

**ACADEMIC SUPREMACY AND OBSESSION FOR POWER IN  
ASIGBO'S WAR OF THE TIN GODS AND ONCE UPON A  
SCHOOL**

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**Abstract**

The fact remains that in every professions of the world over, the phenomenon of supremacy and obsession for power is humanly inbuilt, human thirst for power in every endeavor and claim of superiority over one and other has been order of the day. Everyone want to be something or somebody in life, by so doing goes to any length to acquire such feat regardless what happen to the other person(s) in the course of their pursuance of such feat. They crush anyone who crosses them, even their family members. The academics are not an exception in this race of life endeavor. The academics have been thrown into a confused state of ignorance, a war zone and political arena where power tussle and war of supremacy is the order of the day. The questions therefore are; how did we get here? When did we get to this mess? And are we not suppose be intellectuals who should know better and teach others? These and many other questions are the bases for this paper and Asigbo's 'War of the tin gods' and 'Once upon a school' are plays that exposed the insensitivities of the academics to these dangerous epidemic that is ravaging our institutions. The paper tried to ex-rays the damages and decay that these two neglected epidemics (supremacy and obsession for power) have done to academics and academic system in Nigeria, by exploring the sociological realism as its theoretical base.

## **Introduction**

In the world over, high institutions are almost the same probably in structures with governing bodies that administer the day to day activities in order to achieve the set up goals of such institution. As such, it is seen as a community of its own where learning and research are the order of the day, but not without the politics of scramble for positions here and there, promotions from one step to another therefore calls for competitions amongst both the academics and the non-academics. The scramble for loyalty of colleagues and the students for post and position in the institution gives room for back biting, rumor spreading and gangsterism amongst the lecturers and the students. The claim of superiority of all sort rears its ugly head as people who are supposed to be more knowledgeable than the others in area of academics, either in teaching, playwriting, directing or otherwise engage in in dirty war of complexity. Set-up, witch-hunting gang-up against each other and hot chase for position drives the wheel of lecturing in our society. However, one cannot rule out politics in all facet of our life endeavor even in our different homes but the politics that is trending in our high institution is unhealthy, grievous and un-call for, because it is affecting the educational system and the students involved. Therefore, it is worrisome to see how decay and rotten our educational system have become due to supremacy war and thirst for power and position which Asigbo in his plays, 'The war of tin gods' and 'Once upon a school enumerated.

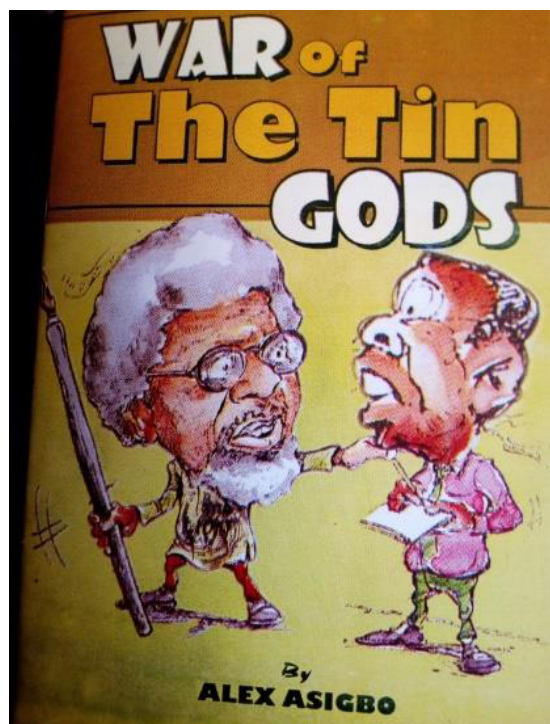
## **About The Plays: War of The Tin Gods**

The play 'War of the tin gods' is satirical advancement of two giant playwrights in academics who fight for supremacy in playwriting and the accusation of being either too advanced or watering in language and plots. The claim is that one believed he writes for the elites and the other for the common man on the street. They both claim superiority over each other of their affluence in the academics and the society at large. Their ego are also robbed on their followers/disciples who believed so much in them and their works regardless what critics or people say about them. Woye and Emi are the character used in play, it is crystal clear that the two of them attended the same school and both are playwright of good repute, and are always on each other's neck.

## **Once Upon A School**

It is a play that exposed the antics and dubiousness of lecturers' desirous for power in our institutions and the length at which they can go to get their desire achieved. Their plots and plans to eliminate whosoever is on their way, no matter how high and mighty he/she may be was alighted in the play. The use of student most especially girls in setting up colleagues to achieve/acquire their goals was the in thing in the play, also is the issue of betrayer of trust after attaining power. The play emphasizes on these immoralities and lack of honest associated with activities of students, the lecturers and the University administrators who insist on imbibing ennobling qualities. It is a play that used typical issues to interrogate and analyses the prevalent social and academic problems inherent in an academic institutions.

### **Analysis of War of The Tin Gods**



**Fig. 1**

The characters and events described in this play are entirely the author's imagination and bear no semblance whatsoever to person(s) dead or living. Any resemblance is therefore unequivocally fortuitous. (Asigbo, v).

Though Asigbo's claim(s) may be tenable in some quarters but starting from the play's cover page which is out-rightly suggestive and there cannot be any denial of the fact that the two caricatures on the cover page (pig1) are resemblance of very prominent playwrights among Nigerian academics. Asigbo claimed he did not mention anyone's name either living or dead, that the names in his play are fictions. That can only be genuine to the new generation set of students and not the old generation of academics who knows or experienced the cold war that went on between the two giant playwrights in Ibadan then. With Asigo's claim above, that kite can only fly within the new generation of students and even at that, the new set of scholars these days are wide read and they cannot be pushed around like puppet on the string. Even the lines in the play give it all out. For instance;

**Olodumare:** When did you notice this! Mean this arrogant and disrespectful nature of his?

**Zuluike:** Back then at UCI when he was still fledg writer.

Looking at the speeches here, the playwright cannot deny the fact that UCI is not an acronym for University College Ibadan now University of Ibadan, the great fountain of knowledge where most of our great playwrights drank/acquired their educational skills and water of knowledge. Moreover, resemblance or pronunciation of names of major characters and other names in the play gave an indication that characters in the play are colleagues or contemporaries. Names like Chebe, Zuluike, Aba and Aki are related to many other playwrights in Woye and Emi's category. The cover page of the play 'War of the tin gods' speaks volume of the playwright's (Asigbo) intent and imagination, denial of any sorts can only be for people that are neither in theatre or academics. However, one can give it to him that as a playwright, one also has the right as a critic or analyst to read/interpret or give contextual in-depth meaning to a work of art. Yerima (50) posits:

Art survives a man because it flows from man's very essence and being. It allows man to express himself. It is used as a tool for distinguishing truth from falsehood, illusion from reality. It grows from man's overriding belief, his origin, his religion and his history, allows man to face the constant ambivalence of existence which is the conflict between false consciousness and human nature.

However, that the playwright said he does not refer to anybody whatsoever will allow us to just analysis that play based on its content and context

based on our knowledge and belief. Woye in the play is an Ogunian believer while Emi is Eshu believer; both deities are of Yoruba mythology. Ogun is god of iron who destroys its enemies in fierce battle while Eshu is god of mischief and trickster contrary to the biblical devil. Woye is believed in some quarters to be proud and pompous in his writings, using advanced vocabularies meant only for the elites above the common man's knowledge. However, Emi writes in a simple language that suits the common man. Woye accuses Emi of dearth of vocabularies, which brought about war of superiority between them. But the two tried to defend their stand and superiority in the text:

**Olodumare:** Children, the world of the dead is a part of the living and the gulf that separates us must constantly be bridged by creatures stubborn and willful. Let therefore the two ancestors in question to pit their wits against each other to determine who is the master of his art. Let Woye Ogun and Emi Eshu stand out for this epic contest.

**Woye:** Impossible! Because my spirit has leapt into this land of the fleshless, must my body here be taken for a commoner's? How can it be told that I, poison pen of my generation, scourge of megalomaniacs, the sublime artist himself am pitted against this purveyor of discordant note and nursery rhymes?

**Emi:** I beg your pardon! My art is populist not elitist. I am sensitive and responsive to the needs of the masses. I am committed.

**Woye:** Committed? Ha! Ha! Don't make me laugh where were you in '65 when single handedly . I held up a radio station at a gun point? Where were you in '67 when I dodged Ogbunigwes and defied the orders of a tyrant to visit Biafra? What of '94 when I confronted the stone-age despot? My friend commitment must be tangle not nebulous.

**Emi:** It is a question of perception. My works urge unity and mass action. Shall I cry war when peace is honorable?

Notwithstanding, the two have points in their favor and they have right to their opinions and stands but some quick questions come to mind, do we really need this bigotry in the field of art?, are we all talented same way? Is creativity limited to a certain genre of art? I presume NO, because as our faces are different so are our thinking and perception of thing differ. However, as human, it is bound to happen because we are jealous and

insatiable animals, even God who created us confirmed that He is a jealous God. The jealousy is pronounced in the text with venom when the two begin to eulogies their deities;

**Woye:** Ogun o! Ogun o! Ogun the fabled wisdom! Warrior who gorges himself with blood.

Ogun of the indestructible will. You the axe headed one!  
Nourisher of my art. Lone warrior of the winding road!  
Conqueror of the abyss. Artist, technologist and bulwark of  
my art! Ogun o! Will you stand by and watch this affront to  
your favorite ward

**Agbako:** Are you done?

**Woye:** Yes.

**Agbako:** Emi Eshu... You have Olodumare leave to pray to your patron god.

**Emi:** I really do not believe in deities and divinities, myth and mystification but for purposes of their fable attributes. I make my prayer to Eshu, the quintessential trickster. Eshu ee! Eshu ee! Confuser of men's brain. God or retribution who never forget injury. Who defeat even the wise in their own games. I sing your oriki you who throw a stone today and it lands yesterday. You with the wit to spin a bloodless revolution. Sharpen my wit against this conceited son of Ogun. Revenge this slight on your favorite ward and you Orunmila give me wisdom.

**Agbako:** Are you done?

**Emi:** Yes.

**Olodumare:** Now child, what displeases you in Woye Ogun's work?

**Emi:** Everything! In fact, his entire philosophy is repugnant and repulsive. Instead of water he asks for blood. Instead of the spoon he demands for the knife. He attempts to foist an oriental philosophy that has the bondman scrambling for *seppuke* on the masters wish on us,

**Olodumare:** Can you prove these allegations?

**Emi:** I accuse him of theatrical apartheid! I accuse him of grand design to decimate the proletariat through his specious strong breed philosophy.

**Woye:** Is this not the height of phantasmagoria? Have you not taken leave of your sense? My friend, what I advocate is Ogunnian hero not some reject of the world.

**Emi:** Obstreperous! Tell me, why is it always the poor who are called to sacrifice? Why is it always the wretched, never a wealthy man, never the son of a king, who is suddenly discovered to bear the mark of destiny at difficult moment, and pushed on to fulfill himself in suicidal task in your plays?

**Woye:** Are these the insipid charges I must encounter from this impetuous upstart? Are you not treading the path of self-immolation? Tell me, in which of my works is a strong breed made a commoner? My carriers are not discovered by accident. Their blood says they are the strong breed and they spend their lives in blessing on account of it. Read my works and you will discover that my carriers are not discovered fortuitously.

**Emi:** What of your obsession with deities and divinities, myth and mystifications? Why your beguiling preoccupation with gods and phantoms.

With those conversations above, one could feel the supremacy tussle between the two playwrights, the envy, open jealousy and gruesome hatred between the two which has affected most of their followers'/disciples' forbearance in present academics. These issues still linger in the academics till date amongst the big wigs and the upcoming, issues of clicks, caucus and godfatherism has become an epidemic and cankerworm in the high institution that is eating deeply into the fabric of our co-existence. War of words has become the weapon in which we throw like missile the destroy ourselves not minding the gravity of its effect and the aftermath. We use words freely and carelessly on each other as if we will never reconcile, forgetting that words are like egg when broken can never be coupled together again. This is the case of Woye and Emi in this play, the used words freely on each other and names calling that pierces like two edged sword. Sincerely the war of supremacy has forever being and will continue to be as long as human being are concern and not only in the academic but in the world over, academics must take caution.

Aki and Aba are representation of the stunt followership of these two playwrights, the die-hard Woyeist and Emist who believed in their doctrine, philosophy and ideology about life and academics prowess. They can go to any length to defend their masters come rain come shine, it was evident in the play when they got to Oledumare to request for one of the ancestor/playwright to return for impartment of knowledge.

**Olodumare:** That will do. Now, will my children from the living world ask question of Woye Ogun?

**Aba:** No question, Olodumare! Woye Ogun is my mentor, the quintessential artist, inspirer and bulwark of our continental literature.....

**Aki:** Speak for yourself! There is denying the fact that he is a great playwright....

**Woye:** The greatest son, the greatest.

**Olodumare:** You emissaries of the living what do you have to say?

**Aba:** Can you not hear the voice of humility clamoring and pleading for the return of the bleeding genius? Do you not experience this anguish of an impoverished humility panting like a tired dog from a dearth of sublime wisdom? Let woye ogun return with us..

**Aki:** Once again you go too far! When did we arrive at that decision? Surely emi eshu is the better choice.

Those are the voices of their disciples/followers then which till echoes till now all over, none of them will succumb for each other, so the enmity and supremacy war lingers to no end in sight in our institutions, all over Nigeria. Few are those who are not loyal to one theatre guru or the other.

### **Once Upon A School Analysed**

The play 'Once upon a school' is a typical replica of our high institutions and the nation at large. A nation where obsession for power is eminent, back biting and setup reign supreme. A people full of hatred, liars and insensitivity in dealing with each other has been the order of the day, where no one cares what comes out of any action taken even at death. Asigbo chronicles the obsession for power in Nigeria through the high institution with the characters of the lecturers and their professors with the syndrome of pull him down, setup and deceit. Wariboko is likened to a

typical Nigeria politician who wants a position by all means and could go to any mile to get it, even if it means assassinating and maiming the opponent. The politics played in our Universities these days is outrageous and deadly not considering the aftermath of it outcome all that matters is the power and when they get the power, every other things become history including those who brought them to power. Asigbo (199) asserts:

Through chairman [wariboko] the ugly picture of distorted social relations in Nigeria as a nation is painted. Some political [academics] aspirants when in search of power and recognition try to be level-headed with their fellow citizens; but the moment they see themselves at the corridor of power, discard the same people who put them through to such elevated positions.

Agema (233) also posits:

The political plot of Africa is interesting and many times, depressing. It is one that has repeated itself since independence with only actors changing. At the time of poll, the actors promise heaven, speak jargons and pose as messiahs. Such terms as 'transformation', 'change', 'continuity' and the like are slogans that fill the air. It takes only a while before we see the truth of their lies.

All the assertions above played out in the character of Wariboko who wanted the position of the head of the department (HOD) by all means, a position occupied by a professor and a superior at that, but his obsession for power and affluence brought out the human greed and selfishness in him to plot the professor's downfall by using Chuks who has axe to grind with the professor. Chucks in the play is like our new generation of student(s) who will not strive to read or do the needful for academic excellence but always finding a short cut to success thereby vulnerable to be used as a bate for setup. However, the use of girls to bring down male lecturers is rampant and outrageous in our University, it has been there and continues to be there till the end, but still the male lecturers do not learn from occurrences that befall their colleagues. This is the case of the professor who could not take away his eyes off all that is under shirt which almost caused him his life hard earned professorship. The intrigues and antics of politics played in the University and the nation at large is ex-rayed in this play. Sometimes getting to a position is not as worse as seeking the life of the opponent. For instance, after Wariboko got the HODship and was feeling insecure, all he wanted next is the professor out of the system.

**Chucks:** Really?

**Wariboko:** Yes. *Hurriedly*. If you're ready to do me a little favor in return?

**Chucks:** Just tell me what to do sir and I will do it

**Wariboko:** Okay, I will lay my card on the table. You know I want Prof out of the system as much as I think you now do. Okay, let me not beat about the bush. What I want you to do is this.. set Prof up for blackmail so we can dictate our terms to him.

**Chucks:** How am I supposed to do that sir?

**Wariboko:** Think about it chucks, think about it, if you want to pass Prof's course. I will leave you to figure out the best way.

What a way to stampede and blackmail a citizen, most especially a student who is desperate to pass a course by all means with sentiment. This is the exact way our politicians rope the unsuspected citizens into mischiefs and dangerous mission. With such mouthwatering offer(s), anybody can go to any length to get such job done which was the case of Chuck in the play using his girlfriend (Angela) as bate to get the professor. This has been the trend in our Universities and the nation at large. It has happened in Osun State University, Kwara State University, Lagos State University, University of Lagos where many lecturers were sack out-rightly out of blackmail or setup.

### **In-Depth Analytical Prowess Of Asigbo As a Playwright**

The intellectual world of the twenty century was based on the mystification of ideological 'isms'. The world force then to great extent, was predicated, influences, framework, terminologies and analysis of such terminologies has set and stable patterns. Artistes could project their ideologies mystifications and positions in reality and turn them into symbolic imageries in their works, giving specific significations of meaning and theme to them. Yerima (50)

The two plays have a serious impact on the society and the students who will either read or study Asigbo as a playwright and moreover those who do not know much about the war of supremacy of the two giant playwrights of our generation. Asigbo as academics has a reputable prowess in writing, with these two plays in review, he has presented himself a prolific writer who satirized situation around him and give meaning to life impending results. However, Asigbo, though trying to dodge the fact about the reality that faces us as academics most especially

the two playwrights, claiming superiority over each other, he managed to carve a way to express his consternation over this ugly situation. First and foremost, as an artist that he is, Asigbo used his creative ingenuity to project his dismay. Also as academics and mirror of the society, he has proven that he has the duty and obligation to express his pain through writing hence the plays. Agema (237) quoting Ojo-Ade's statement asserts:

The artist serves the community and mirrors the life of people. The essentials of his art are commitment to the culture and responsibility within the society. From the vintage point, the writer chooses to depict reality as he would like it to be or paint a picture of present pollution, thus challenging the public to seek solution to the problems.

However, the playwright has the liberty whatsoever to put on paper his thoughts, perception and arguably his stand on any given issue in society because he stands as prophet or mirror. He is not bereft of his society's situations and happenings but sometimes though bias in some quarters. Therefore, Asigbo being a writer, academics and cultural activist who has canvassed the nook and crannies of the University domain as administrator, supervisor and teacher, have seen and conquered, and by so doing, he needs to document his experiences via these two plays and some others. His experiences in University politics, the antics of his fellow lecturing colleagues in scrambling for position and the play of supremacy of rank and works of art has informed these play no doubt. His outpour and expressiveness satirized the insensitivities and gullibility of the academics in bit to gain relevance by all means. This is also borne out of his artistic ingenuity and love for his profession. Olokodana (64) asserts:

Williams Wordsworth's expressive theory argues that expressiveness is the core of every literary work since every work of art is essentially the internal made external. The constituent of a work of art result from a creative process under the impulse of feelings combined with author's perceptions and thought. The primary source and subject matter are the actions of the writer's mind and perhaps some external influence; but these are still converted appropriately from facts to literature by the power of the writer's expressiveness.

## **Conclusion**

Conclusively, Asigbo has no doubt expressed his thoughts, feelings and grudges about the academic setting through these two plays, painting it the way it was and it is now. Looking at the foundation of the dwindling

University system from the fight of the two giants in playwriting genre which has affected the new generation of lecturers and lecturing. Projecting the act of godfatherism, blackmailing, backstabbing, setup, examination racketeering and many other epidemics that are ravaging the University system which represents Nigeria both in politics and social interaction that needs urgent attention. These two plays by our astute and inexhaustible professor of theatre is a clarion call to all and sundry to wake up to reality of life and stop chasing shadow, lecturers are teachers, mentors and evangelists who are to lead for others to follow. Therefore, if the teacher so to say is ignorant of issues concerning him how will he impact knowledge or mentor the student(s) he is supposed to guide aright. Asigbo has put on paper his own view about the issues concerning the academics and academic from his purview, perspective, perception and thoughts but systematically dodged the fact that Wole Soyinka (Woye) and Ola Rotimi (Emi) were two giant playwright mention in ‘war of the tin gods’, though he has the liberty to his opinion likewise I do have such liberty to think otherwise, I stand to be corrected. However, it is bestowed on everyone in the academic system to take precautions not to run fowl of these cancerous wind of blackmail and setup that is blowing across the University environ and even in the country as a nation.

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