

**TABAIM LO LIYONG'S FIXIONS: A STORY IN THE ABSURD+**  
**By ODUNBALOGUN**

(1) Taban lo liyong: the avant-grade artist

There is hardly any short story writer in contemporary Africa who is as exciting as Taban lo Liyong.<sup>1</sup> On reading a story by lo Liyong one is immediately aware of a new dynamic creative personality: the personality of a writer who despite popular opinion believes that the best literature has not yet been written<sup>2</sup> and, because of this belief, is himself determined to find the way of writing such a literature. Taban Lo Liyong is, therefore, not tied down to any of the old literary models. He is free of them and so free, in fact, that at times this freedom borders on irreverence for existing traditions. The road lo Liyong has chosen is that of active experimentation with and development of new literary forms. He constantly synthesizes old and new methods with the hope of creating a new style that is uniquely suited to his themes. The expansiveness and challenging quality of lo Liyong's creative spirit is evident, for example, in the following lines of one of his stories:

*A story doesn't have to have many characters in it. In this one, for example, we have two people, and we feel they are enough. One is he, the visitor from the country and the other is him, the object of the visit. The subject, I may add, is the, visit of he to town.*

*As we feel that what he ate for breakfast that morning has no relevance whatsoever on the visit, nor the colour of the sky while he passed through the countryside, nor how sharp his nose is, nor how blue his eye — in fact, since we feel that these extraneous things other writers use for fleshing up scanty stories are not constitutional ingredients of the story, we shall cut them out — for the readers' benefit. We understand our readers are busy people rushing from one phase of life to another.<sup>3</sup>*

**Another story begins in this fashion:**

*These are the ingredients: an Italo-American woman, a Negro bum, and an African student. The woman had her regrets and wishes; the Negro his anxiety and insecurity; the African student his readings and hope (p. 48).*

To begin a story by assaulting an established tradition as in the first example, or by describing the characters that would appear in the narration as "ingredients" for that story as in the second example, is

certainly most unusual. And this unusual manner is characteristic of the beginning of most of the stories in this collection. When a writer starts a story in this fashion he is saying something extremely significant; he is saying: "Readers and fellow writers, cornel We all already know the conventional manner in which short stories are written, but we have had enough of that kind of stuff. It is high time we developed an entirely different style of writing." And this is exactly what Taban lo Liyong has done in his collection. All the nine stories in the book are written in a non-conventional fashion and are highly stimulating because of their innovative dynamic spirit.

But lo Liyong can at times be highly teasing in his experimental stories. For instance, in an entry titled "Tombe 'Gworong's own story", the writer captures the reader's attention in this fashion: "To understand this story there are three things you must know." (P.26) And he proceeds directly to give these three things:

*One is that I am a Tombe 'Gworong — that is, one of the tribes that eats people. We are not cannibals though. For cannibalism means a hunian being, in his human condition, eatfhg another human being either as food or physic or both. Ours is not that. When our people want to eat people they become leopards first, and then as leopards, they seize a man, or a woman, or a child, and even other animals such as goats, cows, buffaloes, or birds like chick&n and vultures, and eat them...*

*The next thing you must know in order to understand this story is this. One day there was a race for all animals of the bush....*

*The third thing you have to know is this, a certain chief's daughter once thought everybody did not suit her aesthetic taste. Some of the chief's sons who wanted her for a wife had a head too large, or teeth very long, legs made like bows, were too tall or too short, did not laugh musically, and so on. When all the men who wanted her left her alone, a man came, who fulfilled all her prescription of what her man should be...*

After this introduction covering three and half pages (pp. 26 — 29), the writer finally tells "the story":

*Here now is the story. When we are still men, we do not expose our heads to be knocked off or pierced through. We do not live when that is done. When we are changed into leopards, we mind about our backs,*

*especially where our tails begin. When we are leopards our human heads are where our leopard backs are. (p. 29)*

One is, no doubt, amazed that this is all there is to "the story". The story is extremely disproportionate in size when compared to the introduction. While the latter covers four paragraphs of three and a half pages, the former takes only a paragraph of about a quarter of a page — six and a half lines. And as we can see "story" itself is not a story but only a footnote to the first point earlier given to aid the reader to understand the story. Thus the writer has written a story that is no "story" at all.

The trick Taban lo Liyong has played on the reader is that each of those three points advanced to aid the reader's comprehension of "the story" is by itself a full story- In effect we have not a story but three stories. Taban lo Liyong appears to be deliberately shocking the reader. He is shocking the traditional reader into a new awareness, the awareness that "the story" is not always so simple and straight-forward as imagined. After this shock the reader now understands that every stage of the short story is important since every part of it might be a full story. The reader after this experience will always look for meaning at every stage in the development of a short story. Taban lo Liyong appears, therefore, to be writing a story to teach the reader how to read a short story.

The desire to shock is unmistakable in this story. The very second line makes this obvious: "I am a Tombe 'Gwrong — that is, of the tribe that eats people." Later on we read how the over-demanding chief's daughter treats the person "who fulfilled all her prescription of what her man should be"

*She went with him to his home. At night when they were about to sleep, he took off his clothes. She looked at him and found he was a different person. He looked as ordinary as one of those men she had sent away. So she got out a knife and cut him to pieces. When she was going to throw the cut pieces away, the man part of the dead man jumped about dancing and singing a song, nodding his head. It finally jumped and disappeared right into her woman party (p. 29).*

The disappointment of the king's daughter in this story is, no doubt, meant to recall a similar disappointment experienced by the heroine in the famous Tutuola's story, *The Perfect Gentleman*. Tutuola's heroine discovers that "the perfect gentleman" to whom she has been so powerfully attracted is only a skull. The horror of the transformation

from a "perfect gentleman" to a mere skull is parallel by the horror in the murder committed by lo Liyong's heroine. What the two stories seem to be pointing out, among other things, is the naivety in the expectation of a girl to find in our imperfect world a perfect husband. The use of the style of indirection (here the parable) in making such a simple statement; the fantastically exaggerated details (such events are impossible in actual life); the domestication of shock, horror and pornography — all these are details borrowed from the stylistic devices of the folktale. This strengthens the opinion that the style of the absurd might actually be more prevalent in our literary traditions (especially the oral) than we are aware of.

The spirit in which one should understand Taban lo Liyong's tendency to shock the reader — either by attacking accepted literary tradition or by presenting shocking subject matter — is the spirit in which one understands and accepts artistic innovators. An artist who has a reverential attitude to past artistic traditions is not likely to create anything new. Most artists who had succeeded in creating something new had always proceeded from the premise that what existed was no longer adequate. The Italian Futurists, for instance, heralded their appearance with a highly shocking manifesto:

*We want to demolish museums, libraries, fight against moralism, feminism, and all opportunistic and utilitarian cowardices/.....  
Set the library stacks on fire! Turn the carnals in their course to flood the museum vaults!...4*

The provocative call to destroy museums and burn libraries was, of course, only a symbolic gesture on the part of the futurists, who knew that nothing new could be created until the artists turned away from traditional models. This also was the point the Russian writer, Yevgeny Zamyatin, was making when he wrote:

*The formal character of a living literature is the same as its inner character: it denies verities, it denies what everyone knows and departs from the cononical tracks, from the broad highway... Let yesterday's cart creak along the well-paved highways. The living have strength enough to cutaway their yesterday.5*

Among our writers Taban lo Liyong is perhaps the one who best understands the challenge of "a living literature". He perpetually experiments with themes and styles. In a story called "Sages and Wages",

for example, Taban lo Liyong has a sentence with an unusual syntax. This kind of experiment with syntax has been equalled and surpassed only by the American writer, Donald Barthelme, whose story titled "Sentence", is a one-sentence story covering eight pages.<sup>6</sup> With this kind of taste for experimentation it is not surprising that lo Liyong's stories often deal with the absurd.

## **(II) Characteristics of the African Literature of the Absurd**

It is, of course, unusual to speak of Africa having a literature in the tradition of the absurd. This unusualness is, however, indicative not of the non-existence of such a phenomenon but of the lack of attention to the phenomenon. The stories of Taban lo Liyong, as we shall see, are an irrefutable confirmation of the existence of the tradition of the absurd in African literature. My speculation is that a closer examination of our written and especially oral literary traditions may actually reveal that the style of the absurd is more prevalent than we indeed suspect. After all, Taban lo Liyong receives his creative inspiration primarily from oral tradition.<sup>7</sup> It is essential, however, to note that the philosophical orientation, the historical causation and, to some extent, the artistic execution of the African literature of the absurd, judging from the example of Taban lo Liyong, differ from those of the Western tradition.

We are familiar with the Western literature of the absurd the purpose of which is to depict man as "a bewildered being in an incomprehensible universe".<sup>8</sup> For the absurdist, man sees no purpose in life and is "bewildered" because he has been cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots", and as a result he "is lost" and "all his actions (have) become senseless, absurd, useless".<sup>9</sup> In 1942 Albert Camus, one of the chief theorists and practitioners of the tradition, "was calmly putting, the question why, since life had lost all meaning, man should not seek escape in suicide".<sup>10</sup>

The root of the existential agony of the philosophers of the absurd lies in the spiritual depression existing at the time in the Euro-American world, a depression brought about by the lessons of history. By the forties the Western man had come to the realisation that he was not advancing in civilization, but was actually getting more and more barbaric, more and more destructive, more and more incapable of learning from history. The numerous European wars had not taught him the way to avoid the first World War nor had the latter provided him with the wisdom for preventing Hitler and the incalculable carnage of the second World War. The economic depressions he could not prevent further undermined his

faith in himself and in addition worsened his standard of living. With his faith in himself eroded, the western man inevitably was plunged into an agonizing spiritual crisis characterized by pessimism and despair, this was the mood that gave rise to the literature of the absurd in Europe and America. We are already familiar with the poetic, dramatic and prose manifestations of this literature in the works of its most distinguished representatives: Albert Camus, Franz Kafka, Eugene Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett. The fundamental philosophical difference between the African and the Western

traditions of the absurd lies in their attitudes to life. Whereas the absurdist in the West sees life as being absurd and meaningless, so absurd and meaningless in fact that he contemplates suicides as a solution; the absurdist in Africa does not believe that life in itself is absurd, meaningless. As a matter of fact, life to him is very meaningful; what can be absurd and meaningless are individuals and situations.

The title story in Taban lo Liyong's collection, *Fixions*, (pp. 78—81), for instance, paint a picture in which in the middle of the night a President of an African country receives in his secret chambers an envoy of a foreign nation. This President had earlier on requested for aid to build a road and a bridge to his home. The envoy now comes to report that the money for the project has arrived. The President concludes arrangements for the money to be diverted into his personal Bank account. He is overjoyed for, as he says, "It will earn me quite a bit of interest". The envoy then proceeds in a studied fashion to inquire about the state of the President's national security. Thereafter the envoy discloses that a coup-d'etat is secretly being hatched by the leader of the Opposition in collaboration with the Deputy President and that the plotters aim to kill the President. Before departing the envoy succeeds in putting the President in a state of seething rage.

The story ends as the President is about to unleash a bloodthirsty, insane revenge on the plotters. All along the story strongly suggests that there is actually nobody plotting any coup, that the calculated lie is told with the aim of establishing the African country. Furthermore, the reader is aware that the malicious envoy succeeds only because he is not dealing with an African leader of worth but with his greedy fool of a President, who appears to be even gullible, more naive than a mere child. This President is in-deed no better than an animated cartoon being manipulated according to the wishes of the foreign envoy, his master. When a person

— the more so a President — becomes a mere puppet, his life loses meaning, it becomes absurd.

This three-and-a-half-page story is not only a satire on the gullible and greedy African Heads of States but something considerably more. What the story stresses ever so subtly is the absurdity evident in the complete absence of any social and political awareness on the part of certain African leaders represented here by the President. Furthermore, the situation which makes the reign of such ignorant, un-patriotic characters possible is exposed for its absurdity. It is, however, significant that in spite of this, the story is not pessimistic. It presents the President, his greed, his ignorance and his folly not as the summation of life but as an absurd incident in life, something we can afford to laugh at because it is temporary. It is this optimism that prevents the African literature of the absurd from degenerating into the decadence of despair and suicide, which characterises the western literature of the absurd.

As we can see, the cause of the absurd relates to the reality of contemporary African political, economic and social situation. It is implied, that when Africa shall have progressed from the present situation and shall be ruled by people worthier than the President, the absurdity depicted here shall cease to exist. Finally, the sense of the absurd in this story has been conveyed by the writer not by abandoning "usual or rational devices" or by "the use of nonrealistic forms" — as is typical of the style of the Western tradition of the absurd<sup>11</sup> — but by a very realistic method. The realistic form of the absurd in Taban lo Liyond's stories derives from the fact that the stories' purpose is basically satiric. What this suggests is that the way to overcome absurdity may be the way of criticism, the way of satire.

It is this close relationship between the aims and methods of satire and those of the literature of the absurd in the African tradition that has probably been responsible for the non-differentiation of these two methods in the criticism of African literature. Coupled with this, of course, is the fact that why and how the absurd is expressed in African literature is different from "the why" and "the how" of the Western tradition of the absurd, which has been our model. Notwithstanding we should be able to differentiate between the styles of satire and of the absurd in African literature. Satire can indeed employ the absurd as one of its methods but that which is satirized is not always absurd. In the literature of the absurd, on the other hand, that which is depicted is always absurd. Herein lies the basic differences. If the story paraphrased



above, for instance, has depicted an astute President greedily diverting foreign aid into his personal account we would have had only a satire; but here we are presented with a greedy ignorant fool for the President of a whole country. This is absurd. It is therefore not so much the individual as the situation which makes possible the reign of a leader such as the President that is absurd. Socio-historical and economic factors are thus responsible for the existence of the modern African literature of the absurd. However, confusion does not always arise as Taban lo Liyong does not depend entirely on realistic means — "usual and rational devices" — to convey the absurd. Often as in the Western tradition, he employs unusual and irrational devices and "non-realistic forms."

What the foregoing implies is that the absurd in relation to the African experience is not synonymous with the satiric nor should it be understood only in terms of the Western tradition of the absurd. While there exist stylistic similarities between the two, the historical factory and the philosophical mood are basically different in each case.

### **(III) Taban lo Liyong: the absurdist:**

Taban lo Liyong's collection of short stories, *Fixions*, can be rightly described as an "African Short Fiction of the Absurd". There is absurdity in the use of details. For instance, in a story with the intriguing title, "Lexicographicide", a character details his experience of being waylaid by robbers in the following manner:

*...Being evicted, walking home, half way through the journey, accosted by four masked men. Said they have no clothes, no money, no writing things, and had never experienced the joy of dispossessing a man for two whole days. If I pleased, I might oblige them with my coat and its pockets, my eyeglasses and the handles (and case too, if I had any), my watch, its winder, and straps, my shoes and the strings as well, my socks (the holes and smell too are good for them, my trousers (buttons and buttonholes included), the zip too was worth their trouble, if I had a belt that was also one of their specialities, my short, tie, tie-pin, my vest, and my underwear. I did not understand their language (pp. 43-44, Emphasis mine).*

Hardly any reader can miss the absurdity in the act of robbers demanding, among other things, a victim's pair of socks solely because they covet the smell and the holes in these socks. An element that further heightens the absurdity is the contrast between the intention of the thieves and the language employed by them. It is highly unusual for



thieves in the process of robbing a man of all that he possesses to speak in such a refined, delicate and polite manner as would make one think they were gentlemen performing a service for which one should be grateful. Even more weirdly absurd are the details of this character's dream in which he is cannibalistically devoured by his creditors:

*...The skin was removed (together with the ears and the nose), the lower jaws were Disengaged, with tongue, teeth, and palates. Two creatures (I think man and wife) sucked my eyeballs at a go. Now the skull was eaten away, and earthworms given the privilege to gobble my brain (p. 45).*

This passage and the ones quoted earlier from "Tombe "Gworong's Own story" make the reader shiver with horror. The absurdity in these passages and in those similar to them is not just in the shocking act of cannibalism itself but in the manner in which it is described. The act is presented in such a calm deliberate manner as if there was nothing to it, as if it was the most mundane of all things. Cannibalism is a total negation of human civilization, a negation of all that man stands for; and the ease with which it is accepted in these passages is absurd if only because such an acceptance is highly unthinkable.

Often the absurd is created through the use of exaggeration. In this story, "Lex-icographicide", for instance, we are informed that a child decided to leave school at the age of seven "on the ground that being in school was a waste of time" (p.40). In another story with the long title, "Ogbodo pa Apwoyo Gin Ki Lyeche", a female character so much liked the food prepared by her host that "she ate, and ate, and ate, till she even ate one of her fingers" (p.61).

Sometimes, Taban lo Liyong exploits human weaknesses to create an absurd story. For instance, man's habit of often going into extremes in his actions provides the occasion for the absurd and hilarious story titled "He and Him." Here the sophisticated urban white man with his tendency to sometime overdepartmentalize life to a rigid and illogical extent is made the object of ridicule. In the story a farmer from the country is paying a visit to his friend in the city. The most is the typical af-fluent, sophisticated, departmentalizing urban white man, whose house is so full of amenities and conveniences that apart from the regular separate rooms for sleeping, dining, reading, lounging etc, he also has separate cubicles: one for smoking, another for yawning, a third for sneezing and a fourth for coughing, etc., etc. And the significant thing about all this is that the

town-man rigidly enforces the use of these amenities. Once he commands his farmer friend, saying:

*Yawn away all you like here, as freely as you like. In the future if you feel it coming, make a dash for this place. These amenities are here to be used, and must be used, otherwise how can we justify their existence? (pp. 35-36)*

Thus, we can see that the departmentalizing white man (as indeed any other departmentalizing man, black or white) has not only created amenities for his convenience but has also made himself a slave to these amenities. This is what Taban Lo Liyong is attacking with his method of the absurd. This is what he is inviting the reader to laugh at.

In fact, while reading stories by Taban Lo Liyong one cannot help but laugh. One laughs, for example, when the folly of prejudice is ridiculed in the story called, "Stare Decisio Deo." This story depicts hypocrisy and racism using the form of a fable. On a Christmas day Monkey visits his friend, Python. The latter prepares a feast and invites his guest to eat. Monkey rushes at the food, being very hungry, but is ordered back to go and wash his hands. Monkey went back to rewash his hands but his host still remains dissatisfied:

*'Do you call those hands washed?' was a what Python said, 'Have some sense. Those hands are black and dirty. Use soap and warm water.'*

*Monkey went and did so. He returned with clean hands, palms out.*

*'Now, Monkey, where were you raised? How can you come to table so dirty, so smelly, so black, 'Get that blackness off your hands.'*

*Monkey took a butcher's knife, skinned away the black skin in his palms. The palms turned red, red with blood. Tears dropped from his hands.*

*He was still hungry. He came to eat.*

*'How can you be so uncultured? So unintelligent? Don't touch my food with your blood, I am no cannibal'. Those were Python's words.*

*Monkey started for home (pp.22-23).*

A year passed and it is the turn of Python to pay a visit to his friend. Monkey, on the Christmas day. Monkey prepares a delicious feast and invites his guest to table. Python starts to eat but Monkey does not like his guest's sitting posture and he re-requests him to seat himself properly. Python readjusts his posture but Monkey still does not like the new posture. Python tries again and again but repeatedly fails to satisfy his host:

*'Mistah, we don't call that "sittin", said Monkey. 'Now, get seated like other folks. See what I mean?'*

*Python uncoiled himself. He pushed the greater part of his twenty feet outside the hut his head was near the pot of food.*

*'I didn't tell you to lie on your belly. You must learn to sit and to sit properly inside a house. 'Monkey said like that.*

*Python assembled all of himself inside the hut. He started to sit, on his tail. His head went up, up, up, till it pierced through the roof.*

*Monkey ate the food. He took a cutlass and chopped of seven feet from Python's tail. Python jerked up the bulk of his squirting length through the grass roof. (p.24)*

Significantly, during both of these Christmas visits, the peace-loving dove keeps singing to the hearing of both friends its words of wisdom:

Accept him.

As he is

Accept him

As he is.

Everyday the Dove sings:

Accept them, as they are:

Accept them, as they are.

as they are.

as they are. (pp. 22; 23,24).

As we have seen, the friends ignored the song of the dove and the result, of course, is a vicious cycle of laughable absurdities expressed in racial prejudices and discrimination.

Humour also pervades the story called, "A Traveller's Tale which presents a comic incident as the answer to the rapewish of a sexually

starved housewife. This woman was so starved of sex "she wanted to be raped. She looked forward to it" (p. 49). At long last she finds an obliging negro bum who with her full co-operation and participation rapes her on the open platform of a subway station in Harlem, New York, in the full view of waiting passengers. As if this is not enough, the situation is made even more absurd by the appearance of an African student who helps to complete the job half-done by the negro bum. She is again raped on the same spot and with her full co-operation and participation. The humour and the absurdity of the story are further heightened as it ends with the woman's hypocrisy:

*... why did he want to rape me? me a mother of four?, and among all these people?*

Just as hilariously absurd is the story titled "Sages and Wages." The absurd epigraph, which is a parody of the American Declaration of Independence, sets the tone of the story right from the start:

We hold these as truths, self-evident: A reader must not yawm during the yarn without the loss (of his head) Or that, of the writer's, the lay of thfi ancient Optics Grinder... (p.12)

After this, a reader who expects a logical, meaningful narration will be disap-pointed because, of all the stories in the collection, "Sages and Wages" is easily the most heavily loaded with all sorts of absurdities. There is lexical and semantic absurdity:

*...but I am still seventeen years old compared to the captain who accomplished the same distance in fifty-four seconds when her age is already forty, I t tra, i ab ba cir stan cum ces phy graph humn I you she that this is on at aton afin on at thishe (p. 15)*

There is absurdity of illogical reasoning. Here, for instance, is conclusion without it premise:

*...That javelin I threw this morning 'fell just four inches beyond the point I threw yesterday, it is therefore a fair calculation that tomorrow, everything being equal, I should be in a position to throw just one half inch beyond this point and the day utter another one-half to the same distance as our captain (pp. 14- 15)*

There is also the absurdity which derives from an improbable exaggeration:

*...three miles I can now run in exactly one minute, ... (p. 15).*

*...We must remember that they are athletes, now athletes do not 'sleep': they are Inimivnr athleticizing: awake or dreaming (p. 19).*

*We also find the absurdity emanating from human behaviour. The character who at the end of the story impersonates Jesus Christ acts like a madman:*

*He, on his own accord, taking off his tunic and waving it about like a wand, and exposing his sides to everybody around said: 'She is not dead' ... (p. 18).*

The greatest absurdity of all, however, is that this ten-page story which mixes facts with fantasy, reality with dream, absolutely makes no sense. No matter how one reads it, the story yields no meaning and one is forced to conclude that perhaps the author simply wants to create and absurd meaningless story using and absurd meaningless style. At every stage, however, the author manages to amuse the reader although the humour tends to be profane. A woman who is in birth-labour is, for instance, shown bound to "a pillar so that her hands and legs met on the other side of the pillar and a large bandage or sash bound her mid-region firmly on the pillar" (p. 13). Frequently, this woman would cry out to her mother:

*'Mama, choke me! Choke me', and her mother would be at it till the eyes of both mother and daughter were red. But she was stronger than her mother, and the latter ended up by relaxing her grip before the daughter was weakened enough or had the satisfaction from the choking (pp. 12-13).*

All these might suggest that Taban lo Liyong is a follower of the Euro-American existentialist — absurdist school of writing, a school which sees no sense of meaning in life and whose perception of the human condition is of man as "a bewildered being in an incomprehensible universe". The fact, however, is that nothing can be much farther from the truth. Taban lo Liyong is an optimist who sees a lot of meaning in life. The conditions, the instances, the personalities, and the attitudes that deprives life of this meaning which he values so much are the things he

ridicules in his stories by exposing the absurdity inherent in those conditions, those instances, those personalities and those attitudes.

In this connection Taban lo Liyong is only being true to the African tradition. As Julius Lester has pointed out, the Outsider in Afro American literature unlike his counterpart in European literature does not accept, "absurdity as being so normal that he believes in nothing and is undisturbed by the nothingness".<sup>12</sup> What Lester has said of Afro-American literature is also true of African literature.<sup>13</sup> Now there is a great affinity between the Outsider and the writer. This affinity derives from the acute sensitivity of the two, a sensitivity which often makes them a reliable barometer for measuring the level of awareness in a society. What has given the Afro-American Outsider his advantage over the European Outsider, according to Lester, is the suffering which has humanised him and has made him capable of rejecting absurdity as something normal. This is why the Afro American Outsider clearly sees himself as a committed member of a suffering humanity. This commitment, this seeing of oneself as a member of suffering community whose lots can and must be improved is that which has also enabled Taban lo Liyong avoid the pit falls of the European tradition of the absurd. For Taban lo Liyong man is not "a bewildered being in an incomprehensible universe". For him the treatment of the absurd is a way of correcting life and giving meaning to it.

It is thus obvious that Taban lo Liyong's aim is traditional. He is a committed writer seeking the improvement of his society. In pursuing this traditional aim, however, he has chosen a non-traditional, non-conventional path, the path of avant-gardist experimentation and innovation.

#### NOTES

1. There is however, a new crop of African short story writers with a flare for the experimental, who are beginning to make their presence felt. We should watch out especially for the Ethiopian writer, Solomon Deressa, the Kenyan writer, Bahadur Tejani, and the Liberian writer, Wilton Sankawulo.
2. Taban lo Liyong, to my knowledge, has not made any specific statement to this effect; but all his writings, as indeed is the case with all avant-garde writings, combine to suggest this conclusion.

3. Taban lo Liyong, *Fixions* (Heinemann, London, 1978), p. 32. This eighty-one-page collection of nine stories provides the material for this study. Further references will be indicated in the body of the essay.
4. A Manifesto of Italian Futurism", in *The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts*, ed. Irving Howe (Horizon Press, New York, 1967), pp. 170-171.
5. Yevgeny Zamyatin, "On Literature, Revolution, Entrophy, and Other Matters", in *A Soviet Heretic*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970), p. 111.
6. Donald Barthelme,, "Sentence" in *Superfiction of the American Story Transformed*, ed. Joe David Bellamy, (Vintage Books, New York, 1975), pp. 213-220.
7. Han M. Zell and Helene Silver, *A Reader's Guide to African Literature* (Heinemann, London, 1977), pp. 153-4.
8. C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature* (The Odyssey Press, New York, 1960), p.4
9. Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Anchor Books, New York, 1969), P-5
10. Ibid.
11. Holman, op. cit., p.4
12. Julius Lester, "The Outsider in European and Afro-American Literature" *Okike*, No. 10(1976), p. 93.
13. If in doubt, examine the outsiders in Ayi Kwei Armah's first three novels.