
**THE EXPRESSIVE THEORY OF ART AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY
IN LITERARY CRITICISM: RE-READING FRANCIS
SELOMMEY'S *THE NARROW PATH* AND CAMARA
LAYE'S *THE AFRICAN CHILD***

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Abstract

The Expressive Theory is the anchor and leverage point of autobiography, a non-fictional presentation of the author by himself. This paper examines the autobiography of Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*. Each of them represents the experiences of the author as a growing child. It is the picture of the author as a growing child written by the author himself. It is the capturing of the memories of the growing child vividly remembered and chronicled as a work of art. While Laye presents romanticized experiences of his childhood, having grown up in an all-loving environment, surrounded by beauty and care with little or no hardship, except the torture experienced in school as a pupil in the primary school, Kofi presents a somewhat realistic picture of a harsh and struggling home where peace and comfort are the products of self indulgence and diligence, skill and favour, industry and self reliance and dependence. Childhood nuances and juvenile delinquency of pilfering, gambling and stubbornness are included. The language of literature, its milieu and domain in general are also examined in this study.

Introduction

In works of art, writers express their inner self, in sociological as well as political content, including the expression of moral and other affective values. However, Adams (1971), posits that "Under the influence of

phenomenology, some European critics have seen the work of art as a means by which the readers consciousness and the authors become inter-subjectively “one” (6).

Autobiography or biographical novels or works of art express romantic orientation which evolved from “a radical epistemological change that took place in the later part of eighteenth century”, (Adams,2). The Theory of Expressionism regards art as being the expression of the author himself, his experiences, temperaments and others nuances. but according to Adams, “the question of whether the poet expresses general or particular truth becomes associated with the romantic period with a popular distinction between allegory and symbolism” (2). It was of primary importance to recognize the poem than the author. But the shift in emphasis has made it become important to place the subject of the author above that of his creation, the poem. Eko posits that; “. . . the novel as well as drama genres are used as modes through which individuals and their varied experiences are examined and explored” (5). Exceptional works at times exhibit the personal experience of the writer, this therefore implies that every fiction is in part autobiographic and expressionist. Here the temperament of the writer is poured out either as cultural advice or comment.

For instance, Amadi’s narrative stem mostly from his childhood experience. George Nyamndi in Eko 1991 Amadi declares that “For the first twelve years of my life I lived either in my village Aluu or in the adjoining village with the same cultural background” (12). It is on this basis that Eustace Palmer explains what students told him about Amadi’s literary work when he says:

Many students who frankly admitted that of all the African novel they have read, the concubine (and by extension the trilogy) was the only one they could respond to fully, because it represented an almost exact copy of the village life as they knew it(12). (Quoted from Eko, 1991).

Amadi's posits that "aspect of me can be seen in characters like Ekwueme, Ikechi, Olumati and Dansuku" (Eko:21) .

A literary writer pours out his life experiences life experiences built in fiction or non-fiction, he assumes the role of an extra- ordinary story teller, away from the actions but which actions he imbues the each character he creates to perform his thoughts and actions. in autobiography he also assumes another mode which presents him as the discussant, telling stories about himself from childhood to maturity.

Autobiography is captured in the Expressive Theory of art. This Theory came into lime light as writer began to emphasize the presence of the writer in the contemplation of literary work. the theory emphasizes that "Every work of art is the expression of the inner being of the writer" (Hazard Adams : 2). This view came into existence with the shift of emphasis to the subject, thus, the work became less valued in terms of what it represents or copied than what it expressed of the writer. in this theory, the individual or the particular is considered in preference to the general. One general problem of this approach to literary work is the issues of the truth value, originality and sincerity of the author and the work.

Literature is about the expression of actions, events and passions within society and milieu. It calls for the use of memories, thought and the psychology of the writer to be able to put things together and for the purpose for achieving variety of thought and purpose. This is anchored by Eko when she describes Amadi's articulation and artistry that:

With credible smoothness, Amadi takes the reader from the world of wakefulness and concrete plans into a world of sleep and dreams, where the conscious and the subconscious, where the real and the supernatural, where ancestors and spirits interact freely, (86).

Literary works are conceived in language born of narrative. It is this language that dictates the tones of action just like the drum beats dictates

the tone of the dance. Akwanya has said that “every literary form is the site of encounter with language; every literary work is an encounter with language” (4). Thus in this regards, it earnestly helps in forming the perception of the reader. Having this at the tip of our fingers, we are careful to remember Walter Benjamin’s 1968/73, statement and view that “ Over time the tenor and significance of great works of literature undergo a complete transformation; because language itself is constantly undergoing transformation”(73). What a reader derives as meaning of any piece of writing is by the fabrics that hem tight the internal structure of the work, and that is language in action, and not otherwise, in relation to the messages and values attained, conceived and deciphered by the reader. According to Barthes (1977), “Literature is the form of writing in which only language speaks and not me” (143). In literature, language is personalized. Literature is the form of art in which language sheds off the skin of communicative function and assumes the personality of the work itself by a dialogic relationship. Literature thus is built up in the dialogue and the transformation.

A literary work is conceived at least in the atmosphere of reality, the subject matter and the other elements with which it operates and functions. Hence to give life to this position Emmanuel Ngara posits that:

A perfect work of art is synthesis of reality, subject matter, theme, views, attitude and ideals on the one hand, and narrative structure, character and linguistic format on the other ... is not only what is represented but also how it is presented (29).

The approach adopted by a writer speaks volumes of their work. The structure of the work, its rendition in alignment with the characters milieu, time and space proclaim the well -formedness of that piece of work. A writer should be able, in an autobiographical novel, touch the essential parts of his society, hinting on religion, culture and his personal traits which excludes him from others. a writer should be able to choose an aspect of his

culture and with gusto, do a viscera of the society revealing the way of life of the inhabitants of the particular society. The particular things about him and his society are revealed in his work.

Creative writers evolve strategies and methods that will enhance the rendition of their thought into actions and words. Plotinus in Adams (1971) posits that:

The beauty of the artist's creation lies not in any physical object that it copies or matter it shapes, but in what the artist imposes on his materials. In the imposition, the artist turns his materials into something other than what they were, makes them into a new form: this attainment comes from within the artist, who is capable of adding where nature is lacking (105).

The expression of self in the work of art is an age long phenomenon. It is the articulation of the special aspects of the life of a writer, taking into consideration every aspect of human activities, from the age of primary experience to adulthood. The artist thus becomes the creator of "vehicle of valuables"(105). The exasperation and aspiration of the artist is to ensure that he creates a world of beauty in his artistic expression.

The Narrow Path

The Narrow Path is Francis Selormey's first auto biographical novel published in 1966, as his first novel. Selormey in *The Narrow Path* presents an autobiographical note. The story here contrasts immensely from Laye's romantic presentation of his childhood experiences as a growing child. Layers story, however, is situated in Guinea, while Selormey's realistic presentation is located in Ghana. He presents his background as evolving from a traditional African society where most of the inhabitants are farmers. His evolution is from the home of a wealthy farmer, a fisherman, his grandfather. His grandfather was an experienced fisherman who his knowledge of the weather constitution exposes him to a measured of harvest from the fishing expedition. He narrates:

My grandfather, Agbefia, was a wealthy fisherman. He owned four large drag-nets and three fishing boats. He did not employ people, but he was the head of a fishing company.....many of his company slept on the beach and when he had made his decision he would wake them, and give them instructions before he returned to his house.(1).

His grandfather is a recognized personality in his community. He was the Chief's linguist and speaker and speaks for the Chief on every important functions that needed his presence. His grandmother is not as inspiring as his grandfather. She is short built and fat, like a drinking pot. He says "my grandmother on the other hands was awe inspiring. She was short and fat, her skin colour was that of bronze; she laughed easily and she did her best to shield me and all the children of the house from the troubles that came our way" (2). She was nicknamed "Mamadze" which means "grandmother because of her colour. She was an albino. His grandfather is a polygamous man with eight wives, initially, but reduced to six wives as the other two were unfaithful and unsatisfactory, and sent away. His grandfather had twenty five children. His grandmother was his grandfather's favourite and he lived with her in his separate house, away from the common family compound until he died. Yakuvi, his grandmother was so dear to his father that he married her the second time in Christian marriage...

Kofi gives the education background of his father, Nani. He is the fourth child of his grandmother and the first in his community to go to school. He was excellent in scholarship and was among the few selected for further studies in the whole country Ghana. His father was a good disciplinarian who never spared the cane on his children for any act of misbehavior .Selormey's father Nani got married to Edzi after the traditional and usual disagreement of the two families. The pregnancy of the wife and the troubles attendant on it gave him and the wife sleepless nights. This was so much that he hit a young girl hawking fried plantain with his bicycle and

even walked away without showing any concern. To his embarrassment the people who gathered in the scene mocked at him that:

Look at him: a teacher, an educated man who thinks he is Better than us; but he cannot look where he is going. He has Learned many strange things but he has forgotten to be calm and careful. (6).

He is criticized for having no common sense but just the knowledge to read and write.

Kofi informs the reader that Nani his father is a devout Christian but his mother in law is not and she believes in traditional divination. She consults a fetish priest against the wish of Nani to find out if the wife was alive when she fell into a coma. She believes in the power of the gods to divine the state of the daughter pressed with pregnancy. As the fetish priest arrives he declares’ “ all would be well”(10). He advises upon seeing the severity of the situation that, “she will be taken to Lome without delay” (10). At Lome Edzi is taken to a renowned fetish shrine where she is bathed in cool water with mosquito larvae and a white fowl used as sponge. After two days, she regains consciousness and becomes better. At labour she is taken to a French hospital where she is delivered of a bouncing baby body after the difficult labour. Nani is happy and demands the immediate return of his wife and new baby to Zomayi from Lome. The anxiety of seeing his wife and new baby makes him moves to Lome to see and return with them. The child is baptized and given a Christian name.

Their belief in superstition makes them assume every little incident that happens to them to be caused by the evil spirits. The sickness of Kofi is so adjudged and some rituals are performed and he becomes well. Kofi’s ill health signals fear in both his mother and grandmother. This makes the mother seek the help of a fetish priest two miles away from Lome. He narrates:

.... On her mother's advice, Edzi puts the baby in a large calabash basin and covered him up with the lid. She then took the dish upon her head, then set out for a fetish shrine two and a half miles away (12).

The visit to the shrine proves effective as the baby is revived by the power in the shrine. This brings joy and life to the almost dying mother. As Edzi arrives the shrine, the priest picks up the calabash and takes it to the secret room of the shrine and informs Edzi that "to the inner room of the shrine, where I alone may go". . . . A witch has taken his life from him and I am taking him to my god to beg his life back for him again" (13) and as the lad revives, the fetish priest advises the mother thus:

Keep the child wrapped in white cloth or wearing white dresses. Feed him only at your breast. Sleep in a room with the windows open, and before each window put a dish of palm oil. And then all the witches and wizards travelling about at night, who might wish to take the life of the child will drink the oil and be satisfied. And so will not enter the room to drink the child's blood (13-14).

The recurring feverish condition ceased when Edzi announced round the entire town to the witches and wizards that there should leave sucking his child's blood. Among Africans the belief in superstition is real, particularly the presence of witches and wizards. According to Mbiti J.S.

some societies see evil as originating from or associated with spiritual being other than God. There are. . . people who regard death, epidemics, and others major calamities as divinities or as caused by divinities. . .(6).

Hence Edzi and her mother strongly believe in fetish practice and mystery such that anything unimaginable which confronts them warrants the visit to the fetish shrine and the ritual of the fetish priest performed. Kofi is introduced into school at a very tender age of four years. He is excellently

dressed in shoes and good looking clothing to the admiration of people around. Kofi does not mince words to narrate the misunderstanding that exist between his parents. His father does not spare the rod for Kofi any time he does something displeasing to the father. This act of flogging him usually results in quarrels between the parents. Kofi narrate that he deliberately provokes the quarrel and enjoys it. The anger generated in the father as the mother taunt him over causing pain on Kofi usually end in the father beating up the mother.

The family is a Christian family that was regular to church and other church activities. In church women sat separately from the men. Member of my family featured prominently in various church activities. Nani, my father was an interpreter of the sermon in the local dialect while my mother fears my father being in the choir practice because of a figure – Helen. Kofi also gives the impression of the fish farming activities which involves many company apart from the companies of his grandfather. He narrates the situation thus:

On Saturday I became an grandchild of a fisherman . .
.after breakfast we went onto the beach. This was the
great moment of my week. . .the golden beach littered
with coconut branches, rejected fish and all the odds and
ends belonging to boats and fishermen (24-25).

This is an exciting experience which is enjoyed by children from the farming lot. As a child the joy of watching this activity was great and enjoyable. His father helped other companies where his friend work and he is usually appreciated with fishes. The gift came from the catch which fishermen in the shallow sea, and the edge of the shore fishermen pull from their net”(25). He narrates that “as each catch landed on the beach, all those who had helped were given some fish, more or less according to the size of the catch, by the master of the company”(25). As the guard of the fish given to my father by the various company he helped, he learns to exchange fish for food from the food peddlers in the beach. Kofi present himself as being

naughty and causing troubles between his mother and father. He exchanges fish, given to his father as gift, for food and lies that he “sent them to his grandmother”(27). He gambles with his school fees and tell lies to his father when he returned home and to get a refill from his father. All these are childhood nuances which only a diligent and honest child exceptionally avoids. When his discrepancy of fish pilfering is discovered, he is kindly saved by his paternal grandmother who then gives some pieces of fish to his father as compensation for the used up fish.

Kofi narrates sequentially the birth of his younger ones, the care given to them and his own responsibility at each growing stage of his life. There is the belief in the existence of the ancestors who are the guiding spirit of the trade of his people, particularly his kindred who are blacksmiths, they belief in the benevolence of the guiding spirit who is usually appealed to and appeased with financial token put in the ancient mud hut, believed to be the habitat of the ancestors.

Kofi’s narration is not without the introduction of the concept of witchcraft. Africans have a strong belief in witchcraft such that whatever befalls an African or an African youth will be attributed to witchcraft. When Kofi becomes sick, he declares that “ some witchcraft or wizard were trying to steal my life from me”(71). In this kind of understanding a sick child is usually taken to a herbalist or “native doctor” where some incantations and rituals are performed to recover the health of the sick child or individual. Kofi is subjected to this kind of treatment when it was believed that he was being attacked by witchcraft. Kofi is not romantic about the relationship between his parents. He presents his father as a man whose stern attitude is commanding and dreadful and defies daring. Kofi’s father does not spare his anger even on his mother, the wife. He lashes at her when he sees reason and cause to do so. When Kofi is just recovering from sickness, and the mother in an attempt to give him a bath, allows him to fall, his father lash out at her. He says:

You are very stupid . . . look at the poor child on the ground. This is the boy who cost us so much money and so many sleepless nights. And now that he begins to get well you let him fall. Can't you be more careful with him?(72).

Edzi, my mother, like every other woman does not spare my father any anger but rather vent it when necessary. She will always retort “you are not to say that to me”(72) and admonishes the recovering Kofi on the note that “you should know you are weak... why did you run away? God punish you by allowing you to fall down, and then that foolish man came there to abuse me. Why do you give me so much troubles?” (73). Some rituals that require the use of black and white wizards will be used to placate the white and black wizards. A pacification mixture or concoction was to be drunk by Kofi to drive away evil spirit lurked around their home.

At school, and my father's class, standard I, I had a bitter and unpleasant experience. My father does not spare me, rather he treats me worst than he will treat another child or pupil in his class. My father, however, was very meticulous in dealing with issues that confront me. As a stranger, he does not want to be called a bad name or be summoned before the local chief for any reason my father's sternness is also educative to me because from it I also learn not to report anybody to my father, whether he is right or wrong. I acquire diligence and carefulness from the serious approach of my father.

Kofi gives a picture of his arrogance. He causes quarrel between his father and mother. He also injures the mother with a stone for refusing to dish rice for him from her business pot and pays a good price for this act of arrogance from his father who sent school children to chase and fetch him home. The beating he receives from his father helps in molding his character, behavior and temperament towards himself and all around him. His experience in standard two is different from his experience in standard one, where his own father was his teacher. In standard two he confronts a more benevolent and kind teacher than his father. He thus adores and

prefers this teacher's treatments and attitude towards him to his father's who was more severe and strict to him. His new teacher appreciates his class work and praises his class work before other members of the class. He is introduced to cubbing which opens a new vista of break through and experience. Kofi also reveals that the relationship between his father and his teacher was cordial and full of admiration, trust and value. Kofi's regard for his father is without romance as he describes him thus:

In those days I believed that my father had been born without a heart. When I read of the angel with the flaming sword which guarded the gate of paradise, I saw him in my mind with the likeness of my father's friendship with my teacher... (85).

He gives a splendid account of the empire day where he leads the march past through the awesome district officer whose fear kept all children at the alert. His school experiences also expose him to the opposite sex. He narrates admiringly that "...yes, there were many pleasant days in my life that year and many interesting occupations. And it was in that year, when I suppose I was about eleven years old, that I first fell in love" (87). Tona, a junior pupil became his first date who shares his minor anxieties. She sent him a love letter that read "you are the only one I think of" (88). Kofi also gives a picture of his people. His people have a strong belief in witches and wizards. A witch bird claims the life of his love Tona, this made their relationship short lived and unfulfilled. In Africa, old women often are associated with wizardry. The witch that killed Tona was identified in the village as an old woman in the town. She died soon after her exposure. This is the usual thing that happens to exposed witches and wizard, particularly among Africans. They do not live long after their exposure. Kofi's parent show love to the young boys and girls that live with them. They trust them and make them meaningful among them. Bolo is entrusted with his mother's account while he also helps his father in copying out notices. This was because his handwriting was very clear and neat. Bolo is entrusted with his mother's account while he also helped his father in copying out notices.

This was because his handwriting was very neat and clear. Bolo, Sika and George engaged in the habit of pilfering Edzi's stock from the pile which they introduced Kofi into. Thus Kofi revealed the childhood act of stealing and naughtiness. These acts are common among children, particularly those whose parents are engaged in petty business enterprises. He is punished by tying the empty tins of sardines and toffee round his neck and is asked to meet the mother with them in that state, for her to untie them, if she was satisfied with the punishment. He is not bullied by the boys caught with him through his revelation. But they simply avoided him. Kofi also is involved in other childhood crimes, as riding an old bicycle belonging to the young Mission Father in the Mission. This act is reported to his father by the Mission Father. This does not earn him any beating, but it shapes his behavior and helped to mold him for a better life and achievements, thus cleansing him of brigandry. Kofi, to measure up scores with Bolo, scaled his hand with a heated piece of rod he had put in a burning fire until it was red hot. This wicked act took the intervention of his father to placate. This actually earned him a thorough beating equal to the pain he caused on Bolo.

Apart from his childhood discrepancies, and the belief in fetish practices, Kofi and his parents also belief in the God Almighty. This makes him pray to God for good wishes and blessings for his family members. He particularly prays that God should make him stay away from troubles and also make his father keep his words. He attended mass devotedly. In one of his bicycle escapades, he nearly was crushed by a lorry to the consternation of everybody. At twelve, he stays away from his parents to live with his master who takes care of him at his school days in Keta. Kofi does not paint a rosy atmosphere of his parents and the entire family. His father as a molder of school was always being transferred from one native school to another for him to develop. At Keta Kofi's life was not pleasant. He risked his school fees in gambling and sneaked away to his father outside the knowledge of his guardian. He also risks his life as he traveled home to recover another fees from his parents. He is saved by the single grace of God as he was able and lucky to locate the house of the Mission Father in charge of the Mission in Keta. At Keta, he makes new friends and

encounters new experiences. Kosi was almost his mate. He also takes part in carrying out some menial jobs of baking bread. His academic experiences are not as they were in Ho. But he is encouraged to work harder and improve on his performance. He escapes danger and punishment from both his father and his master as both did not discover his deceit. There was constant disagreement between Kofi's parents. This causes both parents to be temporarily separated. Kofi suffers a terrible beating from his father as he defies the warning not to visit his mother Edzi in her village home. However, this disagreement is eventually settled and the family reunites finally and all lived together again.

TheAfricanchild
(1954)

Camara Laye's *The African Child* is an autobiographic novel which presents an idealized views of an African child's growing and forming period of life in his native home in Guinea. In this novel the author concerns himself mostly with those aspect of life that are pleasurable with a little touch on the harsh aspects of his childhood life. Thus he presents his childhood as a very happy experience. Laye's life experiences are honestly and nostalgically presented. Laye wrote *The Africa Child* at the age of nineteen as a student in Paris. This, thus exposes him to the feeling of nostalgia for his mother and his homeland, as is common among children of that age bracket. As a very young boy, not mature enough, he had not really been exposed to the harsh and difficult problems of life. It is therefore evident that his presentation of life as a young person would see it is very much a truthful account of life – particularly among his people. It is particularly void of conflicts, fears, wickedness and sundry things that make life sometimes unpleasant. It is therefore evident that his presentation of life as a young person would see it is very much a truthful account of life particularly among his people. As a young child will pour out Laye gives good details of the daily life of his family which includes the extended and nuclear family encompassing even his father's apprentices. In his reminiscence, he recounts how he nearly would have been attacked by a

snake, possibly their family tortem or another crawling around the back of their house or the father's workshop. He says:

I was a little boy playing round my father's hut. How old would I have been at that time? . . . five, maybe six years old . . . suddenly I stopped playing, my whole attention fixed on a snake that was creeping round the hut he (the snake) seemed to be its mouth (1).

The snake played on his innocence as a child, without which it would have poised for a fight and attacked him, thinking that he held the reed to smash or attack it. Possibly too, the snake may have recognized him as a member of the family of which it was a tortem. He narrates, "After a moment I went over to him. I had taken in my hand a reed that was lying in the yard and thrust this reed into the reptile. He says, "the snake did not try to get away: he was beginning to enjoy our little game: he was slowly swallowing the reed he was devouring it . . . as if it were some delicious prey, . . . I was laughing I had not the slightest fear".(1) He continued toying with the reptile until Damany, one of the father's apprentices sees him with the snake and called out to the father who rushed out, and was only protected from harm by the father's friend. Laye's innocent account builds up an interesting document which experience maybe universal among growing children in any given African society, even outside African society, but its presentation is what is interesting and makes the work material for critical analysis. His parents strive to be just and firm in their dealings with all around them and this accords them respect and honour within the community. The parents are thus regarded as community pace setters. Laye gives the impression of actual security in the place he find himself his home environment. He is close to his parents, and even his grandmother extends the same level of love to him each time he visit her and her people at Tindican. He narrates:

Whenever I went to Tindican, it was always with my youngest uncle who used to come to fetch me – he was

younger than my mother and was much more than an adolescent ; . . . he was very good natured and my mother did not have to tell him to look after me; he was naturally kind and needed no telling. (24-25)

The trek to Tindican used to be a tedious one warranting rests under a tree kapok tree or any tree that gives a sufficient shade. They would sit down and after garnish their rest with stories about the farm such as culvings, the purchase of an ox, the clearing of land for new field or the misdemeanor of a wild boar. He was most excited as a little child of such stories as the birth of the youngs. In his inquisitive nature he would almost exhaust his uncle with questions even as his mind ruminates over nature's elements such as the stars, moon, glow light, flowers and other thing that were attractive to a child.

His grandmother was full of love for him and would always come out waiting for their arrival. She would always come out and on seeing her Laye would drop the uncle's hand and run shouting towards her. He states that, " . . .she would lift me up high in the air, then press me to her bossom and I used to squeeze her as hard as I could, flinging my arms around her, overcome with happiness" (27). She would admire him all over with appreciative verbalization if he puts on or loses weight. Apart from the grandmother, many other relatives of his in Tindican admire him and would always lift him up very high appreciatively while he beams with smiles. Laye's account is so penetrating that he gives every details of his relatives in Tindican. He interestingly talks about his uncles, Lansama and his other two brothers – Lansama and Lansame, were the names given to twins, a nickname which swallows up the real names. Lansama was the first of the twin but an adventurer, who had a lot of stories to tell about his adventures. He always loaded Laye with gifts. This also goes to inform about the degree of love and admiration showered on him by his mother's relations at Tindican. He talks beautifully of virtually everything, the hut cows, and the entire environment full of love and admiration.

Among his playmates, he enjoyed the duty of scaring away birds that made waste crops in the farm. This activity was joyfully carried out in their look out posts. However often time, games would make them forget the duty at the look-out posts. his mates, though reckless, held some degree of reservation and respect for him – a town boy. He was always neatly dressed which won him their admiration. However, he also envies them their loincloth which gives them much freedom. He is loved by all as he states; “...my uncle was goodness itself and he loved me, I really believed that he loved me as much as my grandmother did” (35).

Laye presents a narrative in which his family experience is full of warmth, love and security. He presents his father as being close to him. His father is highly respected in the community. His journey to Tindican through Kou roussa, in his narrative depicts a lonely bush road where nature is in their calm natural environment. This implies that their passage was a nuisance and disturbance to them. He emphatically and innocently states, Kouroussa is quiet a large town and the life of the countryside and the field is lost to us and for a little child, such life is always wonderful.” (25). His childhood fancy is exposed in this narrative and he states:

As we wandered along the road, we would startle out of their hiding places here a hare, there a wild boar, and bird would suddenly rise up with great band of rattle of wings, sometimes, too, we would encounter a band of monkeys; and always I would feel a little shock of fright in my heart...(25).

He loved the December period, which was a period of harvesting filled with a lot of feasting and great junketing and he was always fetched by his uncle to Tindican. He enjoyed rice cutting and participated as much as he could in this exercise. He also enjoyed watching his uncles work tirelessly in harvesting of rice so that he would ask “aren’t you tired.” (41). this harvest is usually associated with the “tom tom” (43), accompanied by the singing workers. The ‘tom tom’ was a source of inspiration to the workers and

makes them work tirelessly. His uncle and his working team were ahead of others in the field but not too far as to make his industry impolite to other reapers in the same field.

Laye narrates his experience with his father. His father was a kind man who treated his apprentices as his own children, and he had quite a number of them who are also obedient to not only his father but also his mother, and treated Laye as their sibling. Laye's father was a gifted blacksmith who work on gold and other metal objects on inspiration from his ancestors. He states:

Of all the different kind of work my father performed, none fascinated me so much as his skill with gold. no other occupation was so noble, no other needed such a delicate touch; and, moreover this sort of work was always a kind of festival:it was a real festival that broke the monotony of ordinary working days (13).

He produces trinket for women for a festival of "Ramadan" or for the Tabaski; or for some other family festivity or for dance ceremony. The special services of a praise-singer were required to enhance and speed up the production of their taste. The praise singer sings praises to Laye's father invoking the spirit of the ancestors and he is thus spurred into action. The client makes the request and the father accepts the offer and swings into the nitty- gritty of the production and joyfully the client leaves him with the praise singers. The apprentices work on the bellows. They work on the bellow "until the fire in the forge leaps into flame, becoming a living thing, a lively and merciless spirit" (16). While his father works on the gold on melting he mutters words which cannot be heard but diagnosed from the movement of his lips. The operation was more than smelting of gold but a magical operation which evokes absolute silence because the guiding spirits are interested in this operation which 'favours or disfavours them. This production was a ceremony which eventually attracted the entire community. It was also a protracted operation. As a child he would watch

with apt excitement as the gold melts into fluidity of water and this evokes the smile of the guiding spirits. This operation was so fascinating to Laye as a child, he narrates, “my father would take the pot off the fire, tilt it carefully, and I would watch the gold flowing into the bricks, flowing like liquid fire.” (18). He narrates:

True it was only a very sparse trickle of fire, but, oh, how vivid, how brilliant! As the gold flowed into the brick, the grease would splutter and flame and give off a thick smoke that caught in the throat and stung the eyes, leaving us all weeping and coughing (18).

Laye’s father carries out this operation through the power of his ancestors. He alone was gifted with the power to conjure the spirits of fire, gold, air and also the power to conjure the spirit of evil, hence he, alone carries this operation. Even the little snake that coiled up under sheepskin was unnecessarily stroked to enhance the successful completion of the assignment. The little black snake who was never a regular visitor to the father was always there when the father was working on gold. This operation was an interesting spectacle to everyone, even the woman who is the father’s client. At completion the praise singers chants the douga, a chant for celebrated men only. This also have some powerful spiritual undertone and significance, it is sung and danced with caution for both the singer and the person meant to dance to its tone or notes. The production of gold is associated with mysteries and the father is forewarned in dream to take precaution. Admirers and well wishers gather round him at the successful completion and the dance of the douga and shower him with gifts. The mother feels it is risky to work on gold and even dance the douga. She will usually say “your father is running his health the douga won’t stop him running his eyesight” (23).

Laye makes a subtle contrast between the traditional education he receives from his parents and that he gets from the alien world. The school is a foreign system, which is a place of absolute misery and fear which requires

the violent intervention of his father to correct. The older students were a bully to the younger students. Kouyate, one of the young student who could not tolerate it any longer reports it to the father. The bully, Himairana is cunningly invited to their compound and given a beating of his life. But Laye's father, a non-nonsense man after dealing with Laye's bully with his apprentices, physically assault the Headmaster. The father confronts the Headmaster with the question "do you know what's been going on in this school? ... is it none of my business when my own son is being treated like a slave in your school?" (17). The end of it was a fight between the Headmaster and Laye's father. They were separated by the teachers who were present. This action stopped the bullying activities of the old boys on the younger students. Laye contrast the school system with the traditional training system he passes through at adulthood, the initiation rites this reaches its vortex with circumcision and the night of Kodon Diara. Those are universally sanctioned and celebrated on successful completion. It is also an educational experience which is imparted with the minimum of pain and intimidation. Being of age and mature for initiation is a communal affair that is celebrated with feasting in a sumptuous manner. The Tom-Tom drummer moves slowly as he goes from one household to another, where there is a would- be mature male for initiation. According to the narrators, "the screaming crowd that surrounded Kodoke and his tom tom was getting nearer. It was going from one compound to another. It would stop for a moment in each compound where there was a boy of an age . . . (75). Laye was afraid a little in the traditional education imparted by Kondon Diara, but not so much as he was with the bullying habit of the old boy in the western system of education – the school. He tells his father that he was afraid of the consequence that would come in the process. He was, however, alleviated of the fear by his father who calms down his anxiety as he explains, "I, too, went through this test, . . . Nothing you need really be afraid of, nothing you cannot overcome by your own will power" (76). His father explains to him that he need not be afraid because Kondon Diara will do nothing to him more than just roar.

The old boys that formed the initiation group, acting as security between those that performed the initiation and those to be initiated are not as brutal as the old boys in school. The relationship that exists among them is that of cordiality. Command are issued and obeyed without any show of violence. Konden Diara roars but does not hurt anyone. Even though the boys are gripped with fear, nothing happens to them until it stops roaring abruptly as it had begun. The bigs – one of them, commands; “getup”(82). They are taught the song of the uncircumcised. The initiation processes is covered with mysteries which are not explicable by any of the young boys to be initiated. The mystery behind the long thread at the apex of major huts in the town is explained by one of the old boys. One of the old boys explains; “it is our great chief who does it, our chief turns himself into a major swallow during the night. He flies from tree to tree and from hut to hut, and all these threads are tied on in less time than it takes to tell.” (84). After the circumcision, he learns that the old boys are the Konden Diara personified who roar using some instruments. Laye mother is very passionate to her son Laye. Though she takes care of every members of the family, but her love for her son is tender. Apart from the initiation ceremony, Laye also describe other community activities which are not carried exclusively by individual farmers. Rather, farms are planted in groups. These process is rotated from one farmer to another. children in turn herd livestock in groups. Festivals involve the entire community.

Laye passionately tells the potentialities of the mother. She loves everybody including the father’s apprentice. She does not draw any line between her biological children and the others who lived in the same compound. He says, “My mother was very kind very correct”(48). She is a woman of great authority and was very watchful on all the activities carried out by those under her care. She dishes food to them in a common bowl according to sex and age bracket. They even shared the same apartment and slept in the same room. Here she monitors the activities of the children. She does not tolerate indiscipline and quickly warns against this. On one of the occasions, she warns “have you two gone to bed to chatter or to sleep, now go to sleep, both of you” (49). She corrects everyone who errs. Laye, the apprentices

and his sisters were always appreciative for the show of love, particularly after each meal, all of them in their turn will say; “thank you father; thank you master for the apprentice” (51) this was a pleasant gesture for the parents. Laye’s mother was respected by everyone in the house, the neighbours and particularly his father. He never taught of despising her. He accorded the due respect to her. His mother wield a special power and authority more than other women in the neighbourhood. Laye describes the power as incredible. He says, “there are incredible” (52). Laye’s mother is familiar with mystery numerous in his native community – say country. His mother has familiarity with all of them. She has the mysterious power to a stubborn domestic animal to obey its shepherd. She fetches water in a stream that is feared by everyone. This is because of the crocodile found in the river. The cocrodile is the maternal totem. The mother therefore is spiritually a crocodile and for this reason she does not fear them. Hence she has the single authority and power to fetch water from the river invested with crocodile. She possesses other mysterious powers because she is born after twin brothers. Laye’s mother was too fund of him that she always becomes worried about him. After the night of Konden Diara, she queries about the significance of it that will make him keep late nights and not sleep at all. The fondness of Laye’s mother makes her worried about his departure to France for further studies. She is so worried that she bluntly declares, “you’re not going . . . a year isn’t very long? For the past four years our son has hardly ever been with us . . .” (153). She continues in fight against the decision to take him away for further studies that “no no . . . our son is not going. Let that be the end of the matter”(53). Even when the father tried to make her see reasons with him, she refuses. She kept lamenting and would not welcome any advance by either son or father. She shouts at Laye “you be quiet.”(157). She is concerned about parental care than the intellectual development of her son. She worries about his feeding. She says “and tell me this, who’s going to look after you? Who is going to mend your clothes? Who will cook for you? She wept and only manages to be consoled by Laye and he holds her close to him to express that tender love. Laye also narrates empathically of his childhood love relationships.

First it is about Fanta at primary school, then Marie whom they were both too close and weep at parting on the way to Paris. Laye is in this reminiscence and nostalgia mood of narration because of his age. Being young and a growing lad, he discovers love and kindness by all around him. He is innocent, and nobody would want to hurt him for any reason. His discrepancies and misdemeanor are still looked upon as evolving from a child who does not know the difference between bad and good, vice and virtue. The story he tells is of event that took place between kindergarten age and early adolescence age. At this age identity fixing crisis has not set in any growing child. A child at this stage of development sees things innocently and so it is not surprising for Laye to present a romantic picture of all around him. He is still watched with tender eyes by all around him. He was not without the imagination of a child as he declares to Fanta, “Listen, I’m going to leave the school. I’m going to try and grow up fast, then I’ll come back, and for every beating I’ve received I will pay them back a hundred fold”(69). He says this as going away from school will make him grow faster, when he comes back, whom he was going to pay back the bully is not quantified.

Conclusion

This paper presents the application of the expressive theory of art in the autobiographical works of Francis Selormey and Camara Laye, using their works, *The Narrow Path* and *The African Child* respectively. In doing this, they present the two works in juxtaposition x-raying the similarities and differences that exist in the two works. It is seen that while Selormey presents a realistic description of his childhood experiences touching his childhood discrepancies, the good and bad aspects of him, his parents and grandparents, including the neighbourhood, Laye is idyllic and romantic in his presentation of his experiences. To him all was well as he was growing up. He was never made to cry by his parents and all around him was beautiful except for the bullying nature of the old boys in school. Both works have a record of horror and fatality—the death of their childhood friends: for Selormey, his childhood love way back in primary school and for Laye his childhood friend, Kouyote. The two works are records of the

experiences of children as seen from the eyes and memory of children. The accuracy and verisimilitude of the accounts can only be imagined by the reader and no more. The activities of parents and grandparents are presented in both works. While Laye presents his mother as a superwoman with mysterious spiritual powers, who never quarreled with her husband in anger or fought, Selormey's parents did and Kofi was in fact, the cause of most of the squabbles that brewed between his parents. He took delight in this.

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