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KOKO BASSEY

La Lumiere

In a world that is fast fading,
where morals have ceded place to inverse values
and priority has espoused herself to injustice,
immorality and corruption...

A light in the darkness shines a message,
a message of hope to a transient world,

*Dusk will give way to dawn
and midnight will become noon.
There is still a narrow path
that leads to the break of day.*

The light shines in obscurity.
It is not given to obscurity.
That light bears a message,
a message of hope to a dying world.

*"Did you say?"
Yes!*

*CHIMEZIRI OGBEDETO***Were You a Phoenix**

Were you a phoenix
I would not carve this dirge
but sing a gleeful measure.
Soon you would return with timeless youth
and death would be nought
and life a coming and a going and coming again.

Were you a phoenix
the wrinkles in our souls would not have grown.
The grave would not be the in-between.
Your going would not leave echoes of parting.
You would return to our embrace.

There are ones who stir my heart.
A mother's love they never will know.
Ugochukwu, Chiekezu, Akuoma,
The little ones you loved
Stare in tearless grief.

I wish you were a phoenix
And I would scrape this dirge.
I would soothe their pain -
"Mummy'll come back soon"
I'd reply.

Your going has opened again
The sad reflections on life.
I hear the flute play awhile and strut away
as tears defy the solace of passing moons.

I hear the silences of death
whisper loudly in my ears
and I fear tomorrow.

Tomorrow may not hold your memory,
If in hurry I do not carve these lines.
Endless time stands between us -
The phoenix did not lend us its secret
of coming and going and coming again
to reap the harvest of life.

Shadows of Time

We used to be one
like pods of kolanuts
hung on a branch.

Today we stand isolated.
Time has put its scythe on our brotherhood.
Each now has his *obi*
where he sits lonely
calling out greetings with false smiles.

We live with the silence
of our inner struggles
each in unspoken competition.

Our cherished past
peeps behind the sun
at our battered present.
No hopes bring back what was
though yesterday still holds fresh flowers.

*FUNSO AIYEJINA***Memories of Three Months**

When April ends, armed with its seasonal overnight kit
Loaded with intense and brief lilies in full bloom
The fragile glow of the cassia tree lining the roads
To proclaim the beauty and brevity of human life,
I recall the nightmare of my brother's death in his youth
On the last day of the month labeled cruel by the poet ...

When April ends, armed with its seasonal overnight kit
I seek solace in the already evident month of May:
The birth month of our hopeful future continuous
When the flamboyant tree rooted in one of our pasts -
Constantly a target of elemental and human decrees -
Blooms forth in all its glory, paying no heed
To the presiding clusters of campus intellectuals
Who, borrowing a leaf from the resident colonies of bats
Ravage our green fruits long before the harvest season,
Blindly out-doing each other like crabs in barrels
Struggling for vantage rungs on the ladder of escape ...

After the brief lilies and the fragile cassias of April
I seek solace in May with its flames of the forest
Which tower defiantly above cretins who have adopted
The belly-to-earth pose of the Ile-Ife campus lizards
Permanently glued to ground dirt in hopeful obeisance
When they should stand up, bloom and be counted as
Contestants for the flaming crown of struggle, as
Members in a procession of satiated priests in worship
As followers of Ogun returning triumphant from battle
With the palm fronds of peace in his left hand

And in his right the steaming sword of conquest
His carpet of glory leading into fields of hope
As a guaranteed link with the month of September:
The month of sunshine: the sunshine of harvest time
When the miracle of May is doubled and re-confirmed.

Aftermath

(For Fatima Vatsa)

Each new life is a descendant of a graying form
Every new season a rebellion against an older norm
But the cactus survives the swing of the pendulum
Not through the collusive allegiance of a chameleon
But through a tenacity of will and a clarity of vision.
Poetry is rebellion, insists Neruda. The poet in rebellion
Is a cactus in bloom, nurtured by miracles in the subsoil.

Was the warrior-poet a desert cactus, a carrier of our anguish?

For you and others who knew them in less dangerous roles
As tenants, friends, husbands and fathers
Yours are grieving tongues and loving hearts
From which cynical questions may not be asked.
Mindful of your intense personal pains and tears
Over lost privileges, we join you in singing dirges
With which to coax them on to their now inevitable posting.

Blessed are they whose coups succeed:
They shall own the yams and wield the knives
And songs shall be erected naming them saviours
Until after the next night of the long knives ...

The Baboon on the Swing

Because the night is dark with no stars in sight
The baboon boasts he's clad in the finest velvet
Forgetful of dawn - the epilogue to nightmare
Our charm to dispel the hold of evil nights
Invocation to affirm that no matter its flare
A lie will always remain a lie, destined
Like a false masquerade, to be unmasked.

Not really; history does not repeat itself.
Men do
And are thus repeated on history's shelf
Like Onitobi of the skimpy loin-cloth
Champion wrestler in the riddle who
Wrestled his challengers to death
And dared harmattan to a final duel.

Now, who amongst us needs to be reminded
That one who throws such affronts at the wind
No matter the magnitude of his past miracles
No matter the number of stars on his epaulets
Such a man must come away from such a contest
Badly bruised, lock-jawed, needing treatment?
No, history does not repeat itself. Men do.

If therefore, the clay-god craves a dance of shame
Persistent in his demand for extended prime time
In the rain; oblige him, turn on the spotlights.
If the baboon insists, in spite of honest protests
Let him swing low and high, secure in his might.
Let him swing sweet chariot amongst the branches
There is a dry one lurking within the green foliage.

Remember the bullock who craved a round-trip aboard?
Didn't he return as corn-beef, cured and packaged?

To Ararimeh at Two

Blessed are they who know how to deploy anger
In the defense of dreams; against nightmares.
They shall inherit futures brimming with life
Forever succulent like the flesh of the cactus ...

Blessed are they who know how to deploy anger
Against sages who boast of knowing the prayer
With which to embrace the baobab tree of wisdom
But who, come mid-night, sneak off to the vulture
With multiple offerings - escorts to secret requests
For instant cures for their hereditary baldness ...
Against those quick to arrest whispering leaves
But never deem it fit to question raging storms
Which alone sow the seed of recurrent restlessness
Among the virgin branches of our forest of a thousand dreams.

You point angry fingers at their stars
Whenever they crash into our laughter
Via their channel 9 at 9, every night.
Does their rank arrogance recall those nights:
Your pre-conscious encounters with their agents
Who embraced darkness, made it their garment
And were guided to us by hooded informants?
Do you wonder why as one of their many victims
I do not join you in pointing my rage at them?
Do you wonder what has become of my gift of anger?

The well is silent: The well is shallow: A child's logic!

I am pointing. I am angry: If only you could see into my head!
But not at those who hold the yams and the knives. No.
They are well out of it. Even as they sign our death warrants.
Look beyond them, beyond their thrones, to aide-de-camps
Stiff with the anticipation of a future to be measured in gold:

First ladies lodged in the sanctuary of State Houses
Concubines recruited from virgins' pools by trusted aides
At home in safe houses and unlisted official annexes
All equipped with state of the art basement chambers
Designed for the ultimate comfort of those parrots
Who are too daft to learn from the three wise monkeys.

Blessed are they who live to celebrate their dreams
They shall not number among the framed and accidentalized.

The Power and Glory of Memory

Death, awesome in its totalitarian amour of conceit
Throws arrogant affronts in the face of humanity
Ignoring the power and the glory of memory
Our immortal antidote against the sting of mortality
Our invincible armour against all doctored history
The gentle fingers of dew drops forming before sunrise
On whose invisible wings the promise of bloom rides
Over generations of sand dunes, along the primal path
Of Ogun, pathfinders and pathmender, to an oasis of hope ...

Today, men of iron have banished past truths and deeds
And decreed their hirelings into new royal legends

To be installed in bunkers inside custom built palaces
Fitted out with regulation pools, overflowing with milk -
Human milk; protected by blind, deaf and mute walls
Designed to shut out the babble of the market place
Insulate their royal highnesses within a magical comfort
From which, unhindered, they continue to mastermind us
Into the holding bays designed into their castles.

For consolation, let us tickle the armpit of memory
Awake, into gentle horses of speech on whose back
We may ride triumphant into the eternal city of hope
Submerged somewhere inside our past ruins and scope
And beyond to when kings kept faith with their subjects
and watched over the teeming masses in the markets
Listening intensely and always to bold human voices
Intuiting unuttered hopes into fulfilled prophecies
Such that the people saw and hailed them as wise
Prostrating themselves, before and after, in gratitude.

Before they Came Calling in the Middle of the Night

Way back when, before chickens became toothless
And turned champion devourers of back-up grains ...
Before drunk agents came crashing into our dreams
Armed and ready to arrest metaphors in our streams
On the orders of a General high on syndicated acclaims
Galloping full-speed ahead of our children's fervent pleas,
I believed with the innocent citizens of our nation
In the open-arm one-on-one embrace of salutation.
But after seeing wily foxes at work in our forests
Spiders spinning deadly webs in and out of contexts,

I now know why, even as they bury comrades freshly killed
Fists of the children of Soweto remain forever clenched.

We have always had their likes: inheritors and usurpers
Who, too cowardly to confront the truths in our songs
Would don the dirty garb of aberrant masquerades
Determined to waylay and strangle singers of tales
Long before the ascension of this General Tortoise.
Today, descendants of those same insolent renegades,
Protected by the anonymity of their choice profession,
Courageously finger the homes of witnesses of truth
Forgetting like their ancestors now condemned to oblivion
That the outstanding relatives of a condemning finger
Are inevitably aimed back at the heart of the pointer.
Whatever darkness conceals, dawn is bound to reveal.

Why argue with men who insist they are really clad
In exotic robes when it is too dark to investigate?
Let them dance. Let them prance. Like the intoxicated.
Daylight, when it arrives on the silent wings of dawn
Will reveal them as wearers of rags before the town.
Men like them are not new; we always had their kind:
Men who conveniently forget that when an order
Fit only for slaves is forced on us we must deliver
Such with the wisdom and courage of the free
Instead of kicking in wide open doors with glee.
To such men our ancestors sent collective ritual curses
Causing them to die abominable deaths, swollen with greed.

ADA UGA

Achukwu, The Night Masquerade

Apa market square was a beehive of activity. This was normal since it was the last Ukwo market day before Ej' Alekwu, the most colourful festival throughout the twenty-two clans of Apa. A sudden hush descended on both vendors and buyers alike. They craned their necks and trained their ears to confirm what they had just heard. The sound that emanated from the direction of the sacred groove was unmistakable. With each passing moment, it became more distinct and louder. The sacred female drum struck thrice. Then her male counterpart burst into life in fourteen rapid rhapsodic beats. A staccato wail of flutes, iron bells and wooden gongs all sounded at once. Drawing this thunderous din, many voices of the night masquerade's advance party rent the midday air.

"Eka - Heji - Mo!"

"Eka - Heji - Mo!!"

"Eka - Heji - Mo!!!"

The sudden out-burst of activity from the usually quiet sacred groove of Achukwu, the dreadful Apa night masquerade signalled an unscheduled appearance at day-time. In a moment, the busy market square was deserted, with children, women and non-initiates scampering into the safety of their homes. Behind tightly shut doors, they monitored the progress of the unfolding drama.

"Something unusual must have happened. Achukwu never appears in the day except on rare occasions." Adehi Ogwuche, Akanaba of Apa whispered confidentially behind closed doors to his family huddled together in his vast Itakpa, the spacious sitting room.

Rolling her large eyes, a smile playing on her sensuous lips, gap-toothed Omeji, Akanaba's first daughter asked her father:

"Father-that-begat-me, why does Achukwu usually perform at night? Doesn't he like the sun?" Father and daughter exchanged furtive glances. A big lump in Akanaba's throat threatened to betray his emotion for his beloved daughter that has metamorphosed from a mere paternal affection into lust. He quickly got hold of himself when he heard his first wife fondly called 'Omeyi's mother' shout out an order angrily at the girl, "Shut up. You, naughty girl!"

"Don't rebuke her, Omeyi's mother. She's only a child ..."

"A child indeed!" Omeyi's mother mockingly retorted, and continued, "At fifteen she is already a woman now. Very soon suitors will start besieging this house."

"You are always too harsh with her."

"Omeyi's father, I know Omeyi is your favorite child. But she is also a girl. In Apa women have nothing to do with the masquerade cult; let alone know about Achukwu, the night cult ..."

"I share your point there, but no sane man gives a scorpion to his child to play with."

Omeyi's mother, the eldest of Akanaba's wives undid her wrapper, retied it around her waist, rested her camwood-polished chin on her right palm and remained pensive for a while, then blurted out: "It is only a fish from the river that can be coiled. It isn't right for a girl to get used to prying into the affairs of men. One day she may see an abomination and the consequences will be irreparable. By then it will be too late."

"Omeyi's mother has spoken our minds." Akanaba's other four wives chorused in support of their most senior partner.

Not a man to be deterred by this show of feminine solidarity displayed by Acheme's mother, Elakeche's mother, Ogo's mother, and Onyeché's mother, Akanaba ignored his wives' counsel and continued his reminiscences in a deep baritone voice: "... throughout my adult life, I only remember three rare occasions that Achukwu came out in the day-time. The first was when the

wife of Ochepo, Son of Elaigwu from Ai-otache Lineage was delivered of three monster children at a go ...”

“Daddy, what happened?” Omeyi asked not unmindful of her mother’s reproachful look. Protected by her father’s presence, the young girl could afford to defy her mother’s myriad sanctions. Her father promptly replied:

“Achukwu took the three monster children away to his abode in the sacred groove...”

“And what happened to the mother of the children?” Omeyi probed further.

“... em ... em ... em ...em ..., she was sold into slavery.”

“But why?”

“Achukwu is a spirit. It leaves its domain in the spirit world to mend the broken bridge that links the living to the world of the dead. Once its job is completed, it returns to its retreat in the groove. No one knows what it does with its seasonal gifts.”

Outside, Achukwu with its advance party and escorts stopped at the deserted market place. They performed briefly and headed towards the compound under sanction by the empowered spirits of the land. On their trail the accompanying cacophony of musical symphonies and ritual chants numbed and shell-shocked non-initiates and their wards. The procession drew nearer to its target. At a hand signal from the lead initiate, the troopers raced ahead to take up strategic positions around the target totally encircling it and cutting it off from the rest of Apa. Achukwu and his escorts continued their slow-paced, deliberate advance.

Inside, a certain air of unease permeated Akanaba and his family’s hearts. Determined, Akanaba continued his recollections in a voice hardly above a whisper. Even Omeyi was not listening now. Her heart beat faster and faster. She merely heard her father’s words without making any sense of them: “... the second outing of Achukwu in day-time was when Adaji, the son of Otukpa from Ai-ono lineage surprised his pregnant wife with her lover Ochoche,

the Son of Idakwo, the blacksmith ... He beheaded both of them. He sought refuge in the evil forest ... Achukwu came out in the day-time and brought him from the forest to face justice. The last one was six moons after the great thunderstorm disaster that wrecked havoc in Apa ... Our neighbours, the rat-eaters-that-farm-for-us, declared war on our brothers at Odugbo. The night cult men came out to lead our warriors to ...”

Ritual chants of “Eka-Heji-Mo!” “Eka-Heji-Mo!!” “Eka-Heji-Mo!!!” broke out in and around Akanaba’s encircled compound.

Words froze in his throat. His heart sank. Omeyi let out a piercing, ear-splitting cry that was immediately stifled with a gag of blue-ribbon head-tie stuffed into her mouth by her mother.

Achukwu stormed Akanaba’s compound.

Trapped and defenceless, Akanaba looked about him, darted to his inner room, came back panting, sat down on a cylindrical-topped wooden stool, and hid the shame in his face in his open palms from his wives and children. The man wept. The thunderous din continued outside his compound unabated. Sharp, metallic objects clanged and clashed as the night cultmen engaged one another in ritual salute. Achukwu asked in a high-pitched tone: “Is there any man in this compound?”

Trapped, Akanaba remained tongue-tied. Defenceless, Akanaba awaited his fate with bated breath. He knew within him that however gifted a swimmer might be, he could not conquer a raging sea-wave when both his hands and legs were tied. Akanaba knew that he had poisoned the land. What beauty? What lust can push a man to desire his own daughter, his own seed?

The eventful day came to Akanaba’s mind. It was an Ede market day, three moons before the last Ej’ Alekwu festival. He left to work on his farm alone as the rest of his household observed the market day as work-free. Exhausted and bone tired, he went to

the farm shed to have a rest. He soon dozed off after a meal of roasted yams spiced with red pepper ...

The members of Akanaba's family were enjoying a delicious meal of pounded yam with egusi soup. Akanaba picked one big lump of meat from his earthenware soup bowl and called out:

"Omeyi! come and take." His favourite daughter promptly stood up, darted to her father's side, took the choice cooked piece of antelope flesh from him, regained her seat and munched it voraciously to the envy of the other children. Omeyi left a sweet perfume around Akanaba's sitting place. He gazed at her as she walked away. He noticed that his erstwhile small child was fast becoming a young woman. Soon suitors will come calling. He inhaled the enchanting perfume left behind by the disappearing silhouette. His manhood stirred. He quickly banished the abomination from his mind. He stood up from his seat to fetch his tobacco pipe from his inner room. He tripped on a banana peel, plunged forward headlong and crashed to the ground measuring his full six-foot height. Akanaba got up from the ground. Sleep vanished from his eyes. He saw Omeyi standing. Smiling, she said, "Father you fell off because the camp bed is too small." She drew closer and dusted her father's body.

"When did you come to the farm?" Akanaba asked, sleepily wiping his eyes with the back of his left palm.

"I brought you gruel," Omeyi replied sitting on the wooden camp bed beside her father and smiled. "When I came to the farm shed, I noticed that you were asleep. I then decided to let you rest awhile but hardly had I sat down than you fell off the bed," she planted a peck on her father's cheek and said: "Father you must have been having a nightmare". Akanaba turned another cheek. His daughter planted a second innocent kiss. Akanaba was roused. Then he lost his head. Satan created evil desires in ten equal parts and handed nine to women. Akanaba saw the nine parts of desire in

his young daughter. He kissed her fully on the lips. Omeyi shivered as sweet little thrills ran through her body. The nipples of her young sturdy breasts stood on end as they pressed against her father's hairy chest. The young girl moaned softly. Akanaba tucked a hand inside Omeyi's pant. She struggled feebly. Momentarily, they were locked in a tight, passionate embrace. They collapsed on the wooden bed. She offered no resistance, neither did she shout for help. He undressed rapidly, did same to Omeyi and positioned himself on top of her. She jerked wildly when their bodies made contact. She let out a loud wail when the seed that gave her life entered her. Three sharp pains were followed by rosebuds of pleasure. She moaned softly as Akanaba pounded her. His eyes were closed.

Exhausted, father and daughter lay side by side. It became a regular affair each time that they were alone. They pledged to keep their secret. But now everything has burst open. The trees in the land must have betrayed them. They all have ears. The trees swaying in the wind seemed to say to him "Akanaba! titled elder of the land, remember the laws of the land. A poisoned seed cannot grow in the land. The Chief Marksman of the land has turned its chief despoiler." The voice of the trees tormented him still. His heart sank deeper. He knew he must drown. "Then drown! Poisonous Seed!" Mocked the trees. A drowning sailor, his innermost heart wailed: I don't know why the rains fall so often upon my wet brows unlike the sheltered in the homely embrace of filial love. I don't know why I row with bare hands in this scorching sun chained to earth-bound tides of the maze of life's whirligig. Morn of all creation! Unbound these chains! Quench this thirst! My famished flesh aches! My lonesome soul bleeds! And beyond the crest of the hill all is mute and still.

Three sharp objects thrown at his door in quick succession brought Akanaba back from his reverie. The lead night masquerade then pointedly accused him: "Akanaba of Apa! Son of my

mother's womb. Adehi Ogwuche! When the traveller with insatiable eyes sees a strange creature he remains tongue-tied. But not I Achukwu! Not I! When Akoto, the nocturnal bush rat suddenly emerges in broad daylight, Achukwu speaks ... when our sole fisherman drowns, Achukwu speaks ... when a practised night hunter loses his way, Achukwu speaks ... when a master tapster falls off a palm tree, Achukwu speaks ... when an old man desires his own seed, frightened women and children feign ignorance ... Not I Achukwu! Not I! Proud first-born of Ogwuchekwo, the eldest son of Idu, Father-that-begat-us-all in Apa. Akanaba what is this story behind the news? Apa is thirsty. Quench her thirst with water which only you and your poisoned seed, Omeyi can provide. No suitor crossed your threshold with gifts yet your daughter's womb is nurturing a seed that poisons the land ..."

Akanaba took one last glance at the prostrate, inert body of his daughter Omeyi, darted across to his room, picked one viper poison-tipped arrow from its quiver and struck himself in the chest. The poison acted very swiftly.

Many millet moons afterwards, the story of the poisoned seed, and Akanaba's suicide became a song among the initiates of the land.

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*IRO AGHEDO***Eclipse of a Nation**

We live on the river's bank
Dirt-scales linger on us
Defying our ebbing spittle

Our oily elixir fertilizes
The spillage of our heated blood
And makes heath of our verdant land

Doves are now hunted causelessly
Norms having been entombed
In this vicinity of death

My country is a giant fly
Trapped in the gluey web
Of a death-dealing soldiery

Daily, daily our unhallowed fasting is enkindled
The macabre dance renewed
Oh! will the sun rise again?

*EMEKA AGBAYI***No Symphonies**

there are no symphonies in the air
there are no symphonies here

no whispering palms
no whistling pines

no sunshine

rivers of blood
showers of bile
descent of shrapnel
darkness profuse
these only

no symphonies

only discordant, haunted voices of penury
wondering out loud what went wrong
in the equation of their lives

there are no symphonies in the air
there are no symphonies here

no whispering palms
no whistling pines

no sunshine

no jingling of coins portending full stomach
no ruffling of currencies threatening relishes
no splash of running waters carrying men's laughers

only rivers of blood
splashing blood-curdling shrieks of drowning men
on deserted shores

... our life is one long shriek from horrors unnameable

there are no symphonies in the air
there are no symphonies here

which symphony when nights are keyed up with gun-shots
and gun-powder tickles children to a death-sneeze
and caskets wander the streets in search of men

there are no symphonies here

*OBAFEMI ILESANMI***Remembering Ted Kayode Adams (1943 - 1969)**

He marches in with youthful strides
And with a crooked brush in his hand
He dares to paint the discordant colours
Of our landscape
Into harmonious crimson
But the earth won't let him.

Though trapped in a mixed grill
Of naivety and bravado
Still he poises to plough
The undulating terrain
Putting into shibboleth
Its anthills of tribes and creed
But the ants won't let him.

He glides through littoral
To raise the values
Of the wandering seashells
Beyond the glitter of gold and silver
Still the ocean won't let him.

Then in a grip of perplexity
Heswaggers out from the classroom
Away from his teachers' admonition
Not with his pen and paper
But daggers and bayonets
To pierce through the carapace
Of ethnic pretensions
That envelope the psyche

Of adherents and adversaries.

But they abandon him
Like ashes from a bonfire
In a loonybin
To trade not only with his sanity
But his lonely ideals
They leave him with nothing
But to catch up
With his independence and martyrdom
On the surface of the sea.

The Area Boys

The new brats are in town.
The tramps on the walk,
Begging and extorting
Manacled the tranquillity
Of our days.

Denizens of the downtown ghetto
Holders of a blighted today
Combing and searching
For the big bright lights
Of their morrow's wishes,
Propped with drugs and daggers.

But your life is at
The brink of the harmattan's solstice
When the sundown
Robs the sunrise
Of its neon lights

Protection racketeers,
There is no solace
In this brigand suburbia
Botched with wants and wine
It is time to hanker
For respite
At another place and another day.

The Zest in the Horizon

What is the sunflower's misdeeds
That the bees
Should separate it
From its nectar
In the heat of the moment

But every denial we know
Emits its own benediction
Hence we should masticate
This experience in love

It is a rung
One has to negotiate
In order not to be
Judged wrong.

It is a desultory footpath
One has to glide through gingerly
In order not to miss
The zest sprawling in
The horizon.

CHINYERE L. NGONEBU

A Contrastive Analysis of Significant Linguistic Strategies in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Things Fall Apart, Achebe's first novel, was published in 1958. That was the period when Africa was regarded as a dark continent - a world without culture, history or civilization; a world of savages and barbarians; a world in desperate need for deliverance. It was against these misconceptions that *Things Fall Apart* was written. In 'The Novelist as Teacher,' Achebe summarizes his aim in writing the novel:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past, with all its imperfections, was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.¹

Consequently, the novel came to fill that gap the West had imposed in the history of Africa. Thus, the novel set about portraying the African in his own world. In this world, we see that Africans are a people with cultural values, and well organised political and legal systems. They equally practised a religion indigenous to them.

Things Fall Apart is a rural novel about life in pre-colonial Igbo community. The main character (Okonkwo) is a strong, hardworking man of substance. It is through him that Achebe explores the communal ethics of this tribal setting and the power of this tribal community to maintain a unified vision of life and values. Okonkwo is a self-made man who begins life in a hard way. His father, Unoka, was a drunken, irresponsible, lazy man, who was a poor model for his son (Okonkwo).

Okonkwo never inherited anything from his father. His first barn was built through share cropping - a slow and tasking way of building up one's barn.

However, Okonkwo struggles against all difficulties, and, through hardwork, and 'solid personal achievement', becomes a successful man. Unfortunately, he gets dogged by tragedy. First, he is exiled for seven years for accidentally killing a clansman, and all his property is burnt to placate the earth goddess. Then, while on exile, his son, Nwoye leaves home and joins the Christians. On his return from exile, Okonkwo becomes disillusioned over his people's complacent attitude towards Christianity. In the end, he commits suicide after killing the white man's messenger and discovering that his clansmen are not eager to join him in destroying the rest of the foreign agents.

Anthills of the Savannah, on the other hand, falls within post-independence era. Now, African writers have turned their attention to pertinent issues facing the new and developing nation. Achebe again supports this change:

Most of the Africans are now politically free. A new situation has thus arisen. One of the writer's main functions has always been to expose and attack injustice. Should we keep at the old theme of racial injustice (sore as it is) when new injustices have sprouted around us. I think not.²

With this philosophy in mind, Achebe sets out to write *Anthills of the Savannah*. Unlike *Things Fall Apart*, *Anthills* is a cosmopolitan novel, set in a post-colonial African country, which, in the words of the President, is 'a backward West African State called Kangan ...'³ And unlike *Things Fall Apart* in which the author describes a traditional community on the verge of change, *Anthills* explores the failures of contemporary African leaders.

Kangan is a society faced with tragedy. On the apex of this ineptitude is His Excellency, the President, Sam, who arrogates to himself absolute power and authority and who spits out fire on his

subjects. In the end, he becomes alienated from the masses and turns a dictator after the likes of Emperor Bokassa of Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants*. Eventually, anarchy erupts and the President and some principal characters in the circle of leadership, Chris and Ikem, are decimated.

Hence, while *Things Fall Apart* extols traditional values, *Anthills* condemns the unfortunate state of contemporary Africa, criticises the normless, selfish, and individualistic society of Kangan, and denounces the corrupt, irrational leadership exhibited in this fictional African state.

This glaring difference in subject matter between the two novels marks the difference in their styles and techniques. There are not only dissimilarities in setting, point of view, and narrative pattern, but also in the choice of linguistic structures. This paper will only discuss the significant linguistic strategies in the two novels and show how they embody the writer's visions and ideological contentions. It is not the intention of this work, however, to examine every bit of language patterning that appear in the novels. The focus is just on those configurations that show profound thematic significance.

The strength of *Things Fall Apart* lies in its linguistic simplicity. The novel is permeated with concrete, specific and homely every day words. The words are mainly short, crisp, and picturesque; precise but not pedantic; common without vulgarity; neither diffident nor ostentatious. Every word is at home, taking its place to support the others and to portray the world and culture of this simple African community.

A few illustrations from the novel exposes this brief, direct, and lucid choice of linguistic structures:

As night fell, burning torches were set on wooden tripods and the young men raised a song. The elders sat in a big circle and the singers went round singing each man's praise as they come before him. Some

were great farmers, some were orators who spoke for the clan; Okonkwo was the greatest wrestler and warrior alive.⁴

The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath. Amalinze was a witty craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water. Every nerve and every muscle stood out on their arms, on their backs and their thighs, and one almost heard them stretching to breaking point. In the end Okonkwo threw the cat (p.3).

The story of Okonkwo, like the excerpts above, is explored in the same vigorous manner. The reader is brought into the world of Umuofia and easily visualizes every scene. Achebe also uses these forms of words to imprint in his readers' minds something of the life and habits of these rural people.

From the first passage above we get the following simple structures:

night fell
burning torches
wooden tripods
young men
elders
farmers
singers
clan
warrior

The second passage provides also numerous Anglo-Saxon terms:

drums
flutes
fish ... water
thighs
cat
arms
breath
witty ... craftsman
back

From this class of words we can deduce that Achebe is writing with an intense desire to explain clearly and effectively and to show with no complexity or obscurity all he envisages in this pre-colonial society. He uses no word that will becloud the reader's perception of Umuofia. Rarely do we see such polysyllabic constructions as occur in the latest novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*. Consequently, the readers have a clear picture of African life and tradition, and so grasp fully and vividly the significance of Igbo civilization. The simplicity of linguistic items in *Things Fall Apart*, therefore, is a major means of improving clarity in communication and forcefulness of appeal.

In *Anthills*, however, the classes of words are different. There are predominantly complex polysyllabic terms, longwinding verbose constructions, political clichés, modern dogma, obstructive prepositions. Ikem's meditation, as he calls it, is essentially a form of verbosity. His ideas are clothed in superfluous wrappings of words and expressions. Like those of the President, they are pompous and inflated; long, elaborate, and far-fetched.

Hear him:

I see too much parroting, too much regurgitating of half digested radical rhetoric ... When you have rid yourselves of these things then your potentiality for assisting and directing this nation will be quadrupled (p.161).

In Ikem's speech above, we can identify many compound/Latinate constructions:

regurgitating
half digested radical rhetoric
potentiality
quadrupled

These linguistic terms are not negative in sense. Neither are they derogatory, nor better or worse than those of the earlier novels. Rather, every writer finds the most appropriate means of exploring his creative vision. I.T.K. Egonu captures this fact thus:

... the real habitat for literature is found not in the use of writing but rather in the aesthetic use of words and language. This means that the writer makes a conscious and deliberate choice and arrangement of both words and imagery in order to produce certain effects on the reader not only by *what is said* but also by *how it is said*.⁵

Raymond Chapman further asserts this point when he says that writers "manipulate language to make it contain a unique series of experiences and interpretations."⁶

In *Anthills*, Achebe manipulates the language to achieve distinct effects: to reflect the modern, sophisticated, chirographic society of Kangan, to express the discouraging disillusionment in the land, and to underline the pitiable state of affairs in this hopelessly governed state. *Anthills* deals with the delicate issues of power tussle and intellectual conflict. It is a world of confusion, turbulence, and anxiety - an unhappy world, a world divided against itself, filled with fear, uncertainty, heartache, and frustration. Such complex issues elicit from the writer a complex and intricate style. Hence, the novel is completely drained of the simplicity and naturalness that characterise *Things Fall Apart*.

Just as the choice of linguistic items in the two novels differs so do the sentence patterns. In *Things Fall Apart* the syntactic sequence is mostly lucid and forcible. Achebe presents his story with "ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes", to borrow the imaginative expression of W. Strunk & J. White, (1980). The passages deal in particulars and report the details that matter. What is remarkable is that the language is not only definite and concrete, but that the details are also given with such preciseness and vigour that the reader has almost the sense of inhabiting Umuofia during the pre-colonial days. Through this means, the reader easily reaches the centre of the writer's creative consciousness.

The address of the one handed spirit at Ezeudu's funeral is presented in a beautiful lyrically patterned sequence:

Ezeudu! he called in his guttural voice. If you had been poor in your last life I would have asked you to be rich when you come again. But you were rich. If you had been coward, I would have asked you to bring courage. But you were a fearless warrior. If you had died young I would have asked you to get life. But you lived long (p.36).

The structural parallelism of the passage with the emotional intensity it exudes is striking. There are series of similar sentences beginning with "If you had been ..." concluded with "I would have asked you to be ..." while another set provides a wonderful balance of structure, "But you were ..." The result of this rhythmical prose is marvellous. A reading of the passage aloud produces an effect akin to that of poetry. A reading aloud also makes another point: the extraordinarily beautiful way Achebe presents those events that make up the African cosmos.

Achebe employs different linguistic *cum* syntactic patterns in *Anthills*. Because the major characters are literate, the vocabulary is wide and diverse. The stylized writings, convoluted and lengthy speeches, embedded sentences, logical but complicated reasoning patterns are what should be expected from educated Africans - especially from politicians. And each underlines the despair that pervades the society of Kangan.

When Beatrice was coming back from the Presidential Guest House, Abichi lake,

What passed through her mind and flowed through her senses ... could not be assigned a simple name. It was more complex than the successions of hot and cold flushes of malaria. Indignation, humiliation, outrage, sorrow, pity, anger, vindictiveness, and other less identifiable emotions swept back and forth through her ... hitting shallow bottom of shoreline, exploding in white foam and flowing back (p.107).

Beatrice's mind is in a tumult over the venality and moral turpitude of the so called guardians of the nation. Her silent cry of protest at such moral sterility cannot be summed up in one word. Her feelings are as complex as the problem itself. It is a painful and

shocking experience which cannot be summed up in one word. Hence, she gives vent to profuse syntactic repetition:

Indignation
humiliation
outrage
sorrow
pity
anger
vindictiveness

Achebe, in the words of H.G. Widdowson, is "struggling to devise patterns of language which will bestow upon the linguistic items concerned just those values which will convey 'his' personal vision."⁷ This vision is the stark realization of the social and moral decadence of the leaders of Kangan - a realization that heightens Beatrice's bitterness and frustration over the decadent state of her country.

Yet these lexical items do not succeed in capturing Beatrice's state of mind. Her confused emotions

swept back and forth
hitting ... bottom of shoreline
exploding in white foam ...
flowing back ... (p. 107)

The confusion continues as Beatrice jolts between the present and the past. She is lost in the midst of two worlds uncertain of time:

last night now seemed far away, like some-thing remembered from a long and turbulent dream. Last night? It wasn't last night. It was this same night, this night. It was still Saturday night ... It wasn't light yet (p. 107).

The shock she got at Abichi Lake seems to have blurred her memory. This momentary amnesia is not surprising for a warped society only breeds warped feelings, anxieties and uncertainties.

In further exploring the issue of corrupt leadership in Kangan, the novelist employs syntactic relaxation much of which

embody cryptic meanings. One particular instance of this is the personification of *Power* in Chapter eight: "Power rampaged through our world naked" and "power's rude waist." By ascribing to 'power' the qualities of 'devastation' and 'heartlessness', Achebe exposes the tyrannous exploits of the bad government of Kangan. Power becomes not a means of social development, but a means to personal aggrandizement and monetary gains. Government itself becomes a chessboard of secret deals, graft, immorality, deception and dishonesty. Devoid of any ethic or guiding principles, the Kangan leader gradually degenerates into the Frankenstein monster spreading fear all around and threatening to destroy the entire nation. Such are the features personified in the Kangan leadership.

In *Things Fall Apart* there are no similar violations of language to represent defects either in the social milieu or in the concept of government. In a world where emphasis is placed on just conduct and discipline, injustice and corruption do not triumph. It is an irrational situation that gives rise to aberrant linguistic constructions. Deviation from linguistic conventions seems suitable in the description of a society that is robbed of truth and honesty.

A more striking linguistic strategy in *Things Fall Apart* and one that is more thematically significant is the interpolation of indigenous words and expressions within English constructions. At almost every page of the novel one comes across such direct renderings as *Ogbanje*, (p.58) *Inyanga*, *Obi*, *Chi* (p.19) *Ozo*, *Agbala do-o-o*, *Umuofia Kwenu*. *Yaa* (p.8). Besides giving the work an African touch, these local terms enable the reader - especially the foreign ones - to have a better grasp of the culture under exposition.

More than this, however, is that some of these local appositions have an aura of mysticism. There is no English word that can adequately translate such words, and using their English

equivalents will merely divest them of the spirituality and traditional connotation they are associated with. *Egwugwu* (p.49), for instance, is more than just a masquerade. It is the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan. It also represents the spirits of the ancestors. Being sacred, it is held in awe and in respect by all; not spoken of in human terms; and not touched by women and by the uninitiated. Replacing the word with 'masquerade' or even with 'ancestral spirit' will obscure these salient attributes and reduce the centre of the people's belief to child's play.

Similar to interpolation is the profuse use of hyphenated compounds which serve as structures of modification. A few of these appositives are:

"I am dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth";

"I am fire-that-burns-without-faggots";

"I am one-who-kills-a-man when his life is sweetest" (p.60).

Through these impositions, characters, emotions, and situations are more clearly delineated. The speech pattern of the society in the narrative prose is also portrayed. Proudly African and believing that his audience should share his pride, Achebe is concerned with portraying, with all the power at his command, the beauty and rhythm of African language. Also, since this is a rural community, the most successful means of appealing to its imagination and sensibility will be the use of patterns that lie closest to traditional modes and practices. Achebe himself supports this assertion when he says that:

The English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.⁸

In another context, Achebe comments that

the African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language ... He should aim at



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