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Compression and Crisis: The Aesthetics of the Short Story and the Representation of Social Ills in Moses Orhungur's Desperate Dash and Igba Ogbole's Haunted by Halima

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Abstract **Review Article**

This paper examines the aesthetics of the short story as a vehicle for representing contemporary Nigerian social ills in Moses Orhungur's Desperate Dash and Igba Ogbole's Haunted by Halima. Against the backdrop of the dearth of critical attention paid to the Nigerian short story, the study deploys the theory of the short story, drawing on Edgar Allan Poe's principle of unity of effect, Frank O'Connor's concept of submerged population groups, and Charles E. May's notion of epiphany and the "reality of a moment," to interrogate how form enables social critique. Through close textual analysis, the paper argues that Orhungur and Ogbole exploit the core short story aesthetics of brevity, compression, intensity, and implication to render crisis immediate and unavoidable. While Orhungur employs narrative speed, clipped syntax, and abrupt openings to aesthetically embody the culture of impatience, hustle, and moral haste among Nigerian youth, Ogbole deploys concentrated scenes, phonological repetition, and internal focalisation to sustain a singular effect of horror in representing unemployment, sexual exploitation, witchcraft, and massacres of people by herdsmen. A contrastive analysis further reveals convergences in compression, singleness of theme and marginal characterisation, alongside divergences in the use of open endings and moral didacticism. The paper concludes that the short story's economy of form makes it uniquely suited to a society where life itself has become compressed, rushed, and violent.

Keywords: Short story theory, compression, Nigerian literature, social ills.

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Introduction

When the Canadian, Alice Munro, won the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013 for being "a master of the contemporary short story," the award not only emblematised the value and significance attached to the short story in modern times, it basically invalidated the claim that the short story is an inferior artistic endeavour engaged in by writers who lack the artistic sophistication to deliver a novel. Put differently, the short story is now a genre that has achieved international recognition and wide readership. The popularity of the short story has cut across all parts of the world.

In Africa, for example, the artistic dexterity displayed by African writers in the short story art is so glaring that some scholars have reportedly argued that the mastery of the art is because of its closeness to the folktale, which is a popular verbal creativity in

Africa. Jasper Onuekwusi reports that "many similarities in form, content, and purpose exist between the African folktale and the African contemporary short story. Each is intensely glued to the creation of a single impact, impression, or effect on the audience; each usually places a premium on didacticism, even if through entertainment" (151). This must be what Adrian Roscoe meant when he, in a rather derogatory and prescriptive manner, submitted that "the African writer can be a much more accomplished artist if he sticks to short narratives rather than to the longer types because the short story has an antecedent in the folktale which abounds in African oral tradition whereas the novel is alien to it" (77). It is crystal clear that Roscoe's prescriptive comment is insightful in understanding the popularity of the short story in Africa. However, it is ridiculous to think that since the short story resembles folktales, Africans should only be concerned with the art, especially considering that most African short story writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Bernard Dadié, I.N.C. Aniebo, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Sefi Atta, and Chimamanda Adichie, among others, have turned out to be great novelists.

The Nigerian short story, in particular, has always been a critical site for documenting national anxiety, meaning that from Ekwensi to Adichie, the Nigerian short story has evolved as a genre of immediacy. It is this immediacy that compels Odun Balogun to remark that the short story is where "you find the very quick response to reality in a very short form that is sometimes very poetic" (Qtd. in Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 207). Amid economic recession, youth unemployment, ethno-religious violence and spiritual insecurity, writers have turned to the short form to capture lives lived in bursts of crisis. The thematic preoccupations of contemporary Nigerian fiction in general, and the 21st-century Nigerian short story in particular, are marked by urban settings, linguistic hybridity, and a focus on survival.

While it is true that the short story's brevity allows Nigerian writers to capture current Nigerian life lived under pressure, as reflected in anthologies and collections in the last decade, criticism has been largely scarce. This is what Helen Chukwuma decried as far back as 1978, and it was re-echoed by other critics like Charles Nnolim, P.O. Iheakaram, and more recently, F.O. Balogun. Allwell Abalogu Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu regard it as "the relegation of the short story in terms of its general artistic consideration and core appreciation/criticism" (201). This dearth of critical reception on the short story is not unconnected with the nature of the art itself. Balogun, in particular, observes that it is more tasking to critique a short story than a novel because "each short story is a whole study; you look at it from all the angles and perspectives that you look at a novel … a very labour-intensive exercise" (Qtd. in Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 204). It is obvious that the short story is difficult to critique due to the independent existence of the stories in a collection and what Graham Huggan refers to as "lack of theoretical groundwork" for the criticism of the short story (61). Nnolim urges African critics that, "whatever the case may be, our critics must be reminded that the short story as a genre is still stillborn on the African literary scene. To deliver this baby, to ensure the healthy birth of the short story (through vigorous critical response) into the mainstream of the African literary scene is a major challenge facing critics of African literature" (158). Though a few short story critics such as P.O. Iheakaram, Odun Balogun, and Jasper Ahaoma Onuekwusi, among others, have responded to Nnolim's call, there is a need for more effort.

It is in response to the call above and the need to add to the few existing critical responses on Nigerian short story criticism that this paper explores the short story aesthetics of two emerging Nigerian short story writers. Moses Orhungur's *Desperate Dash* and Igba Ogbole's *Haunted by Halima* chronicle the language of hustle, speed, and survival in Nigeria's urban spaces. Both collections are preoccupied with impatience, unemployment, transactional love, sexual exploitation, herdsmen massacres, and witchcraft in a way that reflects the pressured, lived experiences of many Nigerians.

A critical examination of these collections

reveals that beyond their thematic preoccupations with hustle and horror, these works are distinguished by their strategic, though uneven, deployment of short story aesthetics. Both Orhungur and Ogbole exploit brevity, intensity, and compression to make social ills feel immediate and unavoidable, a form uniquely suited to a society where life itself has become compressed, rushed, and violent. However, while Orhungur masterfully embodies impatience through linguistic speed and abrupt openings, his didactic closures often compromise the implication central to the modern short story; Ogbole, by contrast, sustains unity of effect through concentrated scenes of horror and suggestive endings that trust the reader to complete meaning. Since critical responses to both collections remain scarce, this paper fills that gap by examining how brevity, intensity, and epiphany are deployed, and at times undermined, in representing contemporary Nigerian social ills through the lens of the short story theory.

Conceptualising the Theory of the Short Story

This paper is hinged on the theory of the short story as its interpretative framework. Since the two primary texts under examination here are collections of short stories, the theory of the short story seems to have more potential not just in accounting for the form of the short story but also for its ideas of compression, unity, limited space and character structure. The short story is unarguably a unique literary genre that cannot be simply dismissed as a miniature novel. This implies that the origin, formation, and development of the short story show that it was systematic, intentional, and quite different from the novel.

From the 19th century to the modern era, several critics and writers have consciously developed a body of theory that explicates what makes the short story a unique genre in structure, purpose, and effect. It must be acknowledged that central to this theory are the salient ideas of compression, unity, and the portrayal of limited characters in a limited space and time. The major theoretical foundational works that built up what has become the theory of the short story are credited to the writings of Edgar Allan Poe, Frank O'Connor, and Charles E. May. In their essays, they argued convincingly that the short story achieves its power and uniqueness through narrative economy and a focus on a single, decisive moment.

The foundational theory of the short story was first established by Edgar Allan Poe in his 1842 review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*. In the review, Poe made several arguments notably that the short story must be designed to be read “in one sitting,” and thus must produce a “single effect” on the reader (572). To Poe, this meant that a skilful writer must conceive the intended effect first, whether it be horror, sympathy, or moral insight, before considering plot, character, and language to serve that effect. The principle of unity of effect, therefore, demands strict narrative economy, as there is no room for subplots, excessive or needless description, or digression. This upholds an emphasis on linguistic economy where every word must contribute to the overall impression. According to Poe, the short story is thus an art of deliberate design and control, where the ending is consciously planned before the beginning is written.

Equally important is Frank O’Connor's expansion of the short story theory in the 20th century by focusing on the social and thematic concerns of the genre. In his book, *The Lonely Voice*, O’Connor postulated that the short story is the literature of “submerged population groups” (19). Unlike the novel, which normally preoccupies itself with the mainstream and the established, the short story represents the voices of marginal figures like outsiders, rebels, and those in conflict with their society. This concern with the individual against the group has come to represent one of the striking features of the short story, which is that of loneliness, tension, and unresolved struggle. According to O’Connor, the form is suited to moments of crisis as it cannot accommodate the full social context that the novel provides. Relatedly, the short story presents a glimpse or a fragment of a life in conflict instead of a full one.

Charles E. May, another important scholar, further developed the short story theory by emphasising the role of epiphany. According to him, the short story is defined by “the reality of a moment”

(May 3). This means that, rather than narrating the entirety of a character's life, the short story isolates one critical incident that leads to a change in perception or understanding. To May, the plot is minimal and characterisation is suggestive rather than exhaustive. The story often ends without full resolution, leaving the reader to complete the meaning. This reliance on implication is essential and explains the abruptness that has come to become one of the basic tenets of the modern short story. May argues that because the short story is circumscribed by length, it must trust the reader to infer what is not stated directly. By May's argument, it can be said that the power of the short story, therefore, lies in what is left unsaid.

From the above three critical perspectives, core principles of the short story have emerged. Firstly, a short story must exhibit brevity and compression. It must be limited in length and characters and circumscribed to a single setting and time. This limitation is not a weakness but rather a major strength of the form, as it forces the writer to select only the most essential details. Secondly, it can be deduced from the theoretical argument above that a short story must exhibit unity of effect. This forms the basic part of Poe's argument, and it implies that all elements of the story, such as the title, opening, dialogue, symbol, and ending, must work toward one dominant impression. More so, the short story must focus on a single crisis, thereby presenting a moment of conflict or decision rather than a full life history. This is the argument that produced the most dominant trait of the short story: singleness of theme. Furthermore, just as May argued, the short story must show absolute reliance on implication. This can be achieved through the use of suggestion, symbolism, and open endings to engage the reader.

From the foundational arguments that foreground the theory of the short story, it is glaring that the short story is a genre of economy and intensity. While Poe gave us the principle of unity of effect, O'Connor gave us the focus on marginal experience. May, on the other hand, provided us with the centrality of the reality of the moment. The short story is an art form that says the most with the least, and in doing so, creates a lasting impact on the reader. These features are evident in Moses Orhungur's *Desperate Dash* and Igba Ogbole's *Haunted by Halima*. Inasmuch as the writers are circumscribed in terms of length, setting, and thematic preoccupation, their ability to use this compressed form to evaluate the social ills in their society is quite commendable and constitutes the subject of this paper.

Representation of Social Ills in Moses Orhungur's *Desperate Dash* and Igba Ogbole's *Haunted by Halima*

Both Moses Orhungur and Igba Ogbole are emerging contemporary creative writers whose creative outputs have clearly exposed their imaginative skills and positive prospects in the literary field. Moses Orhungur's *Desperate Dash* is a 163-page collection of eight carefully selected stories. The deliberateness demonstrated in this selection ensures that all the stories are thematically tied to impatience, just like the stories of Alice Munro who stated that "I don't write stories and then gather them up. I write toward a book. The stories find their shape because they are answering the same question, just from different rooms in the house" (Nobel Lecture). In *Haunted by Halima*, Ogbole interrogates the plagues of evil, witchcraft, unemployment, deforestation, obnoxious traditional practices, prostitution, and the herdsmen massacres that have continued to haunt Nigerians on a daily basis in twelve engaging short stories that run into 286 pages. The uniqueness of these two collections is based not only on their thematic currency but on their strict adherence to the aesthetics of the short story tradition.

The Aesthetics of Impatience in Orhungur's *Desperate Dash*

As already observed, one outstanding feature of *Desperate Dash* is the author's thematic uniformity, coupled with a linguistic reflection of this ill of impatience. In the eponymous story, Blessing, who is ill, is too impatient to submit herself to the gradual but pragmatic, consistent dialysis and possible transplantation to cure her renal failure, and

prefers Pastor Dumsy's miracle, which eventually fails her. This same impatience is recorded in "Faustian Bargain," where Adebayo is led into a seemingly rewarding world of internet fraud by his friend Chukwudi. As painful as the consequences are at the end, readers are still brought to experience the same impatience in "The Last Overtake," as Emmanuel's over-speeding, fuelled by his desire to complete three round trips before the day ends, lands him in a serious accident that witnesses only a single survivor. Chinedu and Halima's impatience prevents them from studying each other before committing themselves to marriage in "Marriage of Inconvenience." The devastating effects of their impatience are similar to that recorded in "Faulty Foundations" by Braino, whose impatience to acquire a degree in Engineering not only leads him to bribe his way through the university but also to supervising poorly executed building contracts that finally expose his incapability and the corrupt nature of certain institutions of learning. In both "Crawl Before Walk" and "Flawed Justice," Ibrahim Yusuf's business collapses because he lacks the patience needed to humbly grow a business, and Musa Abdullahi is nearly lynched by an impatient mob, respectively.

Orhungur's emphasis on the ill of impatience reflects a global trend, mostly in third-world countries, where hardship has caused a significant number of youths to throw away the virtue of patience. As writers are regarded as social commentators, the short story has become a magnificent tool in condemning these ills due to its brevity. Onuekwusi made a vital comment that corroborates this stance and needs extensive quotation:

> More recently, the corpus of African short stories has continued to grow. It could be said that the purpose of the short story has shifted from that of "light entertainment that aids digestion" to serious exploration of a rapidly changing environment. The short story has become a genre (admittedly more cryptic than the novel) which young contemporary African writers find useful for quickly exploring their circumstances, providing social visions, and more importantly- poking corrective fun at their worlds, even while providing entertainment. (152)

From the quotation above, one can deduce that, just like the novel, the short story has since begun to engage serious issues in society, and this is what is obtainable in Orhungur's *Desperate Dash*. If a checklist of societal ills is to be created, impatience, which has overwhelmed the youths of this present generation, will be prominently featured.

In each of the stories, Orhungur casts a dark shadow on the negative effects of impatience. Though linked to impatience, each story weaves, beautifully, unique circumstances that necessitated the characters to cast away patience. For Adebayo, three years of roaming the streets without a job after graduating from the university closed his ears to his late father's caution that "patience is a virtue that pays its owner well" (2), especially as his mother continued selling 'akara' by the roadside and endangering her vision as a result of "squinting over hot oil all day" (5). Adebayo becomes an internet fraudster, while the driver, Emmanuel, hastily drives his passengers to death because he wants to record at least three round trips in a short time. Pastor Dumsy, who owns a church that performs fake miracles for financial gain, becomes a pitfall for sick people who lack the patience to go through the gradual healing process as required in hospitals.

Interestingly, while Orhungur explores the deplorable conditions that fuelled their haste, he equally exposes the characters' obsession with quick results by presenting other options which they ignored. For example, Ibrahim cautions Adebayo, just as the man simply referred to as the 'man in safari suit' warned Emmanuel against over-speeding. Relatedly, the obsession with quick results and its deadly effects is felt throughout the pages of *Desperate Dash*. Chief Effiong Ekandem's haste to attain the political position of governor without proper orientation of what true governance means leaves him as corrupt as the politicians he earlier criticised, while Chinedu and Halima's rushed marriage ends in divorce. On the other hand, Braino's engineering certificate, acquired through quackery, provides a formidable clue as to why most buildings

collapse not long after they are built. The author's presentation of the characters' outright rejection of alternative means to legitimately acquire all they got reveals the moral deterioration in modern society and serves as an eye-opener to the rising ills in society. Thus, to posit that Orhungur's thematic concern is relevant and fitting is an understatement.

One important thing this paper examines is the way Orhungur utilises narrative speed and brevity as impatience in *Desperate Dash*. Since economy of words is key in the short story, Orhungur deploys sentences that are short, paratactic, and clipped. These linguistic elements are not just used to achieve compression and brevity but are symbolic of the haste, impatience, and hustle culture that has taken over humanity, especially the youths whose obsession to become rich overnight has continued to lure them into unimaginable ventures they label as 'hustle'. In *Desperate Dash*, there is limited time for patience as it has been taken over by impatience. Thus, the characters are consistently running out of time to think. Rather, they are only concerned with the result.

This compression and brevity is linguistically reflected in several ways. Firstly, almost all the stories begin suddenly, as is expected of a short story, but this goes beyond achieving a short story trait to representing the haste that characterises the characters' hasty decisions in the collection. In "Faustian Bargain," apart from the story beginning close to its end, the rate at which the story intends to accelerate is so alarming that the narrator applies the brake: "But we are getting ahead of ourselves" (1). While this is perfectly in line with the short story tradition, especially as argued by May, this linguistic feature represents the haste and impatience evident in the behaviour of the characters. These are further complemented by other utterances by the characters and the narrator. While trying to lure Adebayo into internet fraud, Chukwudi communicates with him curtly, deploying utterances like "My guy, I've been trying to tell you. Time no dey" (3), "I can teach you," "Don't call it fraud" (4). This same expression of lack of time is evident in "The Last Overtake." Emmanuel's language is heavily infused with signs of urgency. He tells his passengers thus: "Benin City! Fast moving" (15), "We go take small shortcut" (20), "Dis route go save us one hour at least. We go rejoin express after Mile 2" (21). While it is possible to argue that Emmanuel's language typifies that of a motor park driver in an attempt to persuade customers to board his vehicle, his actions behind the wheel, which later land him and the passengers in a fatal accident, betray this argument.

In the eponymous story, Pastor Dumsy equally employs this kind of language that demonstrates immediacy. This is seen in utterances such as "Your miracle is available RIGHT NOW! This INSTANT! In this MOMENT!" (34), "I declare your kidneys HEALED! RESTORED! PERFECTED! RECEIVE YOUR INSTANT MIRACLE!" (36). More of these utterances representing haste and immediacy are scattered all over the collection, and they sufficiently showcase the haste and hustle that have come to be part of youths in our modern society.

The Aesthetics of Horror: Exploitation, Unemployment, Massacre and Witchcraft in Ogbole's *Haunted by Halima*

Igba Ogbole's chief achievement in *Haunted by Halima* is the masterful way he handles and controls the aesthetics of horror. This is excellently executed in such a way that the plagues of evil, witchcraft, unemployment, deforestation, obnoxious traditional practices, prostitution, and the herdsmen massacres that have continued to haunt Nigerians on a daily basis are witnessed at close quarters by readers. In almost all the 12 engaging and ruminative stories, the characters are haunted on all fronts by one societal ill or the other. By interrogating these devastating social vices in society, Ogbole successfully corroborates Nnolim's observation that:

> In the face of despair which now grips all of us, I suggest a ray of hope in our literatures. Why literature as a possible moral corrective? Why not more church sermons and more "moral institutions" in our schools? I lodge my hope in our literatures because of the permanency of its nature and in the pervasive influence it has on the very young

> and on our youths. The literary voice, tiny and most often overheard rather than heard, etches itself on our psyche as permanent records to which one returns again and again by the very nature of its permanent existence. (159)

The above quotation showcases, with astonishing clarity, Ogbole's thematic relevance and currency. Ogbole's tone of condemnation as he engages these vices is glaring. For example, in "Wealth on Air," Ogbole takes a swipe at the wrong impression that fame equates to wealth; a belief that has reputedly caused unnecessary animosity among family members and friends. Mirrored through the narrator's experience with his father, the negative effects of this belief leave nothing to the imagination. In "Bloody January," the author equally explores, with chilling images, the gory activities of marauding herdsmen, accurately regarded as "harbingers of terror" (189), as they participate in what has become a daily occurrence in Nigerian communities. The alarming rate of unemployment as thematised in "An Easter to Remember" seems to reveal the motif behind the uprising of "the representative of the forgotten children" (243). With a similar tone of condemnation, the author decries the increasing rate of sexual immorality and exploitation in "Layers of Rot." Through the investigative eyes of the narrator, readers are horrified by the number of girls who are trapped in sexual slavery. Other preoccupations such as environmental degradation, witchcraft, and love are exhaustively treated in "Gone Forever," "Marked," and the eponymous story.

There is no doubt that, just like Orhungur, Ogbole's thematic engagement is timely and relevant. However, one of the artistic traits that remains fascinating and demands scrutiny is the way the author utilises the aesthetics of horror to imprint these social realities on the tablets of his readers' hearts. With strict adherence to intensity and unity of effect that typifies the short story, Ogbole renders the violent activities of the herdsmen in one concentrated scene rather than extended narration in "Bloody January." A careful examination of this story reveals that all the phonological repetitions of words like 'blood,' 'burning,' 'smoke,' 'flames,' 'marauders,' and 'massacre,' among others, are not just to make photographic, the gruesome murder of people by herders, but most importantly, to, in the fashion of Poe, sustain one major single effect, which is that of shock and horror. This is also true of the eponymous story where Ogbole uses an internal narrator to demonstrate the horror of missing a chance with a loved one.

Armed with the metaphor of haunting, euphemism, and understatement, the author makes us see this horror of missing a loved one through Adayi's eyes. The story, which begins with the horrific effects of this horror of missing a loved one in a dreamlike fashion, reinforces May's position about the role of epiphany, as the end is likely suggested rather than stated, thereby forcing readers' participation. Interestingly, horror is unmistakably made more haunting through omission.

This aesthetics of horror is compressed in both "Marked" and "The Colour of Evil" in such a way that the supernatural appears suddenly and is resolved in one scene. "Marked," beginning with the narrator's horrific killing of his uncle, leaves nothing to the imagination about the terrifying act, especially regarding the photographic nature in which it is captured: "I drove the knife into him with a force I would never have believed was in me. I must have been energised by the load of venom from the poison he had fed into my bloodstream all these years" (247). While the act itself represents horror, its presentation at the beginning of the story not only gives the opening a sudden take-off but also enhances compression by focusing on "the reality of a moment" (May 3). Similarly, Ogbole, in a metaphorical rendition, reveals to us an embodiment of evil in the character of Akatu, who adamantly obstructs the wedding of his brother's daughter until a fat cow is presented to him. The psychological trauma experienced by the distressed couple, Ameh and Elina, which is complemented by a near-fatal accident on their way back home after the wedding, is horrific enough to compel readers to imagine the depth of man's evil.

Just like Orhungur, Ogbole's thematic exploration is systematically designed to reflect the

lived experience of contemporary Nigerians as that of horror, where everyone is haunted by one social ill or the other. Relatedly, it can be submitted that Ogbole's *Haunted by Halima* is a collection that documents the horrors of unemployment, sexual exploitation, witchcraft, and herdsmen massacres, among other social vices explored in the collection. It is not just the intensity and unity of effect exhibited in capturing these social ills but also the compressed nature in which they are captured that validates Ogbole's mastery of the short story craft.

Orhungur and Ogbole: A Contrastive Analysis

A comparative analysis placing side by side *Desperate Dash* and *Haunted by Halima* holds the potential of revealing their convergences and divergences, opening up an avenue to objectively weigh their individual skills on the scale of short story aesthetics. Besides, since the paper has so far dealt basically with how Orhungur and Ogbole engaged the aesthetics of impatience and horror respectively, which is thematically based, this analysis holds the prospect of beaming its searchlight on other equally important aspects of the short story as reflected in the two collections.

Both collections adhere to Poe's demand for compression. Both writers restrict length, character, and setting to achieve a narrative readable in one sitting, and both populate their stories with O'Connor's "submerged population groups": fraudsters, touts, and impatient drivers in Orhungur; unemployed youths, trafficked girls, and massacre victims in Ogbole. Thematically, both also observe singleness of theme, subordinating every image and dialogue to a single dominant effect; haste in Orhungur, haunting in Ogbole. The divergence, however, is decisive. Ogbole largely trusts implication. In "The Gods Lied" and "Marked," horror erupts and resolves within a single scene, and meaning is left to accumulate through image, omission, and epiphany rather than explanation. The reader is forced to complete the moral shock.

Orhungur, in contrast, compromises compression through didactic over-explication. While his linguistic compression is masterful: short, paratactic sentences that formally embody impatience, his narrative compression falters at the point of closure. Every story is anchored to an explicitly stated moral dictum: "patience is a virtue that pays its owner well" (2); "a journey that takes a lifetime can be ended in a second of impatience" (29). As Nnolim observed of Ekwensi, Orhungur begins with a moral vision and "then proceeds to tell his story to fit his moral philosophy" (73). This is commendable as social commentary, but it betrays May's principle of suggestion. Where the modern short story should end in epiphany; suggestive, open, participatory, Orhungur ends in maxim, closing down the very interpretive space that compression is meant to open. In short, Orhungur achieves compression of language but not always compression of meaning.

Ogbole, therefore, emerges as the more formally disciplined practitioner of the short story aesthetic, while Orhungur emerges as the more urgent moralist; a tension that itself reflects the crisis of a society demanding both art and immediate moral correction.

Conclusion

Moses Orhungur's *Desperate Dash* and Igba Ogbole's *Haunted by Halima* confirm the short story as a critical form for documenting contemporary Nigerian crisis. Read through Poe's unity of effect, O'Connor's submerged population groups, and May's reality of the moment, both collections demonstrate how brevity, intensity, and compression can make social ills such as impatience, unemployment, sexual exploitation, witchcraft, and herdsmen massacres feel immediate and unavoidable. In a society where life itself has become compressed, rushed, and violent, the short story does not merely describe crisis; it formally enacts it.

Yet the two writers navigate this aesthetic with different degrees of formal discipline. Orhungur brilliantly embodies impatience at the level of language through abrupt openings, clipped syntax, and urgent dialogue that leave characters, like readers, with no time to think. However, his insistence on explicit moral closure undermines the

narrative compression central to the modern short story, replacing epiphany with maxim and implication with instruction. Ogbole, on the other hand, sustains compression to the end. By concentrating horror in single scenes, repeating phonological clusters of violence, and withholding explanation, he trusts the reader to infer meaning from shock, thereby achieving a more complete unity of effect.

Ultimately, the divergence is instructive. If Orhungur represents the short story as moral sermon which is urgent, didactic, unwilling to risk ambiguity in a society in haste, Ogbole represents it as aesthetic haunting; suggestive, unresolved, and therefore more lasting. Together, they reveal both the power and the pressure of the Nigerian short story that is caught between the art of saying the most with the least, and the social demand to say it clearly enough to be heard.

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