cathedral* also tells us how Thomas changed when he became Archbishop. The Second Knight reveals how Thomas became "more priestly than the priest" (86).

Although most of the episodes of this clash concerning several attempts by the King of France and the Pope to reconcile the two parties are not reflected in details in the play, however, the

work makes references to them in the dialogue between the Priests in the beginning of the play as the Second Priest describes the nature of the situation:

In ceaseless intrigue, combinations
In conference, meeting accepted, meeting refused
Meeting unended or endless (Eliot, 1965:25)

This change in Thomas from Henry's friend and trusted Chancellor to the "turbulent priest" is summarized by the Fourth Knight who accuses Thomas of "first making then breaking the King's order he himself helped established". The two men remained in feud for some years with each trying to garner support from the Pope and King of France. The quarrel was later compounded when Henry's son was crowned by the Archbishop of York who was assisted by the Bishops of London and Salisbury. And since it was the right of the Archbishop of Canterbury to crown kings of England, Thomas right away suspended the Archbishop of York and the other bishops. This particular episode of the conflict is also revealed in the play by the First Knight: Suspending those who crowned the young prince, / Denying the legality of his coronation (70) Eventually the parties were able to reach a truce after series of conflicts. The reconciliation, however, is considered by many commentators as a "patched up affair" since the main contention was not properly dealt with. The uncertain nature of this peace is reported by the Messenger who informs the agitated Priests just before the Archbishop return to Canterbury:

Peace, but not the kiss of peace
A patched up affairs, if you ask my opinion.
...
If you ask my opinion, I think that this peace
Is nothing like an end, or like a beginning (Eliot, 1965:27).

With this pessimistic report by the Messenger, Eliot makes reference to Henry's refusal to grant the peace of kiss Thomas demanded during the reconciliation on St. Mary Magdalen's Day of 1170 (Coghill: 1965), which clearly demonstrated that the truce between the two was only a temporary one as seen later after the return of the Archbishop.

Since the play begins with the return of the Archbishop, all what we have so far discussed is revealed through the dialogue of the characters in the play. The rest of the events which culminate into the murder of Thomas are revealed in details in the play since the playwright focuses mainly on this final episode of the historical event; the martyrdom of the protagonist. As historical drama, the play chronicles the return of Thomas to his church, his Christmas sermon in which he denounces and excommunicates the bishops and finally reveals his intention to achieve martyrdom.

One unique way of Eliot's handling of the historical material especially in terms of his characterization in *Murder in the Cathedral*, lies in the dramatic role of King Henry who does not appear directly throughout the play. However, Eliot succeeds in revealing the King's main argument in his tussle with Thomas through the Four Knights, who serve as his mouthpiece. This work argues that, this demonstrates that in recreating the history, Eliot's main concern is to highlight some Christian values such as piety, total submission to God, self-mortification and perseverance displayed by Thomas Becket which he believes are lacking in his modern society. As such the play focuses mainly on the protagonist in order to highlight these values. Thomas' strength of character, not only as Archbishop, but as a Christian are amplified in the play. His dedication to his responsibilities, his sense of duty, perseverance, determination, piety and total submission to the will of God become apparent in the play. During his encounter with the Four

Knights in Part II of the play, he withstands their bullying, intimidation and mockery because he is ready to suffer in defence of his faith.

At the end when Thomas insists that he no longer has the power over the absolution of the suspended bishops, the Four Knights have nothing to do again other than to be blunt on their mission: “We have come for the King’s justice, we come with swords” (78) and leave the church to arm themselves. Thomas refuses to back out and demonstrates that he is well prepared to remain steadfast until the end. He refuses the Priests’ attempt to hide him from the Knights or even bar the door of the church to prevent them from entering as he keeps repeating “unbar the door” to the Priests. The Four Knights finally come back and kill him inside his own church and in front of his priests and then face the people and offer their insincere apologies and try to justify their gruesome action.

As historical drama then, *Murder in the Cathedral* places real people at the foreground of the action. The play imaginatively presents the key participants of the historical saga it recreates. The Archbishop, the main protagonist is treated in detail. This can be attributed to the Eliot’s literary purpose as argued earlier which is jointly informed by his Anglicanism and perhaps his commissioning by George Bell, the Archbishop of Chichester to write a play for the religious occasion, the Canterbury Festival in 1965. This can be contrasted with the treatment of King Henry II, whose role is recapitulated in the Knights’ main arguments with Thomas, but does not appear directly throughout the play. Again, the Four Knights, who play the mouthpiece and the henchmen of Henry, remained unidentified in most part of the play until the last episode. With this Eliot unites them in their “urgent business” of punishing the Archbishop who betrayed their King. Lidia Kyzlinkova contends that,

It is no concern of Eliot to individualize the Knights. They are but four mouths with one intent— punishment of the Archbishop who, in their opinion, has betrayed the king (1995: 104).

From the foregoing discussion then, this work argues that in *Murder in the Cathedral* Eliot treats the historical facts closely but selectively. Closely because the play presents the historical events as close as they are documented in the history of the well-known conflict Selectively because he concentrates mainly on the specific episodes that suit his literary purpose of responding to his modern society as it is going to be demonstrated in the next section. Based on the New Historicist reading of this play, this study then demonstrates the nexus between drama and history.

3.3 Treatment of Religion in *Murder in the Cathedral*

Although T.S Eliot proclaimed himself as both “Royalist in politics” and “Anglo – Catholic in religion” his religious leaning took precedence over his political ideas in most of his plays. In *Murder in the Cathedral* which he wrote for a religious occasion, the Canterbury Festival, he explores a number of religious issues such as sacrifice and martyrdom in order to respond to the socio-political order underlying the modern society of his time.

The play is written at a time when there was sharp decline in religion and religious values in his modern English society that were ravaged by modern ideas. Already the society was moving inexorably toward secularism and the materialism which accompanies it. As such, *Murder in the Cathedral* goes beyond mere reflection of medieval past but also serves as Eliot’s response to the problems of his age from religious and philosophical standpoints. He is convinced about the socio-cultural importance of religion as a primordial binding force in his society as he explains in detail in his *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture*,

It is in Christianity that our arts have developed. It is in Christianity that the laws of Europe have until recently been rooted... An individual European may not believe that the Christian Faith is true and yet what he says, and makes and does, will all spring out of his heritage of Christian culture and depends upon that culture for its meaning ... I do not believe that the culture of Europe could survive the complete disappearance of the Christian Faith ... If Christianity goes the whole of our culture goes (Eliot, 1948: 122).

The quotation above clearly demonstrates Eliot's strong conviction about the role of religion in the revival of the secular society of his time. Cooper (2007) contends that,

His theological tendencies and interest have come out as dramas of salvation and submission to God in an age increasingly devoted to the secular panaceas promised by the mechanized production of wellbeing through the wonders of materialism, down to earth commodity consumption and wealth accumulation.

As such, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot deploys the theme of religion in order to highlight some lost religious values among his people whose faith has been shaken as a result of the changes that characterized the modern period. He uses the play to highlight certain presumption of Christianity and specifically the kind of torture and suffering which a true Christian can find himself in his search for heavenly and eternal glory.

One of the goals of new historicist reading is to demonstrate how a literary work is a product of the socio-political experience of a society and how in turn a work influences society. As such, it advocates correspondence between literary and non-literary works in order to show the relevance of what they called "co-text" in shaping the literary text. And since Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* is a dramatization of history, then this work provides a new historicist correspondence

with the history of the famous conflict between the two powerful institutions in the English society.

The historical works which served as the source materials for Eliot in writing of the play stopped at mere recording or reporting of the facts surrounding the conflict and eventual assassination of Thomas. However as an artist, Eliot goes deeper and prisms the facts to reveal some important aspects of the history. Instead of presenting a direct recreation of the events, the play imbues a kind of creative magic and elaborately presents the kind of internal conflict and turmoil the Archbishop passes through before he achieves martyrdom.

Sacrifice and martyrdom are considered one of the most prominent religious values the playwright explores and which formed the central themes of the play. Scott (2001: 22) posits that martyrdom was not merely a concern for theologians or hagiographers, but was a topic embraced in all branches of the arts. Sacrifice, according to Shalaby (2013: 78) is a term used to bestow honour on protagonists who die for altruistic purpose. However, instead of tackling Thomas' martyrdom straight ahead as historian does, Eliot spent a lot of time exploring the issue of self-conquest using Thomas encounters with the Tempters and Knights in order to demonstrate that, the protagonist is able to achieve his martyrdom and eventual sainthood only after he succeeds in conquering the exerting corporeal and mundane lusts in him.

The aim is to present Thomas as a true martyr who first conquers his worldly and bodily desires before he dies defending "the Law of God above the law of man". Through his characterization in the play, the Archbishop is shown to be a man who completely divorces himself from earthly splendour and submits to the will of God. This can be seen as the playwright's attempt to provide a hagiographic re-enactment of the religious strength of Thomas Becket. After his several valiant attempts to thwart the King's attempts to compromise the ecclesiastical church by standing

against all of the latter's intimidation and manipulations, he now totally embraces his martyrdom which he considers as the will of God, as he expresses in the sermon he delivers on the Christmas morning:

A Christian martyrdom is never an accident, for Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effects of man's will to become a saint. Martyrdom is always the design of God. It is never the design of man, for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God and who no longer desires anything for himself not even glory of being a martyr. (Eliot, 1965:49)

In this sermon, Thomas clearly explains what constitutes a true martyr in Christianity. The sermon also vindicates the sincerity of his martyrdom and reaffirms his conquest over the corporeal and mundane lusts symbolized by the First, Second and Third Tempters and equally confirms his triumph and successful surmounting of the greater temptation of pride as symbolized by the Fourth Tempter. As such, the play symbolically demonstrates what constitutes a true Christian martyr.

Thomas' encounter with the Four Tempters in Part One of the play marks his first struggle on his journey towards his impending martyrdom and definitely prepares him for his later more serious encounter with the Four Knights in the second part. When the Four Knights who claim to be acting on the orders of King Henry confront Thomas in his cathedral they find him well prepared. The henchmen show that they mean business and they have not come to waste any time in their mission which they consider "matters urgent" and "urgent business" as the First and the Second Knights consider it respectively. After their refusal for any kind of hospitality from the churchmen with the First Knight unmannerly jokes about their intended murder: "Business before dinner. We will roast your pork / First, and dine upon it after (65)". They again refuse the

Archbishop's offer for public hearing and insist that they must finish their job "here and now" which confirms their evil intent on the clergy.

The Knights then recapitulate Henry's accusations against the Archbishop which include his dissent against the King, his attempt to stir trouble between Henry and the King of France and the Pope and the excommunication of the bishops who crowned Henry's son which denied "the legality of his coronation". The Archbishop calmly and eloquently responds to all these accusations by the monarchy and refuses to absolve the excommunicated bishops as demanded by the Knights. Confirming that Thomas has no intention of changing from being a "turbulent priest" the First Knight then presents Henry's next proposal: "Be that as it may, here is the King's command / That you and your servant depart from this land."

It is in his response to the King's command to go for another exile that Thomas' true virtue as a man of God becomes clearer:

If that is the King's command, I will be bold
To say: Seven years were my people without
My presence; Seven years of misery and pain
...
Never again, you must make no doubt,
Shall the sea run between the Shepherd and his fold (Eliot, 1965:71)

These lines clearly portray Thomas as a true martyr as he chooses to stay and face death as an optimum option for the benefit of others; his people and his society. According to Shalaby (2013), Eagleton sees martyrdom as "freely surrendering what you esteem for the benefit of others." As such, rather than embark on another exile to save his life, Thomas chooses to fulfil his ultimate desire of sacrificing his life for the sake of the church: "I give my life / To the Law of God above the Law of man." Again, the Archbishop strongly believes that he will triumph not

by “fighting, by stratagem or by resistance” but by “suffering” which he sees as the “easier victory” (79). Thus, when he is finally killed by the Knights, his death symbolizes the “triumph of the cross”.

Moreover, the most notable aspect of the assassination of Thomas is his attitude toward his impending death as he courageously and religiously submits to the will of God. He refuses to be intimidated by the Knights who even suggest to him to go on another exile. He also resists the Priests’ attempts to hide him so as to protect him from being killed. He repeatedly commands them to “unbar the door” which gives the Knights the chance to kill him but, of course, more importantly serves as his entry to the kingdom of martyrs and saints.

Apart from the concept of martyrdom, another religious aspect which *Murder in the Cathedral* explores is the problem of temptation as a sinful human nature. Temptation as a religious concept lies deep in all the divine religions as men of God are constantly confronted by one form of temptation or the other in their lives. Like in Islam, temptation in Christianity is connected to Satan, who is seen as the embodiment of all evil. In the play, Eliot explores this concept using the four temptations faced by Thomas in Part One which symbolically serve as the secular ideology of the modern society of which the play is written as portrayed in the Archbishop’s struggle against the Four Tempters that try to derail him from championing the ecclesiastical claims of the church and corrupt his spiritual aspiration.

Unlike the historical works that merely record the historical events of Thomas-Henry conflict that led to the assassination of the Archbishop, *Murder in the Cathedral* as drama offers the readers/audience an opportunity to glimpse in the inner struggle of the protagonist through his encounter with the Four Tempters in Part One of the play. As such, the play is seen at a higher

plane than history since it expresses the unspeakable in history by stressing the inner struggle of the protagonist.

The play begins with the return of Thomas from his seven-year exile in France, after what the Messenger regards as “patched up affair.” The play then moves on to creatively reveal the disastrous temptation of anyone in Thomas position as personified by the Tempters. His stellar record as seen in his ability to withstand the ordeals of life in exile and his courageous return to England in an uncertain atmosphere is immediately put to test by the appearance of the Four Tempters with their tantalizing secular offers which Thomas manages to dismiss one after the other.

The First Tempter offers Thomas earthly pleasures by recounting the “good time” which the Archbishop enjoyed during his chancellorship. He opens the door for the Archbishop to regain the life he savoured together with the King of:

Fluting in the meadows, viols in the hall,
Laughter and apple-blossom floating on the water,
Singing at nightfall, whispering in chambers,
Eating up the darkness, with wit and wine and wisdom (Eliot, 1965:34).

Although Thomas acknowledges the glamour of his non-clerical life as “still a temptation” he is able to finally overcome it with his simple reply: “You come twenty years too late” and thereby dismissing the grandeur of the profane life.

The appearance of the Second Tempter clearly shows that Thomas has indeed tasted the good life prior to his conversion to the man of God. And this reveals his personality as a spiritual leader who disengaged himself from the temporal splendour for the eternal bliss. In line with the first temptation, the second one tempts Thomas with a chance of reclaiming his share of the temporal power as Chancellor which he relinquished immediately he was made Archbishop, a

position which the Second Tempter views as very rewarding: “King commands, Chancellor richly rules.” In addition to the worldly reward, the Tempter also points out to Thomas that the position of Chancellor would also grant him the chance of doing some other godly things such as

Disarm the Ruffian, strengthen the laws,
Rules for the good of the better cause.
Dispensing justice make all even (Eliot, 1965:37).

However, the Archbishop is well prepared to spot the ungodly motive in the Tempter’s offer that earthly power would only come “at a price of a certain submission.” He eloquently dismisses the offer of power that “was once exaltation” since now from his Archbishopric position he considers it as “mean descent” in comparison to his now elevated position of the servant of God.

The Third Tempter proposes an alliance between Thomas and the barons and therefore tests the limits of the Archbishop’s dedication to the service of Christ and his disenchantment with temporal desires. As with the previous temptations, Thomas sweeps this one aside closing the door for any form of betrayal; first by refusing to betray an old friend (King Henry), and second by affirming his main duty of being a servant of God.

The fourth and the final Tempter comes with the most dangerous temptation; a temptation which many men of God failed to overcome; doing the right thing for the wrong reason. He offers Thomas what he desires. He urges the priest to seek for martyrdom and therefore achieve the status of a holy man; a Saint and tempts him with how this would make him emerge victorious in his tussle with the King:

But think Thomas, think the glory after death.
When King is dead, there is another King,
...
King is forgotten, when another shall come:
Saint and martyr rule from the tomb.

Think, Thomas, think of enemies dismayed,
Think of pilgrims, standing in line
Before the glittering jewelled shrine (Eliot, 1965:47).

As can be seen from the lines quoted above, the Tempter coats his deception with what Thomas desires as he himself admits: “Who are you tempting with my own desires?” No wonder the Archbishop himself, in spite of been able to resist it, considers it the “greatest treason” as it stirs the feeling of pride within him, a sin that many religious men failed to overcome; “To do the right deed for the wrong reason.”

This particular scene of Thomas encounter with the Four Tempters is very significant in appreciating the history of Thomas Becket. With this, the play creatively dramatizes the four aspects of the Archbishop which help in reflecting the complex nature of human beings and also symbolize man’s struggle with his own self. Coghill (1965) contends that the four aspects of Thomas are easily recognized in this play. He then offers a critical summary of these aspects as revealed through the Archbishop’s encounter with the tempters,

The first is the natural sensual man who loves pleasure, the second is the man who seeks the exercise of political power,...The third is the man who might have used the power of the church in secular ways The fourth is the man who seeks the supreme glories of sainthood for the sake of the satisfaction it would bring him ... (Eliot, 1965:107).

By recreating the history of Thomas Becket in this play and using it to offer a therapeutic dose to the psyche of his modern audiences who have lost some golden values as a result of the devastating effect of the pervasive changes that characterized the modern society such as materialism, violence and anarchy, *Murder in the Cathedral* then can be seen as Eliot’s attempt to revive some Christian values lacking in his society. Thus, the play attempts to revive some important values such as dedication to duties, determination, perseverance, courage, focus and

above all, the play serves as a medium employed by the playwright to reawaken the sense of responsibility that is lacking in most of the present day leaders. This is the aspect which is going to be compared with that of Yerima's recreation of Caliph Attahiru in the other text of this study. Furthermore, Thomas' encounter with the Fourth Tempter also explores another significant religious element in the play that is the issue of pride. In addition to what historical works recorded about the martyrdom of Thomas, Eliot's dramatization of the story reveals the internal confusion and dilemma the Archbishop finds himself which can never be so glaring in the historical texts of the same story. This also places the play on the same or even higher plane than history. Thomas' encounter with the First, Second and Third Tempters examines his weaknesses in terms of worldly temptations of love of pleasure and political power and influence which would have put him under total control of King Henry in spiritual matters. However, his ability to finally overcome these, according to Coghill, opened the gate for a higher sin of pride,

Thomas, in boasting that he keeps "the keys of heaven and hell (line 376) is guilty of a sin of pride ... that soars up above the lesser sins Thomas is rejecting out of the royal sphere of power into the sphere of God's authority and so he escapes the kinds of temptations offered by the First and Second Tempters: So the second leaves him to his fate ... (1965: 113).

Using this particular part of the play, Eliot provides a critique of the Sainthood of Thomas Becket, and indeed all men of God. Mostly those people who have achieved high level of piety become so obsessed with their puritanism and morality to the extent they were caught up in the guilt of pride. This is what Eliot utilizes to create his "tragic flaw" of the historical protagonist. The sense of pride and moral superiority of the Archbishop serves as his biggest obstacle in his journey toward the attainment of real martyrdom and heavenly glory. He is bedevilled in the play by the temptation to die for the sake of his glory and pride which means to die for the "wrong reason".

Thomas encounter with the Fourth Tempter gives him the opportunity to re-examine the purpose of his impending martyrdom. He is able to avoid the “damnation in pride” which would have served as his undoing. He is finally able to overcome this egotistical tendency and feeling and totally submits himself to the will of God. With this, we can say he demonstrates his strong sense of duty to his people as he resists all temptations including the last one which he considers as the “greatest treason”. Thus, in addition to the mere reflection of events the historical texts do, as drama, *Murder in the Cathedral* re-examines the authenticity of Thomas sainthood and therefore implicitly reveals the moral integrity and inspiration that influenced Saint Thomas’ actions.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined *Murder in the Cathedral* as historical play that treats religious elements such as sacrifice, martyrdom, temptation and pride through recreating the well-known historical facts of the conflict between King Henry II and Thomas a Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Through new historicist correspondence of the play and historical facts, it could be said that the play demonstrates the nexus between literature and history. Also it can be argued that the playwright succeeded in bringing into life some important aspect of the history of the protagonist through the dramatization of the events.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE USE OF HISTORY IN *ATTAHIRU*

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the use of history in Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru*. It examines the relevance between Nigeria's colonial history and the play by providing a new historicist reading which aims at investigating how far the play-text reflects, rewrites, compliments, subverts and reconstructs the history adapted. Specifically, the chapter examines how the dramatization of history provides Yerima with an opportunity to present the historical protagonist as an embodiment of the besieged values.

4.1 *Attahiru*: Synopsis of the Play

The play is written by Ahmad Yerima, one of the most prolific contemporary Nigerian playwrights. It is a reflection of events that occurred in Northern Nigeria during the British colonial conquest of the region. The playwright recreates these historical events by dramatizing the episodes that led to the emergence of Attahiru as the new caliph at a time when the British imperial forces were advancing on Sokoto, the administrative and spiritual headquarters of the vast caliphate in 1903. The play chronicles Caliph Attahiru's gallant and patriotic resistance which led to his martyrdom at the battlefield defending Islam and his people from foreign invaders.

The play begins with a conversation between ordinary people of the caliphate through which the readers/audience learn about the socio-political climate at the headquarters on the eve of the British invasion. The commoners reflect on the pervasive destruction done by the British forces across the caliphate under the command of Lord Lugard. At the same time, they also ponder on

the importance and urgency of electing new caliph from the worthy candidates whom Yakubu describes as both “good soldiers and leaders.”

The play then moves to the next scene of the palace where the new caliph (Attahiru) is presented to the people. The new Caliph immediately delivers his inaugural speech in which he reflects the chaotic situation in the caliphate and immediately demonstrates his sense of responsibility as both the spiritual and political leader by analyzing the intricacies of the problematic relationship between the caliphate on one hand and the colonial invaders on the other. At the end of the court session in the next scene, the Caliph presided over the settlement of dispute between two communities. He seizes the opportunity to comment on the challenges the caliphate is facing and stresses the importance of peace and unity among his people.

In the next scene, the tension in the capital heightens as the Caliph receives yet another letter from the colonial officers which instructs him to appoint new Emirs for Kontagora and Bida who were deposed by the whiteman. In the same letter, Lugard also requests the friendship of the Caliph. After serious and heated deliberation among the decision makers of the caliphate who consider the content of the letter as insult to the Caliph and the entire Muslim community decide to go to war against the imperialists. Finally, the Caliph instructs Waziri to write a reply and tell the infidel whiteman that they did not invite him to interfere “with their problem.”

Although the colonial officers on their own part are reluctant to go to war, they decide to attack and take Sokoto by force because the Caliph rejects their offer for friendship. The British who are motivated by the thirst to acquire more land coupled with their rivalry with the French in struggling for and partition of Africa, finally attack Sokoto and meet fierce resistance from the Caliph-led Muslim army who are assisted by their brothers from Katsina, Kebbi, Kano, Nupe,

Gombe and other parts of the caliphate. After fierce battles between the two armies, the British forces defeat Sokoto but only after gallant resistance during which caliph Attahiru stands out as a brave leader as recounted by Yakubu. Earlier, The Caliph has a premonition courtesy of a dream interpreted to him by Mallam that he will die in the fight against the infidel whiteman. However, this does not stop him in his struggle to defend his faith and his territory. He religiously and patriotically submits himself to the will of God and tries to defend the honour of his religion and his people until he lost his life.

As a historical play then *Attahiru* chronicles the heroic deeds of pre-colonial African people and their resistance against the agent of colonialism. Specifically, the playwright recreates the historical personages of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to his present day audience and therefore “giving life to the past... to the dead.” The aim is to help us to “appreciate their roles, their bravery and their place in history” (Abubakar, 2014:60).

Thus, the play can be seen as a theatrical paradigm of major socio-political and historical events in Nigeria. In this way, recounting Nigeria’s colonial history forms the central part of the play. It can be argued that, a greater verisimilitude is given to the historical event through the setting, characterization, allusion and other dramatic techniques deployed by Yerima in the play. As such, the writing and reconstruction of this episode of African history which Ogude (1991) contends that “shaped the African experience” is deliberately done to create an avenue for appreciating our glorious past which has been largely blurred. This is going to be discussed in details in the next section.

4.2 Imperialism and Colonialism as Historical Context

In his paper “African Literature and the Burden of History: Some Reflections” Ogude contends that,

One cannot say it too often that the history of Africa in the last five hundred years is the story of slavery, colonisation and further colonisation... On the other hand, it is also true to observe that the history of African literature is the story of the struggle against slavery, colonisation and further colonization (1991: 1-19).

This aptly summarizes the manner in which Africa’s colonial experience serves as the source material for African literature and Africa drama. As such, this section aims at discussing imperialism and colonialism as the historical context of Yerima’s *Attahiru* and how the playwright revisits and recreates this specific Africa’s historical experience.

To begin with the definition of the two terms, imperialism in its general sense means the policy of extending the rule or authority of one country over other countries and colonies. The term is seen by many theoreticians and critics as an umbrella word used to describe the relationship between a dominant and subservient society. According to the *Webster College Dictionary*, imperialism refers to “the policy, practice or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of nation, especially by territorial acquisition or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas.”

And in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, it is defined as “a system in which one country controls other countries often after defeating them in a war.”

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993: 8) the postcolonial and cultural materialism theorist, Edward Said defined imperialism as “the practice, the theory and the attitude of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire.”

In the nineteenth century, the European economy was hungry for overseas markets, raw materials, cheap labour and hugely profitable land. As such, this is what motivated European colonization of other parts of the world. Again, this is further heightened by foreign policies which motivated the rival European countries to become more “committed to the maintenance of vast tracts of distant territories in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Caribbean (Said 1993:7)

Colonialism on the other hand is considered as a consequence of imperialism. The term refers to the system in which a country maintains foreign colonies for their economic exploitation (*Webster Dictionary*). Colonialism therefore, is a practice in which a powerful country rules a weaker one and establishes own trade and culture. It is a policy in the imperialist system by which a nation rules weaker or dependent nations often with or for economic exploitation (Zengin: 2007).

Specifically in Africa, European imperialism and colonialism took its momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century after the Berlin Conference of 1884 during which the struggle for and partition of African continent was formalized by the European superpowers. After the conference, the powerful European nations like Britain, France, Germany, Portugal and Belgium motivated by their foreign policies and their Eurocentric supremacy intensified their rivalry and competitions in acquisition of colonies in Africa. With sustained imperial maneuver and manipulations backed by military might the Europeans were able to bring larger part of Africa

under their control. However, their success was not without resistance from the African people who on many occasions tried to repel the imposition of foreign rule in the lands. This African resistance was of various types depending on the nature of the society in question.

Like in some other areas where Islam has already established its highly organized political system, in the Sokoto caliphate the European Imperialists came face to face with political entities different from those found elsewhere, with a well-organized and well-documented political system based on the Islamic religion which also served the dual functions of spiritual guidance as well as political binding force. As such, the major justification provided by the British colonialists for the conquest and annexation of Africa and other colonized areas as the “desire to bring civilization to an otherwise barbaric people.” This is hardly applicable in the case of Sokoto caliphate where the British found a well-established political system which they adopted in their indirect rule.

As such, a new historicist reading of *Attahiru* reveals that the play is written as part of the ongoing postcolonial discourse that has been raging on in Africa since Chinua Achebe wrote his *Things Fall Apart*. The play and many others like it such as *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* and *Death and the King's Horseman* are written to respond to, or more precisely to protest of the distortion of African history as created and sustained in the European fictional version as depicted in works like Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*, and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. This is as a result of the realization of the challenge on Africans to fight imperialism on all fronts. As such, as artists, playwrights like Ahmed Yerima have taken from the literary angle and point the gaps, distortions and misconceptions used by the imperialists in creating what Said (1978) famously referred to as “the Other.”

Most of the popular European versions of colonial history try to justify the colonization of Africa. As such, one of the main issue inherent in rewriting African colonial history by African writers is to demystify and subvert the European “civilizing mission” claim which was emphasized as their central mission in the “dark continent.” Postcolonial texts like *Attahiru* attempt to unveil other more important driving forces behind European imperialism. Adamu Fika (1978) reports that,

The age-old rivalry between the British and the French culminated in the British conquest of Kano, the destruction of the Sokoto caliphate and the imposition of British colonial rule over what came to be known as Northern Nigeria (cited in Akoh, 2007:116).

This is exactly what is portrayed in *Attahiru*. The whiteman’s thirst for territorial gain as opposed to the desire to civilize the “savage” is shown as the main drive for the British colonialist as seen in the assessment of the situation by the colonial administrators on the eve of their attack on Sokoto,

WILLOCKS: My major worry is the French. They are moving closer to Sokoto through the north of Katsina.

LUGARD: I have studied the situation myself. It means that we either fight and take Sokoto now or the French would cross the Niger and join Sokoto and thereby cutting us off totally. This must never be allowed

MORLAND: Detail sir, I am hoping that if we have to take Sokoto, it will be swift and quick. We can’t allow a long war or a defeat.

LUGARD: Defeat? Never! Right now the morale of our men is high. With the spoils of Zaria and Kano they will fight even their fathers for the glory of Britain (Yerima, 1999:35)

Using this particular scene, Yerima presents the colonialists in the same fashion he portrays them in his other historical play, *The Trial of Oba Ovonramwen* (1998) in which Phillips, the Consul-General reveals the main reason of British conquest of Benin Kingdom, in the nineteenth century: “My discretion tells me that we attack Benin. I have assessed the situation and I feel that for a better grip of the trade area, Benin must fall” (Yerima, 1998:22).

Another justification for the choice of Africa’s colonial history as a subject matter for African drama is to reconstruct the distorted image of the Africa’s heroes of resistance to foreign domination. Like Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo, Yerima presupposed that heroes of African struggle must be shown in a more positive light and not as betrayers, bad, traitors, despots or undemocratic as shown in other works both historical and fictional. Thus, the study of *Attahiru* in relation to historical and cultural texts demonstrates how drama goes beyond mere recreation of history and imaginatively serves as a form of rejection to European version of Nigeria’s pre-colonial history as simply one story of savagery, despotism and a political system that was never sophisticated, civilized, and organized. The play is inspired by these issues touching on African culture, history, mythology and religion. It is inspired also by the need to bring to light the legend of African heroes like Caliph Attahiru I to come close to reality of his existence and what he really did in defending the honour of his people against the European invaders.

Immediately Attahiru is appointed as the caliph of Sokoto his qualities of leadership begin to emerge as he demonstrates full grasp of the chaotic political situation as a result of the threat of European colonizers,

I am becoming Caliph at a time when the history of our lives is at a delicate balance at a time when the whiteman is determined to upset the peace of our lives (Yerima, 1999:21).

In this inaugural speech, Attahiru reveals his understanding of the challenges the caliphate is facing after witnessing the destruction of several emirates by the British colonial forces led by Lugard and the colonialist determination to upstage the peaceful coexistence of the people. From this episode then, the Caliph's sense of duty comes to light again in his fair settlement of an internal dispute between two communities. This clearly shows his determination to maintain peace which he believes to be very crucial in maintaining the unity of the caliphate especially in this delicate situation. At the end of the court session, the Caliph seizes the opportunity to re-emphasize the importance of unity and peace among his people.

One popular accusation against the pre-colonial African leaders by the Europeans is that, they are despots, undemocratic and uncivilized. This is the image the Europeans imperialists created and sustained in order to justify their dethroning of the African political leaders and replacing them with their stooges. However, this distorted image is reconstructed in *Attahiru* as the Caliph is depicted as everything other than the figure which the imperialists tried to invent. In his handling of the dispute between Sarkin Fatake and Sarkin Zango he virtually allows his aid, Waziri to take charge of the reconciliation of the two parties. He did not dictate as the supreme leader. Likewise, when it was time to decide on whether to accept or reject the whiteman's offer for friendship the Caliph allows thorough and rigorous assessment and consultations on the matter. And when finally the decision is made on going to war against the British, it is the decision of the entire stake holders not solely that of the Caliph. This clearly demonstrates how democratic the pre-colonial leaders are in terms of managing the affairs of the state. Again, this can also be seen as a vindication of the whole political system that has been intentionally

misperceived as undemocratic. It is not surprising then how the people of the caliphate rally behind the Caliph and practically demonstrate their support to the leadership during the war. In spite of been blind, Abbas is prepared to sacrifice his life to fight with his Caliph;

The Caliph. I must get to him. I must fight by his side. I must give up my life for him. I must be somebody for once in my life, eyes or no eyes I must be somebody. (Yerima, 1999; 48).

This tells a lot about the personality of *Attahiru* as the leader of the Muslims. His people are ready to shed their blood for him. It is also the same reason why the Caliph receives the support of his Emirs who converge around him.

Attahiru's heroism in defense of his people is brought into light in the play as Yakubu summarizes it at the end:

Yet, the greatest moment was when the Caliph fell. As the bullet struck him, he raised up his sword and screamed Allahu-akbar! Allahu-akbar!! He was a great man indeed. With the bullets he still cut down two more soldiers, then his *Rawani* loosened and his cap fell... (Yerima, 1999: 63)

This clearly depicts Attahiru as a true hero of the African struggle against the European invaders who sacrificed his life while defending the honour of his people. With this recreation of history, the play shows the qualities of leadership that was lacking in our present day leaders.

Finally, it's a known fact that the evil and destruction done by the British colonial agents in this part of the world have been recorded by historians, however through the dramatization of this history in plays like *Attahiru* their destructiveness and evil intention become more glaring to the readers/audience. The play not only glorifies the African heroes but also exposes the image of European expatriates who claimed to have come to Africa as agents of civilization, beacons of

light, missionaries, merchants and law enforcement agents. Rather than these, the expatriates are shown to be exploiters, high-handed administrators, imperialists, colonialists and destroyers of peace.

Another important issue with regards to colonialism and imperialism as historical context is that, the Europeans are fully aware that, in Sokoto they are dealing with a society in which the ideology and politics are highly informed by Islam. And since the British have established their rules in other Muslim lands, they realized the tendency of the natives to see their intrusion as purely a religious affair and therefore consider resistance against it as Jihad. That is why they try to present their mission as purely political;

LUGARD: Good. We must not give a sign of wanting to interfere with their religion. I prefer to be a peaceful infidel ruler than to be a sleepless conqueror. The Fulani are usually better to rule when their religion is left untouched. I do not want a religious war either. It never ends (Yerima, 1999: 35).

However, this imperialist maneuver fails as Caliph Attahiru along with his court officials and the entire people of the caliphate see the European intrusion as purely a religious affair and hence take resistance to it as an act of Jihad in defense of Islam and Muslim people.

Finally, reading the play in relation to the post-colonial context in which the work is written, it can be argued that Yerima revisits the past in order to highlight some important issues that are relevant to the present. In his interview with Gbemisola Adeoti titled “Drama is an Arbiter of Socio-political Crisis”, Yerima reveals that Soyinka made them to understand that using work of art, a writer can contribute towards raising the consciousness of people about the need for change (in Adeoti (ed); 2007). As such appreciating *Attahiru* in the Nigerian post-colonial

context would help in raising the consciousness of our people through retelling the heroic and patriotic deeds of our leaders in the appreciated past. Also the play debunks the biased notion that Islam condoned or encouraged colonial rule in the Northern part of Nigeria by clearly depicting that the Sokoto caliphate which constituted larger percentage of Northern region was once inimical to British dominance (Balogun: 2000). Therefore, this work argues that through re-writing of history drama can contribute to socio-political awareness needed in our contemporary society.

4.3 The Religiosity of *Attahiru*

Most of the reviews on Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* focus mainly on either the historical or socio-political aspects of the play. This is perhaps due to the socio-political and historical context in which it was written as discussed in previous section. However, the present study attempts to look at the religiosity of the play, especially focusing on the characterization of Caliph Attahiru as an embodiment of the Islamic values. In his paper, "Historicism, Sultan Attahiru, the European Conquest and Dramaturgy", Yerima affirms that *Attahiru* is premised on the Islamic religion,

The first heritage, which I used to situate the play, is religious. This is because the essence of the Sokoto Caliphate is religious. The caliphate was born on the premise of Islam. I therefore built the society presented in the play with characters... On the Islamic references of Al-Qur'an the hadith and the symbolic images of the caliphate itself (cited in Ewojobi: 2012).

This is exactly the case. The history of Sokoto caliphate can never be separated from Islam which provided the motivation for Sheik Usman bn Fodio's Jihad upon which the caliphate emerged and since then remained as unifying force in the entire caliphate.

It would be appropriate then to put *Attahiru* in its socio-cultural context in order to provide a new historicist reading which helps to investigate source of inspirations and strength of the protagonist. Contrary to many historical sources that try to emphasize political bent of the conflict with the whiteman, Yerima's play attempts to show its religious overtone through the presentation of the eponymous hero and his people. In the play, the white colonialists try to make the people believe that their penetration into Sokoto has nothing to do with religion. However, the Caliph and the entire people see it as purely a conflict between the infidels and the faithful. That is the main reason Sokoto sees the deposition of the Emirs of Kontagora and Bida by the whiteman and the directives given to the Caliph to choose new leaders as their replacement as contained in the Lugard's letter as both an act of interference in the political affairs of the caliphate and threat to the Caliph's authority. Above all, they consider the whiteman's action as meddling with their religion. Therefore, all their responses are informed by the desire to protect the dignity of Islam against Christianity. Even the request for friendship is seen by the people as an insult to their faith.

The conflict in *Attahiru* is therefore a conflict between political power represented by European colonizers and religious authority represented by the Caliph and his people. The motivation for the British colonialists is purely the quest for political domination over the vast Sokoto Caliphate with all the socio-economic trappings that accompany it as earlier discussed how their political rivalry with French propelled them to advance and sack Sokoto. It is all about territorial expansion and economic exploitation as Lugard explains to Abbas:

You know, you Muslims are getting it all wrong. This is not a religious war. It is a war of superiority of wills. I have the machines and guns. You have what I need to trade with, so if one of us is stubborn, or refuses to cooperate, then a little nudge is needed. (Yerima, 1999: 59).

But on the other hand, the Caliph and his people are not trying to defend the political power but rather they are more concerned with the defense of Islamic faith. Instead of seeing the conflict with the whiteman as political, as Lugard wants them to do, they consider it as an attack on their religion. As such, they respond to the challenges within the premise of Jihad. In the Caliph's remark after the heated deliberation with the decision makers of the caliphate, he clearly demonstrates how the Muslim see their conflict with the British:

To this effect, the Waziri must write to him (Lugard) this reply. Tell the infidel that we did not invite him to interfere with our problems. He has his religion and we have ours... As my predecessor Caliph Abdul-Rahman had earlier said, the only relationship that can exist between a believer and an infidel is ... war! (Yerima 1999:33).

The instructions given by the Caliph above clearly show that the conflict is between religion and political power. While the latter is influenced by the British foreign policy in the quest for territorial expansion, the former is shaped by Islamic conception of Jihad.

There are many historical works on the life and times of Caliph Attahiru all of which attempt to give a factual documentation of the events. Yerima's Attahiru is the first dramatic recreation of this story which imaginatively tries "to give life to the past." As such, this new historicist reading demonstrates the way the play, as living art, differs with historical works on the same subject by bringing into life aspect of the protagonist that are not revealed or emphasized in history. Through the characterization of the historical protagonist, the play explores the issue of self-conquest which is emphasized through the Islamic conception of Jihad. Literally, Jihad means a holy war undertaken by Muslims. However, many Islamic scholars contend that the meaning of the concept goes beyond the physical confrontation to the inner personal spiritual struggle for self-improvement and against evil which is seen by many scholars as the greater form of Jihad.

This falls within what is referred to as “self-conquest” that is, the ability of one to overcome the lust inherent in himself. That is the strength to resist the temptation to surrender to the worldly and bodily desires as opposed to the spiritual.

Throughout the play, Caliph Attahiru is depicted as the embodiment of the Islamic values. He is shown as ideal Muslim leader who stands firm in his belief and faith in spite of the intimidation and temptation from the colonialists. For him, honour and faith become his vehicle for attainment of divine status (Julius-Adeoye: 2013). The Caliph is depicted as the custodian, upholder and protector of the besieged religion within the context of colonization.

When the whiteman threatens, or even undermines the authorities bestowed on him by his religion, the Caliph does not decide on his own. He humbly brings the matter to his council for rigorous assessment because he never sees the colonial activities as threat to his personal position of authority but rather as an attack on the religion of Islam and the entire Muslim Ummah. Thus, when the decision is made about going to war against the British, it is not to protect the throne of Attahiru, rather to defend the Islamic state and faith against the infidel.

Furthermore, the significance of the Caliph’s refusal to accept Lugard’s offer of friendship is very important in appreciating the character of Attahiru. The request is seen as great temptation against the Caliph’s level of piety. If he grants the request of the British and accept them as friends that means he is going to be allowed to stay in his position as the caliph like what happened in Katsina and other parts of the caliphate where the Muslim leaders made peace with the British. However in the case of Attahiru, he sees this as an act of privileging the worldly, corporeal and mundane desires over and above the spiritual aspiration promised by remaining steadfast in one’s faith. He sees the acceptance of British dominance as succumbing to the bodily

pleasure of life which he considers temporal and hence less important compared to the eternal bliss offered by holding firm to his religion. Thus, he considers accepting the whiteman's domination as bringing shame to the religion of Islam and the entire people as we can see in his comments:

They (whitemen) throw dust of shame all over the place, and yet with their bloody hands they want you to shake and embrace them while the dust of shame settles on your face (Yerima, 1999: 24).

Even the threat of Lugard in the letter that the British soldiers "have already established British rule over Muslim lands all over the world" (27) fails to deter the Caliph's determination to resist the imperialists' penetration into Sokoto. Instead Attahiru and his court officials see Katsina's surrender to the British rule as shameful and humiliating to the Muslims:

MADAKI: I will beg the Marafa to understand. To stain a people with shame is hard to wash clean my lord. To avert war like the Katsina people is to have the whiteman bring his paper for the Caliph to sign. It is for the whiteman to tell us to stop owning slave, to stop Islam. It is also to have a whiteman live in our midst as the master of the Caliph, and fly his stupid flag (Yerima, 1999:44).

This clearly shows that the Caliph's acceptance of whiteman's offer for peace would definitely come at a price of shame and humiliation. The Caliph and his followers reject this in favour of the dignity, pride and above all, the spiritual bliss which their refusal of the temporal benefits would bring them. Therefore, Attahiru's position with regard to this conflict with the European usurpers is that he prefers to lose his throne or even his life than to live in shame under the control of the foreign infidels unleashed by the British Empire. This is quite symbolic of the

ideal Muslim leader as we can see others are eager to accept the offer under the humiliating conditions.

Furthermore, Caliph Attahiru and his other senior officers like Madaki and Waziri have a genuine reason to be suspicious about Lugard's request. They quite understand the implication of accepting the offer of peace from the man who had already violated sovereignty of their political entity. Effiok Bassey Uwatt provides an indepth analysis of the message which the Lugard's letter conveys,

The British conquest of the Southern Emirate was clearly incompatible with Lugard's offer of friendship to the Caliph. At best, his peace policy amounted to no more than an attempt to demonstrate to the Caliph the futility of resisting the British... The promise that the British would not interfere with the Muslim religion would be rendered odious in the unmistakable threat of conquest conveyed by the assurance which Lugard gave to the Caliph: if the men he appointed were not good Muslims, he would not hesitate to remove them again... (2007: 123-142).

One aspect of history of the Sokoto's resistance to the British colonization is the decision of Caliph Attahiru and his Muslim army to migrate and leave Sokoto at the time of the whiteman's onslaught. The Hijra, as it is regarded in Islam, was recorded by historians in their works. However, in the dramatization of the history in *Attahiru* the playwright tries to show that the main reason for this decision to leave the headquarters is not an attempt to escape death by the Caliph but rather to save lives of the weaker members of the caliphate, to shame the whiteman and of course to prepare for the greater battle:

GALADIMA: The sense is that we shall be saving lives your Highness.

The lives of women, children, and the old. It is accepted within Islam your Highness. You excuse yourself from the

presence of the enemies, in order to re-group, and fight, stronger, and more focused (45).

Like Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus Rex* in which the protagonists impending tragic end is foretold or known, that of Attahiru is also foretold as he learns in his discussion with Mallam about his recurrent dream which further tests the Caliph's determination to remain firmly on course of his religion:

CALIPH: Always it starts in the early hours of the morning. There is smoke heavy smoke. It is at the battle field. Dead warriors littered everywhere. Then images of my ancestors appear in a circle round me. They pass the flag from one hand to another. As they chant, la Ilaha Illallah, I watch them helplessly as Caliph Atiku gives it to Mu'azu then to Caliph Umoru, then to Abdul-Rahman and as he passes it to me, the flag falls, dripping blood. In all this smoky confusion, Dan Magaji tries to help me pick it up but he is tripped by a white pebble he too; falling on his sword. (Yerima 1999: 41).

So when the Mallam tells the Caliph that what he saw in the dream signals what was foretold about the lifespan of Sheik Usman Dan Fodio's caliphate and his dream "confirms the beginning of the end", Attahiru does not falter. Rather he seeks the Mallam's spiritual guidance on how to approach his impending martyrdom before making one of his most powerful and courageous statements in the play:

If indeed, there is a prophecy that must end Shehu's Empire in my reign as Caliph, then this is no time to mourn, but a time of gratitude. A time of prayer and great thanks to Allah that I am the chosen one. A time to stand

firm, defending the faith, and carrying out the wish of the Almighty. (*Pause*)
And what can I say to Him, but, Al-hamdu lillah! (Yerima, 1999: 43).

This affirms the stellar qualities of Caliph Attahiru as the leader of the Muslims as it demonstrates the strength of character and piety even at a time when his power and authority is threatened. Again, Julius-Adeoye (2013: 94) argues that Yerima places Attahiru in the same way as Oedipus the King in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* as his fate rests entirely with God, so it becomes nearly impossible to escape. Attahiru accepts the burden of martyrdom as decreed by the God as we have seen in his speech above.

The play reveals the inner conflict the Caliph finds himself in his spiritual journey towards achieving self-conquest and martyrdom. He is trapped in a dilemma of satisfying the desires of the body or the spiritual which further imbues his human nature. This is important so as the audience/readers of this play can identify themselves with the protagonist. Moreover, even when the Caliph learns that his brother Prince Muhammad al-Tahir Aliyu has been appointed as his replacement by the British, he did not feel any regret of losing his crown but only ponders and laments on the humiliating condition his successor would find himself under the control of "his infidel friends":

I wish him luck with his infidel friends. But he must remember that there is only one moon at a time, one sun at a time. No two moons shine at a time, Muhammad al-Tahir Aliyu must know this (Yerima, 1999: 61).

Instead of feeling regret for losing the throne of his ancestors only six months after his ascendency, Caliph Attahiru is absorbed in weighing what he has done during his short stint as the Sarkin Musulmi:

It is not how long, but what you did while on the throne that people will remember. Tonight, I say let them remember us all here as heroes not as the whiteman's slaves. Let them remember that when it was time to say no in the name of Allah one humble Muslim led a group of believers to say no to colonial oppression even at the cost of our lives! We shall never surrender! (Yerima, 1999: 61)

In spite of the fact that Attahiru learns that he is no longer the Caliph of Sokoto, he still continues to lead the charge against the imperial domination and above all, in defense of the honour of Islam. The significance of this particular episode is that, the play tries to deemphasize the issue of betrayal as one of the main causes for the downfall of the Sokoto Caliphate as amplified in some historical sources. Through the Caliph's speech it is evident that there is no ill feeling between the deposed ruler and his successor.

Thus, while others are eager to grab the throne vacated by Attahiru under the humiliating condition, the Caliph is reveling in his triumph over the temptations and the motivation to surrender to the mundane as opposed to the spiritual and therefore achieving self-conquest. This clearly portrays him as an embodiment of the religious values that are lacking in most of the followers of the Islamic faith, both the leaders and the led.

One of the characteristics of "conventional history" is the tendency to ignore the contributions of ordinary people in society. On so many occasions historians failed to capture or ignore the roles played by common people in the history of their communities. However, as playwright, Yerima uses Yakubu, Ahmed and Abbas to show that the story of African resistance to European incursion can never be completed without the contribution of those people who were largely omitted in the official history. Their efforts in supporting the Caliph in the fight with the whitemen is captured in *Attahiru*. Through their dramatic roles in the play, Yerima highlights the

special status the caliph occupies in the hearts of his people who are ready to shed their last drop of blood fighting by his side.

Finally, Yakubu's elaborate report of the final moment of the Caliph is quite significant in contrasting the imaginative reenactment with the historical works it recreates. Mostly a historian who is dealing with facts, is restricted in his documentation of events. In contrast, a dramatist who is working within the spheres of fiction would reshape the same events and presents them in a different manner. In this way he provides an alternative to history. As such, Yerima's hagiographic presentation of the eponymous Attahiru is quite significant in attainment of his literary purpose. Yakubu's dramatic reportage of the Caliph's death caps it all in the play:

Yet, the greatest moment was when the Caliph fell. As the bullet struck him, he raised up his sword and screamed Allahu-akbar! Allahu-akbar!! He was a great man indeed. With the bullets he still cut down two more soldiers, then his *Rawani* loosened and his cap fell. He twisted in pain. Holding on to nothing but his guts. Slowly, he started to fall. And as he fell, the Madawaki noticed him, he covered him with his shield, the Ubandoma, all forming a human shield. But the Caliph had fallen, and with his last breath, he screamed again. Amidst the noise of the guns, and dying men, a gentle breeze blew, and as if we all knew... the Caliph had gone with the passing breeze (Yerima, 1999: 63).

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the use of history in *Attahiru* by studying it in relation to the history of the Caliph. The work argues that although the selection and handling of the historical material in the play is largely informed by post-colonial discourse in Africa, but the examination of the religiosity of the play shows how the protagonist is depicted as an embodiment of the besieged Islamic values in the context of colonization. It could be said that the play succeeded in

emphasizing the significance of self-conquest in Caliph's Attahiru's heroic resistance against British colonization of Northern Nigeria, an aspect that was not been amplified by historical narratives. More than the mere reflection of the historical events, the play demonstrates that by remaining firm on one's faith, one can concur the exerting bodily temptations. Thus, as imaginative recreation of history, the play succeeds in dramatizing the history of Caliph Attahiru and more importantly, it offers the artistic re-interpretation of the historic event and therefore complimented and reconstructed some aspects of it for better understanding and appreciation of Africa's colonial experience.

CHAPTER FIVE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Comparative Analysis

Before concluding, this chapter provides a comparative analysis of *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru* focusing mainly on their use of history. The aim is to demonstrate that in spite of the periodical and geographical distance as well as differences in terms of socio-cultural context, form and style the two plays share so many things in common.

5.1.1 Historical Protagonists as Embodiment of Besieged Religious Values

One aspect that *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru* share is how they depict their historical protagonists as embodiment of besieged values. In both texts it is clear that the conflict is all about the contestation of power in which the political power wants to dominate and marginalized the religious authority. The main difference, however, is that in the first play, *Murder in the Cathedral* the conflict is internal, that is between the secular power and ecclesiastical authority within the same society. While in *Attahiru* the dispute is between external political power and the religious authority of the Sokoto caliphate.

In *Murder in the Cathedral* Thomas, who is an Archbishop, finds himself in a conflict with the English monarchy under King Henry II who has become obsessed with his quest for more political power. The Archbishop's refusal to cooperate with the King in terms of the stipulations of the Constitution of Clarendon that demands that the criminous churchmen should be tried in secular courts contrary to the previous tradition where they are tried by the church and enjoyed the "benefit of clergy". Thomas on the other hand sees the drafting of the constitution as a threat

to undermine the ecclesiastical power of the church and therefore considers Henry's move as a threat to the religious authority and promptly rejects the King's proposal.

The source of conflict in the play is then the monarchy's attempt to undermine the religious authority because it considers it as a threat to its political authority. As such, the battle between the two most powerful institutions in the play is seen as the battle between church and the state which represents secularism, materialism and therefore temporality. The play shows the triumph of the latter at the end.

In the case of *Attahiru* in which the context is European colonization, the source of conflict is the whiteman's attempt to takeover the powers of the Muslims leader. The British who are foreigners, the uninvited guests, and infidels in their materialistic quest for more political power through territorial expansion, threaten the sovereignty of the Caliph, an action that the Muslims see as direct attack on the authority of the Muslim leader and therefore consider it as an insult to Islam. How could some foreign infidels come and dictate to the Muslims on how to manage the affairs of their land? Thus, unlike in *Murder in the Cathedral* where the conflict or the contestation of power is between two institutions within the same society (church and state), that of *Attahiru* is a confrontation with an external power. The battle is between the imperial colonizer and the theocratic power of the caliphate. But like *Murder in the Cathedral*, in *Attahiru* it can also be seen that the political power represented by the European colonizers triumphes over the religious power after the sacking of the Sokoto caliphate and the eventual dethroning and killing of the spiritual leader. The defeat of the two religious leaders in the two texts symbolizes the waning of religious power and the ascendancy of the temporal power.

Moreover, in both plays the historical figures are depicted as the embodiment of the besieged religious values. Both Archbishop Thomas and Sultan Attahiru are confronted with the motivation to surrender to the mundane as opposed to the spiritual. As such, the plays show the struggle of man between choosing the glamour of temporal life and the spiritual satisfaction. According to Mustapha Muhammad,

Duality is an essential feature of the human life. What is required is a balance between the exerting corporeal/mundane and lofty spiritual demands that continually colour our conduct. Happiness comes from an inflexible will to serve God and humanity in accordance with the Glorious Message (2008: 88).

Thomas Becket is offered with the chance of regaining his friendship with King Henry. A decision if taken would give him a chance to regain his share of the temporal political power with all its materialistic benefits and therefore satisfy his bodily, material lusts. However, guided by the religious demands on him as enjoined in the Holy Bible and Christianity, the priest demonstrates his inflexible will to serve God by refusing to surrender to the exerting corporal and mundane desires in favour of the eternal salvation promised by remaining steadfast in the service of God. As such, he overcomes all forms of temptation in his spiritual journey. First, he resists the lusts of bodily pleasure which “music, good company, luxurious fare, gaiety and the romance” would give him. Secondly, he remains disinterested in the share of political power which his antagonist is craving for more. Again he refuses the motivation to undermine the power of his detractor (King Henry) by rejecting the third tempter’s offer for treason. And finally above all, he conquers the fourth temptation of pride by avoiding doing all these good works for the wrong reason; self-gratification. At last, he is able to get what he desires of achieving

martyrdom for the sake of God and thereafter achieving the position of sainthood in Christianity as a result of his religious virtues.

Attahiru on the other hand faces his own kinds of temptations. Here is a man whose position of power was threatened just after six month of his ascendancy to the throne of his forefathers. However, the Caliph refuses to succumb to the urge to surrender to the bodily and material lusts for political power. The Sultan rejects the British offer for friendship which would give him the chance of retaining the coveted throne. He realizes very well that, if he accepts the whiteman's offer the political position he is occupying will be secured but he refuses the bodily motivations for the temporal benefit which he strongly believes would only bring shame and humiliation. Instead he favours the lofty spiritual promises of upholding his religious demands. Even at a time when he confirms that the war has already been lost to the colonizers, he still prefers to shed the last drop of his blood in defense of his faith. Therefore he continues fighting the British infidels already after he has achieved self-mortification by conquering the bodily lusts. Like Thomas Becket, in the end Attahiru achieves the highest position of martyrdom for the sake of his religion. As such, both works show the struggle of the historical figures in achieving self-mortification as both succeed in suppressing their bodily desires in the quest for salvation.

Another point of comparison between Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Yerima's *Attahiru* is in how the two writers modelled their historical protagonists after Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad respectively. Both Archbishop Thomas and Caliph Attahiru are characterized in such a manner that they follow the footsteps of their role models. In the case of Thomas, this can be seen in the light of temptation faced by the Christ himself. John Walvoord (1997) stated that the devil on several occasions and using different patterns has tried to tempt Jesus Christ in order to corrupt his full obedience to God (cited in Kasteras, 2010:33). While the devil failed against

Christ due to his level of piety and devotion to God, many Christians, including the highly devoted ones find it very difficult to resist these patterns of temptation. In *Murder in the Cathedral* Thomas faces his own kind of temptations but he is able to successfully come through them. However, it is in the last temptation of pride that the comparison becomes clearer because it is stated in the Holy Bible how the devil tried to tempt Jesus to commit the sin of pride. In the same vein, Thomas finds it very hard to overcome the Fourth Tempter's inducement about achieving martyrdom for the simple glory of being considered a martyr.

On his part, Attahiru faces the temptation to surrender to his earthly and bodily lust which the whiteman's request for friendship signifies. However like Prophet Muhammad he is modeled after, he prefers to seek for the eternal reward of salvation by choosing to resist the domination of his religion by the white infidels even though it endangers his position of leadership and thus echoes Prophet Muhammad's refusal to accept the Meccans' offer of position of power and wealth to make him abandon the call for Islam. Another depiction of Caliph Attahiru in a Prophet Muhammad-like model is the issue of *hijra* (migration), after the infidels' first onslaught on Sokoto which forces the Caliph out of his headquarters. Unlike the Prophet who eventually came back and conquered his enemies, Attahiru does not defeat his external aggressors as he is conquered and killed in the last battle of Burmi. However, his defeat makes him a martyr like Thomas and he is considered as hero among his people because of his selfless exploits in defense of his people and religion. Thus, it can be said that the characterization of the historical protagonists in both plays makes them hagiographic in nature.

Finally, it can also be seen that, in spite of the difference in socio-political and historical contexts both *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru* portray the two historical figures as the embodiment

of the besieged values. They also reflect the waning of religions power and the ascendancy of temporal power in their respective societies.

5.1.2 Drama and the Burden of History

Another apparent thing that *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Attahiru* share in common is that both are dramatization of history. But more than this, on both occasion, Eliot and Yerima wrote their plays as a response to a request which makes their dramatization of history even more challenging. Eliot was commissioned by George Bell, the Archbishop of Chichester to write his play for the celebration of Canterbury Festival of 1935 during which the play was performed at the cathedral and later at some other places (Coghill, 1965:9). On his part, Yerima wrote *Attahiru* as a result of a request by a friend and senior colleague, Alhaji Shehu Suleiman who dared Yerima to turn the history of his ancestors into drama (Yerima:1999: 7). In the preface to *Attahiru*, Yerima admitted that he enjoyed the patronage and support of the custodians of the history of this great caliphate and the play was performed as part of the millennium celebration in 1999 (Balogun: 2000). It can be argued here that, although the writing of *Attahiru* was not formally commissioned like in the case of *Murder in the Cathedral*, but the writing of both plays was a result of a request. As such, both playwrights worked conscious of the interest of the people or institutions that requested them to write the plays. They may fear to offend their people.

The significance of these requests to write the two historical plays is that it adds serious challenge to the already problematic burden of recreating history. The challenge of recreating history in literature in general and drama in particular is that the playwright is presenting to his audience/readers a well-known story and as such he is expected to use his dramatic creativity to

provide a new dimension of the already known historical facts. In both plays, there is a story taken from history and adapted in drama and to perform history is by no means an easy task.

Shalaby contends that,

It is a venture that requires substantial effort from the playwright to set a balance and exercise his artistic power in the space that lies between the realistic and imagined, between the factual and intellectual, between what historically happened and what theatrically would happen. This is because the audience comes to the stage with the historical background and in most cases they are obsessed with the historical material of such plays as they always know how the story ends (2013: 90).

In the chosen plays of this study, it is clear that both Eliot and Yerima are quite familiar with the historical facts they recreated. As for Eliot, he tried to reenact the story as contained in the contemporary records of the conflict and also tried to be faithful to historical truth (Coghill, 1965:20). But since his purpose is to use the history to present a conflict between the material and spiritual worlds, he uses the historical facts as exposition for the play. In the same vein, Yerima also relied on the extraction of “the materials from the intellectual rigours of earlier historians” (Yerima, 1999:7). All this demonstrates how the two playwrights are deeply concerned with the presentation of authentic historical truth in the imaginative recreations. Moreover, the commissioning of drama adds serious challenge to a dramatist especially on the issue of objectivity in terms of representing the history in addition to the novelty that are expected of him. This is understandable since there is tendency for the dramatist to gratuitously reshape the story to appease his employers or the targeted audience.

One way of a new historicist reading of a literary text is to provide a correspondence between literature and history in order to demonstrate that a work is a product of the socio-political and

economic context of the society which produced it and at the same time demonstrates how the writer brings his ideology into the text. Moreover, the dramatist will have his own interest in the events and the historical personage he deals with, and this interest is likely to be something other than historical. In other words, the writer's interest may be religious, political, psychological or ideological.

In recreating the history of Thomas Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot's main concern is the decaying modern society, on which he believes that recourse to religion, a primordial binding force, will help the society. As such, the religious leaning of the play is not so much a result of his commissioning by a religious institution and for religious occasion. Rather, it has to do much with Eliot's concern with bringing in to light some religious values that were lacking in his materialist modern society.

On the other hand *Attahiru* is not Yerima's first play which he wrote on request. *The Trial of Oba Ovonramwem* written a year before *Attahiru* was commissioned by Benin Kingdom in which he reconstructs the image of the pre-colonial Benin monarch who resisted British activities in his domain. In *Attahiru*, Yerima also narrates the history of Caliph Attahiru, and the literary purpose behind his recourse to history has less to do with the request or the patronage he enjoyed from the custodians of the history as Dennis Akoh puts it,

Yerima's recourse to historical material for the plays (*The Trial* and *Attahiru*) is not gratuitous but rather for specific dramatic intentions. It is these intentions that shape his dramatic visions in the two plays (2007: 110-122).

Although Yerima (2003) affirms that the premise of *Attahiru* is Islamic religion but the recreation of history in this play seems to be informed by post-colonial politics. By recreating the

heroism of Attahiru and how he led the Muslims in their resistance against European colonialism, Yerima contributes in the post-colonial discourse which protests the depiction of Africans and African culture in the distorted version of Africa's colonial history which he believes should be a social or political task every playwright should carry. As such, Yerima's depiction of Caliph Attahiru as a popular choice right from his emergence as against what was recorded in some historical sources, can be seen by some critics as an attempt to appease the people who requested him to write the play. However, this work argues that it is not gratuitous but rather it is done to serve the dramatic vision of reconstruction of the distorted image of leaders of African struggle against European imperialists.

Through the examination of the use of history by Eliot and Yerima in their two historical plays, this work argues that the playwrights treat their historical material closely but selectively. Both dramatists relied on the historical documents of the events they recreated. However, as creative writers they also enjoyed the privilege to reconstruct, reshape and tilt the events to serve their literary purposes. As such, both writers selected only the episodes that suit their respective dramatic purpose and representing it in a way that are acceptable to the institutions that requested them to write their works.

5.1.3 Martyrdom as a Means of Leaving the Profane Life

One of the most outstanding theme shared by Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and Yerima's *Attahiru* is martyrdom. Martyrdom refers to the death on account of adherence to a religious cause. The protagonists in the two plays all lost their lives defending their faith. Thomas' martyrdom is a result of resistance to the domination of religious powers by the secularist monarch of his time. When he finds himself in a conflict with power-craving Henry, the

Archbishop realizes that opposing the powerful ruler will eventually cost his life. But instead of succumbing to the exerting demands of the King he prefers to continue resisting him because he believes in the salvation promised by dying in the cause of his religion. In the same vein, Sultan Attahiru also opts to lead his people in defense of Islam against the British. The Caliph considers the infidel whiteman's intrusion to the political affairs of the caliphate as purely an attack on the religion itself, and as such suffering or even dying in the course of protection of religion would lead to salvation in the hereafter. Therefore, the Caliph continues fighting the infidels until he attains the glory of martyrdom.

One striking resemblance between the two plays is how both portray the attitude of their heroes to their impending death. When Thomas Becket is faced with dilemma of choosing between the temporal or spiritual, he prefers to die a martyr than to live an unclean life. His focus to the eternal salvation makes him open to aggression and is not willing to hide or save himself from danger. When he has an opportunity to stay inside the church and to avoid the confrontation with the knights, he orders the priests to open it. "The church shall be open, even to our enemies. Open the door!" (Eliot, 1965.79). After that, he again orders the priests to open the door and he explains his decision as being a part of God's will or "Law". "I give my life To the Law of God above the Law of Man. Unbar the door! Unbar the door!" (ditto). With this, the play demonstrates that the man of God considers martyrdom as a means of leaving the profane and unclean world.

In *Attahiru* also the protagonist approaches his death with a kind of attitude that demonstrates that he considers martyrdom as a path of achieving salvation. The Caliph has all the opportunity to make peace with the British colonialists led by Lugard but he considers the "peaceful" life as a life full of shame and humiliation. A life in which the infidel whiteman would be the master of

the Muslims and “fly his stupid flag” in place of the standard of Islam is not worth-living for the Caliph as such, he welcomes martyrdom which he believes would grant him eternal salvation.

Both Thomas and Attahiru did not falter in their struggle with the aggressive opponents because they believe that martyrdom would only free them from the temporal profane life and take them to eternal salvation as promised by their respective religions. It can be argued then that the two plays show that accomplishing self-mortification is the first step for achieving the glory of martyrdom and salvation as both Archbishop Thomas Becket and Caliph Attahiru have to suppress and deaden their temporal and materialistic desires to attain the status of martyrdom.

Conclusion

This research is a comparative study of two historical plays, *Murder in the Cathedral* by the English writer T. S. Eliot and *Attahiru* written by Nigerian playwright, Ahmed Yerima. The work involves the study of the two selected plays in relation to their respective historical contexts. This kind of reading is a method of interpreting literary texts proposed by New Historicism, a theory that sharply differs from formalist and new critic approach that separates literature from its context of any kind.

In both plays Eliot’s and Yerima’s interest in revisiting the history of their respective societies in the two works is seen as a result of their specific literary purpose. The research investigates the use of history by both Eliot and Yerima in these two plays. It is argued throughout this study that both playwrights go beyond mere reflection of the historical events by bringing into light important issues in the history they recreated.

Both works are seen based on the contestation of power. However, in *Murder in the Cathedral* it is the monarchy that sets out to acquire not only the temporal political power but also the

absolute control of the spiritual power. And this is what Archbishop Thomas Becket refuses to accept. As such, the conflict has an internal dimension since the struggle between the church and state is within the same society. On the other hand, *Attahiru* is about an outside power attempting to dominate the spiritual and political power of the Muslim leader Caliph Attahiru. The link between the two works lies in how both explore the issue of self-mortification of the historical protagonists. Through the political conflicts the historical figures find themselves, they embark on spiritual search. Both Thomas and Attahiru are concerned with uplifting the spiritual penance as both protagonists want to do what is acceptable to God since their main concern is salvation which puts them in conflict with the political powers.

Again, through the exploration of the common thematic concerns of sacrifice and martyrdom, it becomes clear that the treatment of religion reflects aspect of the affinity between the two works. As demonstrated in this research, both dramatists revisit the religious history in their societies to find ideal tragic heroes they used to tackle the issue of self-conquest. Eliot searched the history of Anglican/Catholic church and found his tragic hero, Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury who conquered his own bodily desires to champion the interest of the church against King Henry II which earned him the glory of martyrdom. On his part, Yerima looked back to the Nigeria's colonial history and found his own tragic hero, Caliph Attahiru who sacrificed the coveted throne of the Sokoto caliphate and embraces martyrdom in defence of the Islamic faith against the British invaders. It can be argued that both texts demonstrate that self-conquest is an important step in the quest for martyrdom and salvation. The work further argues that, the recreation of history in the two texts would help in creating awareness needed in our contemporary societies.

Finally, it can be concluded that, in spite of difference in terms of socio-political context as well as geographical and periodical distance, there is close affinity between the two works especially in their use of history. Through the dramatization of the historical events, both playwrights are able to recreate the life and times of the two historical personages and explore some issues that are somehow unspeakable in history.

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