

# GENERIC VARIETIES AND PERFORMANCE PRINCIPLES IN KOM ORAL LITERATURE

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## Abstract

*This article sets out to identify and classify the culturally rich but highly endangered Kom oral literature. The Kom language and her culture in general are very rich but highly endangered. There is an inseparable link between language and literature. Literature lives and thrives best in language and language blossoms and explodes in literature. Oral literature is a phenomenon transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to the other. For this reason, it carries the stamp of fluidity and remains subject to various, vagaries distortions, arising from a variety of factors. Hence, the importance of such a documentation.*

*In the literature on the collection of Oral literature, one comes away with the conclusion that there are several methods of collecting oral literature. This study, however, employs the field method which entails observation, interviews and the administration of questionnaires in both rural and urban centres of the Kom/Cameroonian setting. Gershon Legman supports the view that any collection or publication of Oral literature has to be based “upon some meaningful and mature interpretation – socio –analytic, or psycho – analytic” (254). In effect, any identification must pay attention to the many literary qualities or aspects which earlier collectors of oral literature tended to ignore.*

*Library search is also a method that this study utilized in recognition of Graham Furniss’s approval or recommendation of this approach (ii).*

*The study tentatively submits that Kom oral literature makes use of folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, incantations, panegyrics, ululations, lyrics, nuptial songs, birth songs, dirges, jokes, pithy, epigrammatical and gnomic sayings, wellerism and even “nonsense” rhyme. It also argues that the identified genres preserve the history and culture of the Kom people through performance ; gesture/mime as well as other presentational techniques. The study concludes that this literature is a living, spontaneous, and responsive art and the oral artist relies on both memory and improvisation.*

**Key words:** Generic, varieties, performance, principles, Kom, oral literature

### **Introduction and Background to the Study**

In recent times, globalization seems to have made so much in – road into Africa and its cultures as to relegate traditional lores, indigenous mores and values to the background. This work, therefore, aims at documenting in a bid to identifying and preserving some folkloristic genres of kom so that future generations will benefit from it. This study is particularly inspired by Crystal’s observation that one story does not make a world view. And that a world view gradually emerges through the accumulation of many sources from a community – its myths and legends just to name these two, contribute to preserve the history and culture of individual peoples through performance. The Kom language and her culture in general are rich but endangered. In the literature on endangered languages, a number of points have been advanced as *raison d’être* to be worried about the disappearance of any of the world’s languages. Of prime importance is what would have been lost when any one of the world’s languages dies which include the critical knowledge of a people’s culture and world view.

The word culture as used in this study is to be understood as to englobe all facets of a people’s appreciation of their natural, societal, and super natural environment, including their behavioral patterns and strategies to cope with their natural environment.

Kom is one of the kingdoms in Cameroon whose oral literature as a whole has hardly been collected or presented in printed form. Writing contributes immensely to the preservation of oral cultures. That is why Nkem Okoh contends that bringing the particular preserving power of print to the rich communal voice of orality” (2008, 5) add to the role of the video tape, are electronic media or other such legacies of technological advancement in preserving oral literature that is already known. This paper insists on identifying, writing or putting in print, the genres of Kom oral literature taking refuge in Nkem Okoh’s argument on the necessity of preservation in the following submission:

In spite of its great potentials, the human mind and memory is neither infinite nor ageless.

Indeed, it is almost a cliché in oral literature to say that the death of an elder, poet, narrator or performer can be likened to the demolition or destruction of an entire modern library. (166)

This argument recognizes the fact that oral performers, the experts at performing such traditional and communally owned genres of Kom oral literature do not live for a eternity. Consequently, it is necessary to preserve their performance in writing and recording for future generations.

For a long time, literature was studied by most Africans as if they themselves had no literature. It took some time for them to know that literature is not only the written texts in English, French or in other western languages, but a quality of imaginative thought. Literature involves the oral as well as the written : oral tradition is one of the major forms of human communications. All human societies largely depend on oral tradition and communication for their meaningful existence and interactions. In spite of this, this area of study has been greatly neglected in human civilisation as far as research is concerned. In this grand neglect, African oral literature is a prominent victim. The crucial role of orality in human civilisation remains undervalued in spite of the fact that, writing has not completely replaced speech and will never be expected to do so. While some interest in African oral literature was shown since the nineteenth century, the attention paid to it is still not commensurate to its significance. Without much illustration and mainly with a theoretical orientation, this study focuses on the generic question and performance principles in Kom oral literature.

Certainly, what should strike a curious literary scholar, folklorist, anthropologist and any prodigious researcher in the domain of creative art, is the appellation, “Kom oral literature”. We think that the next reaction for any of these scholars will be to consult an Atlas and discover if Kom exists at all, before indulging in a painstaking exercise of knowing whether it has an oral literature that is worth writing home about.

**Area of Study**

In strict geographical terms, Kom, which is in Boyo Division of the North West Province of Cameroon, is the second largest tribe after Nso in the North-West grasslands of Cameroon. It shares its eastern boundary with Oku and Nso and the southern frontier with Kijem Keku and the Ndop plain. Kom lies between longitude 10.5' and 1.31' east of G.M.T. and between latitudes 6.6' and 6.24' North of the Equator. Kom occupies an area of approximately 280 square miles inhabited by a population of about 400,000 people speaking a common language known as Itanjikom (the language of Kom). Like most African languages, the Kom language is not well written and studied consequently, the best medium of communication of oral literature is by word of mouth. The oral genres of Kom literature are preserved in the people's memories and it is during performances that they are communicated verbally to the audience. Consequently, we submit here that orature in general, develops from the minds of the people and subsequently, crystalizes into their folklore through their practical human interaction.

**Aim and Objectives of Study**

It is not as a result of just a simple literary taxonomic urge in the domain of orature that we engaged in this work. Our intention is also to provide a functional taxonomy of the numerous genres that constitute Kom oral literature. In addition to the generic model, is another model which we would refer to as performance principles. These principles are indispensable to the understanding of the dynamics of oral tradition. Often, these performance principles bring into existence and give meaning to the various categories of Kom oral literature under reference in this paper. Our ultimate objective is that our findings will hopefully help to establish more evidence that the literature of Africa like that of Kom, is not simply an appendage of European literature or the literature of the colonial masters in the diaspora, as some critics contend, but that Kom oral literature is developed enough to rub shoulders with its counterparts around the world. It functions as a source of entertainment just as other literatures elsewhere in the world, reflects the people's psyche and idiosyncrasies, *weltanschauung* and modes of thoughts. It is profusely sprinkled with complex symbolism as literature of technologically advanced settings and can certainly establish a niche for itself in the mainstream of cosmic literary progress.

Kom oral literature, like any other oral literature in Africa has basic characteristics that must be present before its realization. This literature is dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion. This, therefore, means that without this, there would be no other way in which Kom oral literature can be realized as a literary product. Another very important characteristic is the audience. The audience is directly involved in the actualization and creation of a piece of oral literature. If there is no face-to-face confrontation with the audience, the performer will not produce the literary product.

**Methodology**

This section seeks to highlight the research methodology these researchers employed to collect and identify the genres in kom oral literature. As literary scholars, these researchers are, therefore, paying attention to the literary qualities in their collection endeavour so that they may not identify mere sociological or anthropological materials as literature. There are many methods of collecting oral literature data for study. In any field of study, different methodological approaches answer different kinds of questions about the subject they seek to investigate. This research needs intense field work for the collection and identification of kom oral literature just as well as it needs enough library search to identify earlier collections or some recent collections for different investigations. In order to stress the importance of field work, Nkem Okoh submits that;

No serious student or modern scholar of oral literature can produce work of any great originality or significant quality without devoting at least some attention to field work and its demands. (169)

Kashim Ibrahim Tala considers field work as:

The observation and careful collecting of orature as it occurs in its natural setting which, in the case of Africa is the village. It is often conducted in an alien environment, and naturally gives rise to certain situation that the researcher must anticipate by preparing a range of possible response. (14)

Both Nkem Okoh and Kashim Ibrahim Tala point out the importance of fieldwork in the process of collecting data on oral literature; they also highlight the fact that fieldwork is not an easy undertaking.

On his part, Nol Alembong emphasizes that fieldwork involves direct observation, interviews and the administering of questionnaires (17). It is important to note here that these researchers employed all these methods in their endeavour to collect and identify the genres that exist in Kom oral literature.

Although some research works have been carried out in Kom oral literature (more in the form of long Essays and graduate dissertations for the award of diplomas), there seem to have been a research gap, especially in issues like theory and general classification of Kom oral literature.

### **Generic Classification**

Our knowledge of the Kom language and oral tradition reveal that Kom people make use of folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, incantations, panegyrics, ululations, lyrics, nuptial songs, birth songs, dirges, jokes, pithy, epigrammatical and gnomic sayings, wellerisms and even “nonsense” rhyme.

### **Folktales**

The people of Kom are seemingly oblivious of the various nuances that exist between folktales, myths and legends though each of them is normally identified by its peculiar qualities. The people loosely refer to all oral narratives as “fititi” (story). Our examination of these oral narratives could be classified as follows : moral tales, etiological tales, trickster tales, dilemma tales, tall tales, human tales, animal tales and human and animal tales. This classification is based on character composition and theme, but no storyteller in Kom nor any storytelling session borders to draw a dichotomy between the tales. What is obvious is that the tales have been handed down from generation to generation and though some elements like plot, characters and form might have undergone some changes from the original versions, their ultimate goals – entertainment, education, morality and etiology remain unchanged. From the foregoing classification, we noticed that most moral tales are framed around cinderella or coined to demonstrate the triumph of virtue over vice, how virtue is rewarded or to prove how greed, indercorum, hanky-panky, covetousness, calumny, hatred irrevocably culminate in regret. These tales are mostly told by elderly people in the evening. We include some examples of the various tales.

### **Examples of Moral Tales**

1. The story of “abzi-chi” (wood ash), a poor orphan girl who was rejected by her relation and pushed to live as a tramp at the social periphery, but the gods of virtue later ran her into eternal bliss while nemesis befell her enemies.
2. The tale about a grudgingly fed boy whose calabash got drowned and he was forced by his adopted parents to produce the calabash or be strangled. In an attempt to search for the calabash, the poor boy found himself in the Devils’ land where he demonstrated exemplary obedience by eating devils’ excrement in compensation for the calabash. His humility to devils earned him the devils’ blessings and he became a great man after.

**Etiological Tales**

1. A legendary tale takes an etiological dimension to trace the origin of Kom. According to the tale, early Kom people suffered a genocide from the evil machinations of the Babessi chief and those who survived followed a python trail through thick forests and over rugged rocks to where Kom is situated today. It explains the significance of some species of snakes to Kom people and why the palace is situated in the forest. Such a tale is often told by the men and the audience is open-free.
2. There is a tale that explains why babies can not talk. In the primordial past, babies talked as soon as they were born but the disadvantage was that they knew no secret. This often resulted in grotesque and humiliating remarks made by children. A child would not hesitate to tell a visitor who had big eyes that his eyes were shaped like oranges. This brought shame to parents who decided to feed babies with raw cocoyams. The raw cocoyams created the viscous liquid which fill babies' mouth today thus making it difficult for them to speak.

**Trickster Tale**

There is a tale common among Kom people in which a chameleon, as sluggish as it is, championed a race. It clung to the tail of a hare, which was normally the fastest animal. At the stopping point, when the hare was about to sit down as the first animal, the chameleon cried out, "don't sit on me, please!"

**Dilemma Tale**

1. There is a tale in which a hunter was torn to pieces by a lion in the forest. One of his three sons discovered the mortal remains of their father. The second son was capable of bringing the pieces of the dead body together to form a human structure. The last son gave breath to the corpse and it came back to life. The dilemma is who played the most important role to bring the hunter back to life.
2. In one of the tales a man was carrying a lion, goat and corn to a distant country. He got to a mysterious river, which it was abominable to carry more than one item across. What should he do given that in his absence, the lion would eat the goat and the goat would eat the corn?

**Tall Tales**

Tall tales are characterised by gigantic imaginations and practical impossibilities. There is always an element of escapism. In one of the tales, an orphan boy called Ngong was capable of flying in the air and could eat human flesh. In another tale, 'Bo-Aku' (father of the forest) had a scrotum that could not enter a church door and orange like eyes that shone like the midday sun.

We noticed in our research that some tales in Kom are made up of human beings without any interaction of animals. In the same way, there are animal tales which have animal characters while beasts and humans interact in human and animal tales. It is worth noting that this classification of tales is based on character composition. However, this has been done only for purposes of convenience and clarity since animal and human tales may also pass across a moral or function as a dilemma and even trickster tales.

Generally, etiological tales in Kom explain the origin of the people's behavioural pattern, the genesis of some geographical features like lakes, mountains and even the origin of Kom. Trickster and dilemma tales create awareness of social intricacies, sharpen the wit of the people and prepare them for critical thinking and logical argumentation on social matters of contemporary society. We also noticed that plots, themes and functions of Kom oral narratives have striking similarities to other indigenous and perhaps more popular narratives around the world and can be freely exploited for global literary chiaroscuro analogies. In the Kom tradition, most of the stories are frequently told by women but when it comes to more serious types of narration such as myths and legends, it is the men who do the telling. In this case, they are mostly told

during the day. Certain tales particularly animal stories are felt to be the preserve of children and to be most suitably told by and to them even though adults know them and sometimes join.

### Proverbs

It is our contention that proverbs are of universal occurrence and that there is hardly any speech or language in which they are not found. We noticed that the Kom language is profusely spiced with proverbs, proverbial sayings, and pithy and epigrammatical expressions. We found it difficult to draw a razor-sharp line of demarcation between proverbs and other gnomic sayings and to provide a generally accepted definition that could silence all criticism. However, despite the difficulty of definition, paraomniographers agree on some acceptable qualities common to all proverbs, namely, popularity, brevity, piquancy and adoption by the people. Consequently, during our research, we were inclined to consider any saying as a proverb so long as it demonstrates these qualities. Kom people refer to such sayings as “ngayn” and to distinguish it from a riddle which has the same appellation, a proverb is sometimes called “Itanikom Itimlimi” which means, language of allusions.

Apart from themes conveyed by Kom proverbs, each proverb has a particular function in a particular context ; in speech, they act as vehicles for personal communication, smooth difficulties and add pith to speech. Kom proverbs have no constraint of space or audience. They are, therefore, ‘performed’ everywhere and for anybody present. The following proverbs act as vehicles for personal communication.

Wa to’ mi gha a wà lae kfi ki ankeyna.

(Whatever you sow you will reap only that)

Wàyn wul imo’ nin go’\ Ivi \ a

(A personal child is only in the womb)

some Kom proverbs create humour, entertainment, ridicule and sarcasm :

Awo-a ndu chwÒs\ ichvi isas a ki ghal aghàl

(If the land goes too deep into anus, it will touch faeces)

Ason a wul a bu timi bef a nweyn ichye’

(Somebody’s teeth are never too bad for him to laugh)

In social situations, Kom proverbs recommend procedures, comment, persuade, elucidate and express social approval or disapproval. Since proverbs express the wit and philosophy of a people, Kom proverbs act as bearers of philosophical insights, elucidate, express social control and of course, provide traditional answers to present problems. Furthermore, Kom proverbs may be used as weapons of defence or to make an argument which has the authority of custom and tradition. For instance :

Chî nin ku wi ilvia iyum (magic power does not affect an innocent man)

Awo amo’ nin kulwi bu’ (One hand cannot tie a bundle)

To the Arabs, a proverb is to speech what salt is to food ; to the Chinese, when one has read the book of proverbs, no effort is needed to speak well ; to the Igbos, proverbs are like palm oil with which words are eaten ; to the Yoruba’s, a proverb is a vehicle of conversation and to the Kom people, proverbial language is a language of authority and wisdom. We noticed in our fieldwork that the most appropriate proverbs are heard on the lips of adults who have a good mastery of the Kom language. The authority in the proverbs emanates from local imagery and ancestral wisdom in which most of the proverbs are couched. A few examples are given below.



Neyn-nèyn neyni ma yi wo wuli tisini  
(neyn-neyn meanders because it lacks somebody to direct its course)

Wà koe ajvâ wà fe'ti itwen  
(When you harvest a garden egg, know the branch)

Wül chà' ki ibi zia yi chem.  
(One visits only the kola-nut tree from which kola-nuts fall)

Tu' chi fu wi ndo figî  
(A big rat does not manage the house of a mouse).

Finyuyn fi chve fi lum ba'li wi  
(A noisy bird does not build)

ne lae kfi ighansi iwuyn.  
(Giraffe died because of pride).

Afyefa fanti chwo wà bu yèyn duyn nvi  
(If the wind is not passing, you cannot see the rump of a fowl)

tchvi fitoyn lum chwosi a wu be'a.  
(When a clay-pot gets too hot it breaks)

### Riddles

As mentioned earlier, the Kom people refer to a riddle as “ngayn”. It is not easy to trace the antiquity of Kom riddles but it is obvious that this aspect of folk culture existed in days of yore. Just like the Fiendish riddle to Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* provides evidence that riddles had been part of Greek culture in the primeval past, Kom oral narratives reveal sufficient evidence that riddles have existed in their culture in the primordial past. Normal story-telling sessions in Kom are preceded by riddles. The riddle is jointly performed by the person asking it and the audience and both are indispensable to a successful answer of the paradox. This usually takes place in the evening after supper when children and their parents gather around the kitchen fire and riddle in anticipation for more humorous narratives. It is important to note here that nowadays Kom riddles do not seem to have any particular occasion where they are performed. The first person to start poses a riddle to the audience and if no one is able to unravel it, the riddler proceeds to ask for a royal title as a quid pro quo for an aspect of his wit before he can proudly provide the answer for general approval. Consequently, we observed that the riddler does not ask any riddle whose answer he/she does not know but does not also readily opt to supply the answer until he receives some kind of remuneration. If any member of the assembly doubts the validity of the answer provided by the riddler, he/she will be challenged to provide a further explication. The following five riddles caught our attention :

- Riddle : What freely touches the vagina of the king's wife ?  
Answer : A blade of grass.
- What is capable of sending the king in rain ?  
Answer : Faeces or Urine
- A well-constructed fence with only one gate in it.

Answer : - Teeth surrounding the tongue.

- The longer I stand, the shorter I become.

Answer : - A burning candle.

- Do not come on my side ! Do not come to my side !

Answer : - the opposing struggle of a lady's buttocks when she is moving.

In terms of content, it is important to stress that Kom riddles include just about every sphere of natural and human life, and vary according to the preoccupations and customs of the Kom society. The following part of this paper will concentrate on what can be considered as the poetry of Kom oral art.

### **Incantations**

The outburst of technology and the intrusion of western culture in Africa are taking a heavy toll on African traditions and cultures and, consequently, Africans in general and Kom people in particular, no longer seem to see the *raison d'être* of some traditional beliefs and practices. As a consequence, incantations as an aspect of oral tradition have virtually undergone serious ebb. Had it not been for the indestructible belief in gods, the influence of the dead on the lives of the living, the legendary Genesis of Kom tribe, the practice of incantations might have been completely stifled from the repertoire of Kom oral art. Though the practice of incantations is apparently lying in shambles and barely surviving the tormenting grip of modernism, one can still hear incantations during death celebrations, seasonal prayers to gods, respect to mysterious animals like snakes and prayers to "jujus", family and personal gods. During funeral services in Kom, the leader (male) of the bereaved family obligatorily pleases the dead through incantations. Close relatives to the deceased, gather around the grave and offer fowls to the dead through a series of solemn incantation (prayers) and the fowls are supposedly received in the world beyond (world of the living – dead).

This fowl belongs to Ngong

This fowl belongs to Ful

This fowl belongs to Chia

This fowl belongs to Nkwain etc.

Sometimes when a family is dangling through an inexplicable ordeal or in the case of a prolonged illness of one of its members, the family head calls for intervention from the dead and blows wood-ash after uttering his incantation :

- We are addressing those who have gone ahead
- We are addressing the dead of this family
- We are saying you should not turn your backs.
- We are saying that we have a clear conscience etc.

Kom is one of the African tribes which history has not convincingly traced its origin and to exacerbate matters, we do not have enough archaeological evidence to reflect its past. That is why the people have comfortably clung to the legend that the earliest Kom people came from the neighbouring Babessi following a python trail after a frustrating genocide inflicted on them by the vicious chief of Babessi. This age-old legend has called for incantations when some species of snakes are killed or seen. The commonest kind of incantation in Kom which is performed by women to appease family gods goes as follows :

May the bad god receive through the nose

May the good god receive through the mouth

This incantation is performed with specially prepared egusi pudding ; Corn-fufu and a kind of viscous alcoholic drink made out of guinea-corn are being offered to the gods. This is usually done by throwing these food items to the four corners of the house. The literary finesse of Kom incantations lies in the



juxtaposition of iambic and trochaic metres and conscious use of complex symbolism. The ardent belief in incantations by Kom people could have strung them exclusively as sociological aspects. However, though incantations do not extend or amuse as other literary genres, the conscious use of literary aesthetics and their character of information enable them to overlap with other aspects of creative art in content and form, and so can be rightly classed as aspects of oral art.

### Music/Songs

Kom music is both oral and instrumental but it is oral music that we hopefully intend to lay emphasis on in this paper. However, we find it worthy to briefly observe here that the genre of instrumental literature in Kom is a diversified one and for this reason the term “drum literature” as found in other studies is inappropriate to describe it." ‘Drum literature’ in Kom represents only one sub-class of the varieties of “talking” musical instruments. The talking drum does not even fully represent the whole range of percussion instruments with a “talking” potential. In the Kom tradition, the instrumental literature represented by those musical instruments other than the most important of them, voice, are categorised into at least three classes : percussion instruments, string instruments and wind instruments. Drum is the most famous of the “talking” percussion instruments while the flute (‘Ndong’) is the best known of the wind instruments category. The instruments in all the sub-classes are played with a verbal structure embedded into the performance process.

Oral music comprises nuptial songs, birth songs, satirical songs and some songs that are linguistically ‘surreal’ in the sense that their verbal structures cannot be subjected to the traditional lexicon of the language. In the Kom tradition, we can refer to such songs as ‘nonsense’ simply serving as a class rather than a pejorative tag. Nuptial songs are normally sung during traditional marriages and their audience is free open. Many are restricted to one space –the specific space of the wedding. These songs are, indeed, marriage songs or epithalamia. Most of them are sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments such as drums, xylophones, gongs and so on. The dancing is mostly done by women who swing their waists provokingly occasionally demonstrating sexual posture a proof that the ultimate goal of marriage is birth. The songs are deliberately composed to satirise, lampoon and debunk those undesirable deeds perpetuated by women who risk the integrity of the female world. For example :

Mawumi went down to Fundong and borrowed a thousand francs, she said she would pay back with her vagina

The intention of the above song is to discourage prostitution and restore the crumbling dignity of the Kom woman. In such situations, the women occasionally switch to songs that are intended to coax, cajole and persuade men to offer them gifts given that women are indispensable in the lives of men and in procreation.

Ghi yem teyn bo bzi ni ma ghi wo ?

(We are singing and who is the owner of my labs ?)

Generally, Kom nuptial songs have procreation as their central theme. The theme usually comes through very vulgar language. Some songs simply project the pride of the mother-in-law whose daughter is successfully married :

*Diali ili a nawayn nin dial le-ee*  
*Diali ili nwayn nin dial a chi alayn,*  
*Wo be yi dial teyn a ta yi yeyn wayn*  
 (The happiness the mother is expressing  
 The happiness the mother is expressing today  
 because she has seen the baby)

Birth songs in Kom can be classified into four groups ; the first group consists of those songs usually sung by women who are infertile and seek the help of supernatural powers – especially that of the ancestral spirits

to get rid of the misfortune. This group of songs is referred to “fu yini fu wayn” (the god that gives children). The second group are those songs ‘performed’ during first pregnancy and the performers are the female members of the village in which the pregnant woman lives. The main theme here is that of joy and a sense of personal honour gained by the woman at this stage in life. The next group, the “Njang wayn” proper, centres on the actual occasion of the birth of the child. Even this group could still be divided into two sub-groups : those sung when the good tidings are received and people hurry to see the child ; and those sung later during the celebrations surrounding the occasion. The last group of birth songs consists of songs that express gratitude to, and ask the blessing and protection of the ancestral spirits. Kom birth songs do not employ musical instruments but this does not mean that there is no rhythm. The movements and steps of the dancers provide the rhythm and this is made to suit the words.

In such a paper on generic classification, it would be difficult to study these groups of birth songs in detail due to the constraint of space. However, it is important to observe that one common feature in almost all the songs is that they contain various aspects of the people’s philosophy of life. In fact, they give expression to some of the basic principles that underlie the social and cultural life of the Kom people.

Kom dirges or lament songs are more poetic than nuptial or birth songs. The language of dirges says more and says it more intensely than does ordinary language. They appeal to human emotions and express excessive pathos and the ethics of research should not permit conscious, deliberate and direct work on them as “literary pieces”. In spite of this, their literary status cannot be ignored. These dirges are the most difficult to collect because of the contextual constraints. This is so because they are almost always tied to the occasions (death) and are spontaneously ‘performed’ (if this is the right characterisation of it). In spite of this, we discovered that there is abundant use of complex symbolism drawn from local imagery and a perpetual attempt to communicate to the dead. The dirges are sung by all groups of people but more especially by women and they are usually accompanied by various dancing styles.

### **Work Songs**

The people of Kom delight in communal activities like group farming, hunting, dancing and even burials. During such occasions, there are songs that accompany them. The occasions for work songs include almost all contexts in which monotonous labour is involved.

It is believed that these manual workers often sing such songs to make the work easier. Every worker involved in such a labour participates in the singing. Most of the songs are rendered in simple, straightforward language with many nonsense words just to maintain a particular rhythm. We must mention here that it is the rhythm and the melody of these work songs that are the more striking aspects of them. The audience, who is anyone around, enjoys the melody produced by the workers.

During these communal activities, people coin varieties of jokes in their songs regardless of whether they are obscene, slapstick or simple graveyard humour. For the purpose of consistence and convenience, jokes, humour and fun will be used interchangeably as an aspect of orature in Kom. Traditional marriages in Kom are organised in the night. During the occasion, traditional humorists or clowns are invited to jest and thrill the participants and relieve them from the tedious cooking and impatience due to the long waiting for the arrival of the bride. It is normally during the above-mentioned occasions that one can have a partial grasp of Kom jokes. We decided to class a few of the jokes under obscene, slapstick and normal.

### **Obscene Jokes**

-A hunter’s wife went out to the fields. Her husband remained at home and believing that their five-year-old child was too young to take note of anything, he decided to commit adultery with a village prostitute on their marital bed. When his wife returned in his absence, their baby reported that his father took a woman into

their bedroom. The woman was furious and said the child should repeat the story when his father returns. When the man returned, his wife requested their child to repeat the story and the child said, “Mummy, when you went to the farm, papa brought in a certain woman and they were doing what that old man used to come and do to you like that”.

- The illiterate Fulani people who live up the hills in Kom do not know how to pronounce letter ‘p’. they pronounce it as “f” ; how will they pronounce « porcupine » ? – ‘funck fine ».

Slapstic jokes will refer to comedy of the roughest kind. This is so because it is the kind of fun arising from violence.

In such a study of generic classification and performance principles, it would be unfair to say that any of the genres identified has been studied in detail. What we have attempted to do is to classify the different genres that exist in Kom oral literature and make bold to assert that Kom people, like other Africans, have elaborate artistic forms, literature, complex symbolism, artistry and philosophical thoughts (Finnegan, 1976 : 519). The study of African literature has proven that it is highly figurative. The data at our disposal also confirm this observation with regards to Kom oral literature. The rich contents of Kom proverbs and the beautiful stylistic devices and poetic features in which they are dressed, for example, constitute an essential area for researchers of folklore, anthropology and verbal art.

Since Kom Language is largely oral and mindful of the fact that only very few Kom people are able to read and write the language, the problem of language has been a stumbling block to literary and folkloristic studies in Kom. A work such as this, which is probably one of the first literary studies in Kom language, is intended to create a gateway into more profound studies in the domain of paraomology. We have shown in this paper that Kom Language is richly spiced with myths, legends, folktales, songs, poetry, riddles, humour, tongue-twisters and panegyrics which are not exclusively for literary analysis but may construct a good platform for folkloristic and anthropological studies. Consequently, this study should also serve as a stepping stone into serious studies in the area of folklore and anthropology.

Finally, it is necessary to note that all the genres mentioned in this classification operate in accordance with important performance principles. The principles centre around issues like sexual boundaries, visual status, generational categories, social status, considerations of time and space, accompanying paraphernalia, audience composition, remunerational systems, content, context, mood and professional status.

This classification of Kom oral literature also highlights the fact that far from being a fossilized corm of materials or an antiquated phenomenon, oral literature constitutes phenomenon, oral literature constitutes a potent, dynamic weapon, a literary force that can exercise enormous influence on various spheres of life in contemporary society, especially Africa. For this reason, this research becomes worthwhile.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources (informants)

Name	Approximate Age	Occupation
Jick, Mathias Gwellem(Late)	75 years	Farmer
Gam, Aloysius	55 years	Teacher
Njua, Felicitas Fien	42 years	Teacher
Ma Susana Mbe	77 years	Housewife

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