**MINIMUM WAGE: MAXIMUM WAHALA**

**A poem by Tayo Olafioye**

**The poem is from a collection; Parliament of Idiots.**

**Presented by Group 16**

**NAMES, MATRIC NUMBER, ATTENDANCE, ROLE**

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Two group members failed to submit their details or participate in group activities.

**ANALYSIS OF *MINIMUM WAGE: MAXIMUM WAHALA* BY TAYO OLAFIOYE**

**BACKGROUND OF THE POET**

Tayo Olafioye (1948-2012) is a Nigerian writer, novelist and scholar, active both in Nigeria and the United States. His death was shocking news and it is of no doubt that Africa has lost one of her finest writers. Tayo’s dexterity with the pen puts him on the same pedestal with other literary geniuses as his works make very interesting reads any day. He studied at various prestigious citadels of knowledge; University of Lagos, University of Denver, Colorado and University of California. The Golden Poets Award, American National Library Poetry Award, Yugoslavia Manifestation for Poetry Award and Thorpe International Award amongst other, were many meritorious prizes for which he was a proud recipient of due to his volumes of poetry which include *Sorrows of a Town Crier* (1988) and *Bush Girl Comes to Town* (1988). His other publications include *The Excellence of Silence, The Saga of Sego* (1982) and two works of literary criticism: *Responses to Creativity* (1988) and critic as *Terrorist: Views on New African Writings* (1989).

His most recent collections are entitled *A Carnival of Looters* (2000) and *The Parliament of Idiots* (of which *Minimum Wage: Maximum Wahala* is a part of), both published by Kraft Books, Nigeria. This is the author’s semi-fictional autobiography, written to the third person, following in the tradition of *Camara Laye’s African Child, Wole Soyinka’s trilogy (Ake, Isara, Ibadan)* and Tanure Ojaide’s *Great Boys: An African Childhood.*

In Nigeria today, a category of poetry which is more combative in its questioning of the socio-political and economic structures is becoming increasingly popular. The aggressiveness in the criticism of society is high and so is the degree of commitment to the search for a well ordered society where there is a reasonable amount of social justice and progress in society. Tayo Olafioye belongs to this generation of poets and some of his poems in *Parliament of Idiots* can be used to establish this. Olafioye’s poetry suggests that he focuses his attention towards addressing the yearnings and concerns of the oppressed.

In conclusion, Olafioye captures the Nigeria national maladies in parliament where he uses poetry to point out a genuine socio-political project where the people come to bear on the projections of the political class. Olafioye sets out to expose and condemn political attitudes that put the masses at a dangerous arena. He believes that the moral principles are essential in the contemplation of a people’s paradise, which he finds lacking in the social and political climate where politicians are scavenging for the spoil of politics.

Tayo Olafioye is a devoted father, husband and compatriot.

**BACKGROUND OF THE POEM**

The poem *Minimum Wage: Maximum Wahala* is a part of a collection of poems titled *Parliament of Idiots.* In this poem, the poet laments the plundering of national commonwealth, a situation whereby the masses become deprived of their rights and denied the payment of their wage (even if they are paid, it is the barest minimum). The poem is primarily concerned with exploring the issues of economic slavery, inequality and stratification in society. The poet criticizes the idea of the rich exploiting the poor, professing fake promises and half-truths. Various studies of his poem points to the fact that Tayo Olafioye longed for a new world, a land free from dishonesty and pain, where tomorrow will not leave today; a homeland free of leaders drunk with the need to fill their pockets with the land’s treasures simply on a whim .

Composed by an African, the poem is set to throw light on the ills of society, it ingeniously fuses satirical, allegorical and didactic elements along with its other clever devices such as peculiar diction and tone in conveying a very powerful message; a message of the poet’s disapproval on the issues of economic slavery as well as exploitation of the poor by the rich in society. The poet also uses the poem to point to the fact that we, the masses, the civil servants, the *Mekunnus* and *Talakawas* are responsible for our own suffering as we put our oppressors in power.

**SETTING OF THE POEM**

The spatial setting of the poem is Nigeria as although the poem can be related to Africa and even the world, the use of the Nigerian currency in line twelve, narrows down its events to Nigeria. The temporal setting is Post-Independence era marked by corruption, abuse of power, hypocrisy, etc.

**SUMMARY/ SUBJECT MATTER OF THE POEM**

The poem *Minimum Wage: Maximum Wahala* focuses on the anger, displeasure and disgust of the poet concerning the matter of economic slavery and political evils. Olafioye seems disturbed by the poor treatment and horrible situation of the less privileged members of the society.

**THEMATIC CONCERNS OF THE POEM**

The poem is primarily concerned with:

* Economic Slavery: The poem, all confusing sentence formation aside, is basically talking about the pain of the people who will labor and sweat for a government or for employers and leaders who will not acknowledge their hard work. They are made to work for little or no pay while those whom they labor for, eat the fruit of their hard work.
* Betrayal: Those elected into power were put in place to help the people who put them there. During elections, people hear promises of grandeur and oaths of servitude from their leaders, those leaders make those promises and oaths without telling the masses that the promises of grandeur are for themselves and the oaths of servitude is theirs (the masses) to take. They trust in their government for a better tomorrow instead, they are stabbed in the back as they fall in bed with the python.

 *They are cursed: 5*

 *Reined in by those they chose 6*

 *To lift them. 7*

 *No greater enemy 8*

 *Than the one, in one’s household 9*

 *The python with which one sleeps 10*

 *At night on the same bed. 11*

* Corruption: Our government is put in place to help our people and yet, the people suffer. Appointments are given not to the most deserving, but to the highest bidder. Embezzlement of the people’s money occurs on a daily basis and nothing is done. The bringers of the people’s pain, who do nothing more than fill their pockets with the people’s sweat and blood.

 *What do they care? 16*

 *The kingfishers of pain. 17*

 *Their own mint outside the pail 18*

 *The black gold lubricates 19*

 *Their fingers 20*

 *Bales of the ‘#’* *notes 21*

 *Carried by midnight owls 22*

 *Made pregnant, the garments they wear. 23*

* Ineffectiveness of the Law: ‘No man is above the law’ and so, they make themselves gods on earth. Enslaving the people, bending the law to their will, they do not know when it is enough and when they should stop. The rich is always right and the poor is always wrong in the eyes of the law. There is no justice to be sought, for what is fairness when they are the makers of the law and truth.

 *To make truth face backwards 24*

 *These law making bandits. 25*

 *Those accorded titles of dignity 26*

 *Should avoid perverting the will of the polity. 27*

* Helplessness of the Proletariats: They have been beaten down and now it’s hard to stand up again. Their cries have fallen on deaf ears; their tears refuse to be seen. Their hard work has yielded no fruits and they look towards the sky for help. Such is the plight of the masses, starvation and strife, famine and hopelessness. They worry about what to eat, what money to use to carry out their basic activities, what they will do when they finally run out. With the little that they own, their *Wahala* is multiplied.

 *Strikes today, famine tomorrow*

 *The Mekunnus are dying*

 *Talakawas eye the moon for delivery*

 *Slavery machines of penury*

 *Not even a nobel austerity assigned them*

 *They ate unhappiness for dinner*

 *The new day can be ancient again*

 *Of thwarted desires and forlorn hopes*

 *Their work not only sweat but thinks and panics.*

**POETIC DEVICES IN THE POEM**

* Imagery: Various types of imagery can be found in the poem, they are:
* Tactile Imagery: This appeal to one’s sense of touch. It can be found in lines 19 and 20.
* Gustatory Imagery: This appeal to one’s sense of taste. It can be found in line 34.
* Kinesthetic Imagery: This creates the perception of movement in the readers’ minds. It can be found in lines 1, 2, 3 and also in line 22.
* Enjambment: It is the continuation of words in a poem from one line to another without break. It can be found in various lines of the poem.
* Alliteration: this is the repetition of consonant sounds at the initial part of words in a line of poetry. It can be found in lines 4, 6, 14, 38.
* Personification: This is the act of giving human attribute to an object. It can be found in lines 12 and 24.
* Simile: It is the direct comparison of two things which are naturally different but share a peculiar similarity. It is characterized by the use of ‘as’ and ‘like’. It can be found in line 28.
* Rhetorical Question: This is a question that is asked merely to strengthen the point being made, it doesn’t require an answer. It can be found in line 16.
* Caesura: It is a metrical pause or break in a verse where one phrase ends and another phrase begins. It may be expressed by a comma, tick or two lines, slashed or upright. It can be found in lines 9, 12, 23, 29.
* Oxymoron: It is the expression of two contradictory words juxtaposed or placed side by side. It can be found in line 33.
* Allusion: The poet alludes to the Songhai, a vibrant West African empire during the 15th and 16th century, in what is now central Mali, extending to the Atlantic coast through Nigeria and Mali. The poet also makes allusion in lines 12 and 20, referring to the local Nigerian currency.

Various other devices are also used like; poetic license, metaphor, etc.

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