

Folkloric Imagery and Revolutionary Vision in Kofi Anyidoho's *A Harvest of Our Dreams: With Elegy for the Revolution*

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Folklore is one of the core cultural values in traditional societies and writers who are conscious of its aesthetic relevance deploy it in their creative works. Folktale elicits imagery which underscores the relationship of humanity with nature and mythical elements. Writers exploit this relationship to establish traditionalism and pursue revolutionary vision in their works. Anyidoho uses his affiliation to, and understanding of, the Ewe cultural (one of the traditional societies in Ghana) milieu to comment on issues that are germane to the existence of the people in A Harvest of Our Dreams: With Elegy for the Revolution. This paper, through examination of some of the poems in the collection with Raymond Williams's Cultural Materialism revealed that the poet, with poetic devices, uses folklore and traditional images to advocate for revolution in his society. The paper comes to the conclusion that the poems in the collection are replete with folklore and traditional imagery, which the poet deploys with poetic essence to satirise failings in his society.

Keywords

Tradition; society; folklore; poetry; satire; culture; revolution

Introduction

African writers draw their materials from traditional society, consequently, they replicate traditional elements like folklore, mythology, and other lore in their works to project the cultural essence of society to their readers. On account of this, African writers equally scrutinise the sociocultural milieu with the aim of sensitising the people towards abhorrent practices in society. The poems of Kofi Anyidoho in the collection contain traditional elements, which are

explored for social revolution through satirisation. The poet through symbols, metaphor, euphemism, invective and other poetic devices presents cultural values, and traditional aesthetics to address a number of germane issues in society. Ojaide observes the aestheticism of African traditional elements and submits that "... folktales, proverbs, myths, and legends, all parts of the rich African folklore, are very much alive and they infuse modern African literature with motifs, themes, characters, and techniques" (8).

Anyidoho emphasises the preeminence of traditional African life through some of the titles of the poems (Blewuu, Nunya Dada) and traditional practices which are exploited to give picturesque images in contemporary poetry. So, the readers of Anyidoho's poems are treated to the dual presentation of traditionalism and modernity as folklore, and the mores and norms of the people are presented with poetic essence. This combination enables readers to be educated about traditional practices as they explore the poetic elements deployed to achieve satire in the poems.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Materialism is the adopted theoretical framework for this paper. Cultural Materialism is a theoretical framework and research method for examining the relationships between the physical and economic aspects of production. It also explores the values, beliefs, and worldviews that predominate a society. The concept is rooted in Marxist theory and popular in anthropology, sociology, and the field of cultural studies.

According to the cultural materialists, culture is not simply a reflection of the economic and political system and it cannot be independent of it. This position of the cultural materialists aligns them with Marxism. Cultural Materialism involves using the past to "read" the present, revealing the politics of our own society by what we choose to emphasise or suppress of the past.

Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism took aim at how cultural products relate to a class-based system of domination and oppression. Williams devised his theory of Cultural Materialism using preexisting critiques of the relationship between culture and power. Williams asserted that culture itself is a productive process, meaning it gives rise to the intangibles, including ideas, assumptions, and social relations, that exist in societies. His theory of Cultural Materialism holds that culture is part of the larger process of how class systems are made

and foster social inequity. Cultures play these roles through the promotion of widely held values, assumptions, and worldviews and the marginalisation of those who do not fit the mainstream mould. Williams' theory of Cultural Materialism includes racial inequalities and their connection to culture. The concept has also been broadened to examine disparities related to gender, sexuality, and nationality, among others. By using Cultural Materialism as a research method, sociologists can produce a critical understanding of the values, beliefs, and worldviews of a period through close study of cultural products. They can also discern how these values connect to social structure, trends, and problems. Cultural Materialists situate a text with the political situation of the critic's contemporary world.

Cultural Materialists also believe in the textuality of history and the historicity of texts; they are aware of the political agendas of the text and hence are alert to the ways in which power exerts itself through implicit workings of ideology within the text. While they believe that New Historicists generate apolitical readings, in which there is no question of agency on the part of the marginalised, Cultural Materialists are consciously political, and aim at transforming the social order; as they seek readings that focus on the marginalised and the exploited, and also look at the possibilities of subversion and resistance in both the text and the interpretive act. They are conscious of the subversive potential of literature for subcultural resistance and hence propose "dissident reading", which interrogates the hidden political agenda and power struggles within a text.

Since the postulation of Cultural Materialism hinges on the notion that every sense of social life, including culture, economy and commerce, has been redefined by the overwhelming blow of capitalist orientation, the position of this paper cannot be separated from the materialist conviction because the capacity of capitalism binds on every institution. Relevant in this study is the examination of social doldrums, as portrayed in Anyidodo's *A Harvest of Our Dreams: With Elegy for the Revolution* (1984) via the social realist viewpoint. No satirical exploration or revolutionary survey of class conflict will be devoid of investigating through a dialectical method. So, it is from the angle of this orientation that the researcher critiques the text. It is on this ground that Cultural Materialism is deployed for analysis in this study. The theory becomes effective because it queries the canonical bourgeoisie order, and strives for social reformation and the quest for a progressive system in Anyidoho's *A Harvest of Our Dreams: With Elegy for the Revolution*.

Traditionalism as Fulcrum for Poetic Essence in *A Harvest of Our Dreams: With Elegy for the Revolution*

In the collection, Anyidoho uses traditional elements to comment on a number of issues in society such that readers of his poems are able to experience how the poet deploys African traditional imagery to address societal problems. In the poems, the poet uses cultural practices with underlying poetic essence to address thematic preoccupation of the poems. In “My Last Testament”, Anyidoho mourns the demise of a celebrated dancer Adonu Adokli, whose death, the poet announces euphemistically as “...so you’ve gone the way of flesh”. Liszka (1990), cited in Jing-Schmidt (2021), avers that “euphemism is a strategy of placing topics associated with intense negative effect”. The poet avoids using the word “death” which connotes fear and instead uses a clause in combination with an Apostrophe and euphemism to infer the same meaning as Death but in a more subtle manner. This deployment enhances the aesthetic essence of the poem.

Similarly, through Apostrophe, the speaking voice, reveals the sudden transition of the dancer, who is said to have “danced on heels in a backwards loop” which is one of the salient beliefs in some African societies that the dead, upon transition to the spiritual realm walk backward. The poem symbolically represents the grave as “the narrow termite home” which the skilful dancer characteristically loops into. The poet picturesquely presents the dancer as having energetically transited to the spiritual world. Anyidoho’s imagistic representation of traditional art is in tandem with the postulation of (Sekoni 143) that “Cognitive satisfaction refers mainly to the ability of the narrator/performer to relate individual images to a theme or a comment on a specific aspect of human behaviour in his community”.

Anyidoho continues his symbolic representation of his message in the poem in the second stanza through his reference to the dashed hope of the people who had relied on the elite. The poet paints a picture of the hopelessness of the people who are traumatised as a result of disappointment evoked by unfulfilled ambition.

The dreams we placed among the thorns
are still unhatched
those debts we owe our orphan clan
are yet unpaid
A Harvest of Our Dreams (59)

The poet gives the notion of being the people's spokesperson through his use of the first-person plural pronoun "we". He is part of the people's struggles and he represents their hopes and aspiration as "the dreams" which they have presented before the elite "the thorns". The poet presents the disappointment of the people with the traditional (agricultural) term of "unhatched" (dream) thus emphasising the desolation of the people as a result of their unfulfilled aspiration. The refrain:

Whatever befalls the leopard in his ambush
The panther could not betray the spirit of the hunt

uses traditional or folkloric imagery to underscore the essence of the people's togetherness despite their misfortune and the need for them to be steadfast in the pursuit of their goals. The people are encouraged to persist in their quest for good fortune despite the unpredictable calamity that might thwart their struggle (hunt). The leopard and the panther belong to the cat family and the symbolic essence emphasises the common relationship between the animals which the poet likens to the togetherness of the people.

Anyidoho presents picturesque imagery of the climatic change in traditional society in the poem "Singer Bird". The poet, through irony reveals the contrasting disposition of the natural objects with the prevailing atmospheric condition in the traditional agrarian society. The Singer Bird which naturally radiates happiness visits the landscapes during the dry season (which usually brings drought in its wake) to herald beatitudes to sagging fields of corn:

The Singer Bird
comes in the wake of droughts
spreading million beatitudes
over drooping fields of corn

The ironic situation in the poem corresponds to the function of irony as Sabharwal notes that it "spices up a literary work by adding unexpected twists and allowing the reader to become more involved ...". Anyidoho makes the poem more picturesque as the readers see the extraordinary prowess of the Singer Bird among the traditional people. The poet in the second stanza through personification reveals the differing disposition of nature as the field of corn becomes disillusioned and helpless on account of the "unfriendly" weather which the agricultural objects are experiencing. The beauty of this

presentation is the symbolic representation of the maize silks as beards, the corn seed is presented with the phrase “dying babies” while the expected rain is ironically presented as “the tears” brought upon the world.

They stand perplexed. These corn
with withered beards and dying babies
on their back nodding heads in solemn fear
for ancient skies with bone fingers
that bring the tears upon our old beleaguered world
A Harvest of Our Dreams (26)

In Apostrophic rendering, Anyidoho portrays the recourse of traditional society to heathen practice of making sacrifice to the gods and goddesses for appeasement on account of a drought. In this sense, the Singer Bird is metaphorically referred to as the High Priest, a mediator, which is expected to intercede for the land in order to have rainfall. The poet expresses his frustration at the indifference of the Singer Bird (High Priest) to the plight of the withering corn and rebukes it thus: “You lean High Priest in robes of coloured plumes”, the chastisement of the Singer Bird (High Priest) is as a result of its seemingly happy disposition at a time its service is required to appease the god of rain in the sky. He thereafter orders the joyous bird to dance away in order to herald rain that will invigorate the land. The persona in this poem demonstrates activism and zeal for revolutionary change in the society which is achieved through a challenge to the powers that be in society. Anyidoho uses folklore and traditional elements in this poem to reveal traditional practice and at the same time sensitises the people on the need for revolutionary struggle to demand for a renewed state of affairs in the society. This is in line with Bamidele that: “Oral poetry offers us a lot of folkloristic elements. These elements range from the mystical to the historical and sometimes they fire the imagination to the level of real happenings ...” (178), the poet’s deployment of traditional practice in the poem demonstrates his knowledge of the mores of his people which he exploits to offer them recourse in their challenging moment.

Folkloric Invective and Satirical Exposition in *A Harvest of Our Dreams*

Invective is an element of satire that writers make recourse to, in order to express their frustration with the state of affairs in their societies. Edley aptly emphasises the importance of invective as a means to achieving satire in the submission that:

Invective is an age-old literary technique used by poets, playwrights and authors to lambast or criticize others, using the power of words to offer a window into one's true feelings about another, often with contempt or with cynicism. For the most part, invective is used in both prose and poetry to malign others and express negative emotion, weaponised with sarcasm and sardonic flair, which means it has frequently been used to denounce political or public figures in works of satire for thousands of years.

Anyidoho in a number of poems in the collection uses the tone of a traditional minstrel to give vent to his display of local practices through the use of invective to satirise persons and institutions in his society. In the poem, "Awoyo", Anyidoho, in Apostrophic form, deploys invective to lampoon Awoyo, who is deemed to have crossed his path. He says:

Awoyo I am not the whore's daughter like you
 Your mother went from this village to that village
 sitting babies all along her path across the clan.
 Did she ever suggest to you
 who your papa could have been?
A Harvest of Our Dreams (19)

The persona insinuates that the addressee is a bastard as a result of her mother's promiscuous life. This manner of altercation is reminiscence of traditional society's way of censoring one another in order to ensure that the moral state of the society is protected.

They say the day she died the elders sighed
 and poured a long libation on her grave
 praying her soul to come next time somewhat reformed.
A Harvest of Our Dreams (19)

Every individual's conduct has a telling impact on the well-being of the society hence social renegades like the addressee's mother are ostracised in life and traditional rites performed on their graves in order to "sterilise" it, so that it will not smear the society. In the invective, the poet reveals the communal essence of the traditional society which is that every individual's conduct is monitored to ensure conformity with the norms and value system. Soyinka expresses the view that, in African society humanity "exist(ed) within a cosmic totality, did possess a consciousness in which his own earth being, his gravity-bound apprehension of self, was inseparable from the entire cosmic phenomenon" (3) hence the society sees the addressee's mother as having gone beyond the limit of decency in her earthly existence and as a result she should not be mourned rather, her grave should be cleansed for renewal.

Usually, altercations leading to invective in traditional society may not manifest from actual or real occurrence as the poem "Taflatse" reflects. It may be hinged on the need to settle scores between two estranged persons as they attempt to outdo each other in open attacks. The disagreement between the Persona, Taflatse, and a villager, Sadzi reflects how individuals in traditional societies monitor one another to ensure that the norms of the society are not violated. To this end, Taflatse disapproves of Sadzi's attempt to smear his reputation and as a result he addresses his adversary thus:

I vowed I would not offend the ears of decent folk
 But now, Sadzi, you've fed my thoughts with gall
 My song will be the great whirlwind
 that snatches your only decent cloth
 sells your shame to inner thoughts of men
 The devil's oath you swore
 to defame my name
 undo the fame I wove around my neck
 with years of honest toil
A Harvest of Our Dreams (77)

The persona, through invective, reiterates his resolve to tarnish the reputation of Sadzi for his effrontery in attacking his personality. The duo reports each other to the society which censors the conduct of everyone to ensure that it conforms with acceptable standard hence, Taflatse reacts to Sadzi's hitherto campaign of calumny against him with equal venom. The former's action portrays the individual's resolve in traditional society to go all out

to defend his/her personality and in doing that he/she exposes the latter's misdemeanour:

This dawn I met a young virgin in
 tears, calling the clan to come witness her
 woe, O Sadzi, Sadzi Dzisavi, to whose
 dog did you give your
 shame, you dare attempt a
 rape in a public
 lavatory?

A Harvest of Our Dreams (77)

Taflatse's diatribe against Sadzi may not be hinged on a real event but an attempt to settle a score with the latter necessitates the former inventing tales aimed at damaging the personality of the former. This kind of invective is common in traditional society where individuals make self-conscious efforts to exonerate themselves from perceived wrongdoing and hit out at their adversaries.

Politics engages the attention of literary writers as a result of the direct bearing the actions of politicians have on the people. Satirical works access and/or attack political office holders on account of their performance in order to call them to order. Invective as an element of satire is deployed in this collection to upbraid politicians' naivety, insensitivity, and maladministration.

The world our world is not worth dying for
 a life is dearer than a wreath of tears
 a nation may lay for a soul
 All this talk of redeemers and sacrifice
 of souls is a trap by rogues
 a mesh to ensnare unwary souls

A Harvest of Our Dreams (74)

The persona is dissatisfied with the state of affairs in his country and has come to the conclusion that the nation is doomed and that the common people should not be so passionate to attempt to die for it. Through the use of invective, the poet represents the leaders as "rogues" due to their failed promises and inability to develop the country. The invective emphasises the frustration of the poet and the mass of the people he represents. He calls the politicians

“rogues” as a result of their failed promises of bringing about desired change in the life of the people. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* describes a rogue as “a scoundrel, rascal or unprincipled, deceitful, and unreliable person”. The conduct of politicians in some African societies upholds Anyidoho’s assertion of their dishonourable status.

Anyidoho equally uses invective against overzealous public servants who do not accord the necessary respect to the citizenry on whose account they were employed. He recounts his experience at a public place where public workers failed to give him the needed attention when he attempted to make a presentation. He says:

I pulled out my birthday card
They said it had no official signature
I swear ma papa and ma mama born me
Long long before they born them ‘lectoral commissioner
They laughed. Yes, those sons of thugs and whores
A Harvest of Our Dreams (9)

Anyidoho rendered lines three and four in pidgin English “I swear ma papa and ma mama born me/ Long long before they born them ‘lectoral commissioner” which is the language of interaction among the common folk in a number of societies in West Africa. The poet uses the expression to reiterate the informal approach he deployed when he visited a public place. The essence of using the language is to establish a mutual relationship with the public officers in order to make them have a positive disposition to his request but ironically the officers refused to be swayed towards giving him the needed courtesy. The hostile treatment meted out to the speaking voice makes him resort to the use of invective “Yes, those sons of thugs and whores” which is an attestation that invective comes about on account of registering one’s dissatisfaction to person(s) and institutions. The quintessence of the invective against the public officers is borne out of the resolve of the persona to expose and satirise them in order to make the society have unhindered access to its public office. Anyidoho, thus, desires to make the public officers answerable for their offences.

However, the underlying tone in the lines is humour which resonates whenever pidgin English is deployed in conversation. Since humour is one of the essential elements of satire, its deployment in the lines further emphasises

the satiric intent of the lines and enables the poet to achieve his aim of castigating the renegades of the society.

Euphemism and Cultural Preservation in *A Harvest of Our Dreams*

Traditional societies like other cultures have sensitive social practices which are represented in mild expressions. It is on account of this development that a poetic device like euphemism is deployed in conversations in order to protect such values, norms, and nuances. Speakers and writers have telepathic understanding of the representation of the obscene reference with mild or polite expressions. Anyidoho reflects the use of euphemism in the collection through narrative rendering of the persona's encounter with traditional folks in the poem *Tughedzevi*.

And I remember well yes I remember
 But how can I forget all those early
 morning joys grumbling through the dew
 to wake the river with our chattering
 whispering teasing gossips about
 the foolishness of boys who thought
 their voice was grown quite big enough
 to bear the weight of burdens they could give.
A Harvest of Our Dreams (16)

The village life of frequenting the river to fetch water is represented in this poem; it is a period most of the inhabitants look forward to because of the opportunity it affords them to gossip. "morning joys grumbling through the dew/ to wake the river with our chattering", the activity takes place very early in the morning and this is represented by the poet's personification of the river which is woken up by the arrival of the villagers. Euphemism is realised in one of the gossips which centres on the youth's awareness of puberty and their ability to engage in sexual activity

whispering teasing gossips about
 the foolishness of boys who thought

their voice was grown quite big enough
to bear the weight of burdens they could give.

Line 3 above is one of the signs of puberty which places emphasis on “sex” while line 4 is a euphemistic reference to the ability or capacity of a young boy to impregnate a woman. The poet, instead of a direct reference to “sex” and “pregnancy”, represents both with traditional and humorous expressions which tone down rather offensive words. More so, in a number of traditional societies, pregnancy is idiomatically referred to avoid direct reference to it. Echezona-Johnson in a study on pregnancy in African Cultures submits that:

In African cultures, because of many superstitious beliefs, many families will perform different rituals to safeguard the pregnancy. Pregnancy is acknowledged but not celebrated. It is believed that witches and evil spirits are capable of stealing the pregnancy or interfering with it.

This submission attests to the sacredness of pregnancy and why it is referred in African society hence, the speakers, even in their gossip recognise the salient need to euphemistically refer to pregnancy. The women’s gossip provides relief from the strenuous activity of frequenting the river for water, and their gossip reveals another euphemism in

sometimes we talked of funny old men with
the waist of the wasp. They kept asking
useless questions sending boring greetings
to your parents casting sly glances
at things too fresh for their souring tastes.
A Harvest of Our Dreams (17)

The persona is apparently a young girl in the midst of her peers. She reveals one of their pieces of gossip which dwells on promiscuous glances at the young girls and represents their frail look with an invective “the waist of the wasp”. The conduct of the old men perhaps, is responsible for an unsavoury description of the old men’s look which is fragile. Even in such looks, the old men cast seductive glances at the young girls. The licentious attitude of the old men is represented with the euphemism “things too fresh for their souring tastes” which suggests their overzealousness in desiring sexual activity

with girls who are as young as their granddaughters. Anyidoho, in line with Cultural Materialism reveals that culture is involved in all human activities; he rejects the separation of culture from the rest of human activity. Human beings are members of a society and in part made by that society; their activities reproduce that society and may in some cases change it. Culture has the constitutive functions of binding together the members of a society and preserving social institutions. All human beings are members of societies and all human behaviour is cultural.

Anyidoho euphemistically represents pregnancy in a more humorous form in the poem “Fertility Game” where a young wife laments the sudden disappearance of her husband thus making it impossible for her to get pregnant.

Kokui my young sister went away last Moon
 at harvest time. She swallowed a tiny gourd seed
 so now she carries a giant gourd in her belly
 for Senyo our dying Chief’s only living son.
 Even Foli my mother’s youngest child
 now speaks in the broken voice of a man-child.
 They say at the village school he goes
 pinching the bigger girls on their wosowosos.
A Harvest of Our Dreams (21)

The persona informs her runaway husband that a young girl probably younger than her is pregnant, conception is euphemistically referred to as swallowing “a tiny gourd seed” while pregnancy is presented as carrying “a giant gourd in her belly”. Aside from a pleasant presentation of sex and pregnancy, the euphemism has humorous intent which is characteristic of traditional society’s manner of interaction. The persona affects the psychological state of the listeners as she presents her worrying condition which is derivable from the African oral tradition. Cham submits that

African oral traditions have always constituted a seemingly inexhaustible source of inspiration and models for many African artists; and these artists, using various media of expression, have varying degrees of success, consistently tapped the resources of their individual traditions at all levels – structure, style, theme – in their creative activities (267).

Anyidoho also euphemistically presents a traditional description of the age of puberty as the persona reiterates the need for her husband to return home in order for her to get pregnant. She says that Folu who was probably an infant when her husband was around now “speaks in the broken voice of a man-child” hence insinuating that the husband has been away for so long. The speaking voice further presents breasts as “wosowosos” in her claim that the hitherto little boys (at the initial stage of her marital life) have matured, hence her husband needs to return home for her to get pregnant.

Folkloric Symbolism and Revolutionary Aesthetics in *A Harvest of our Dreams*

Symbol is a representation of things, objects with another in order to give hidden meaning. In literature, symbol is used to inform or educate the readers in a way to hide the disposition of the writer of certain frailties of the society

Symbol gives aesthetic aura to poetry as a poet is able to maintain economy of words as a result of its use. Akporobaro submits that “... great novelists and poets, communicate at a symbolic level by setting up a framework in which certain concrete particulars not only stand for themselves, but are also symbols of other realities” (126). Anyidoho in this collection deploys symbols to condemn a number of issues which includes the mind-boggling corruption and hypocrisy of politicians in his society. In the poem, “The Hyena’s Hymn”, he says:

They will come this way some day
These demigods with broken oaths
For a harvest of our dreams
They will come seeking lonely paths
Through our famished dreams
to the house of exiled gods
(8)

The poet inadvertently condemns contemporary politicians, who seek the peoples’ support with failed promises. They are the “demigods”, the people’s votes and hopes are symbolically represented as the “harvest of our dreams”.

The only system of government through which the commonwealth could be siphoned (democracy) is the “lonely paths”. Europe, which the prodigal politicians cart the people’s resources to, is represented as the “house of the exiled gods”. In this poem, Anyidoho, through the use of symbols ridicules the elite’s profligacy, sensitises the people and consequently aligns with Achebe’s view on the duty of African writers that “... if we are to survive as a nation we need to grasp the meaning of our tragedy. One way to do it, is to remind ourselves of the things that happened and how we felt when they were happening” (xiii).

It is a daunting task for a writer to take up the gauntlet and challenge the dreaded corruptible elite. In Anyidoho’s bid to assert his resolve to confront them (the elite), the poet boasts that he will do the unimaginable in order to set the people free from the choking stronghold of the renegades. He says:

I will make music with howls of dogs
 I will borrow the shrieks of witches
 The screeches of dancing monkeys
 I will make music with howls of dogs
 (8)

The lexical verbs in the above stanza “howl”, “shriek”, and “screech” have negative connotations and they depict despair, and a mournful and harrowing experience. Ironically, the poet desires to use the dreadful words to give music to the oppressive elite. Though music is pleasing and appealing and, in most instances, people dance to it, the music the poet makes is not expected to be danced to but instead to serve as retribution for the callousness of the politicians.

The traditional background of the setting is established with the phrases “howls of dogs”, “shrieks of witches”, and “dancing monkeys” which create gloomy scenery as depicted in folklore. The poet is unequivocally angry. And as a social advocate he strives to confront the reactionary element with the most dreadful folkloric and traditional weapon, which he assumes will disorient them and reduce their oppressive instinct. The poet, through reference to the aforesaid exhibits the animist belief of the Africans on the inexplicable power of some animals or plants, as Adekoya depicts thus: “Names of animals, objects, people, places and plants may appear commonplace, but sourced from their origins, it is believed that they acquire mysterious powers that

could be tapped for good or ill” (192). The poet confines the names/habits of the animals and spiritual powers to negative use in order to solve societal problems. The poet sustains his symbolic appraisal of the societal problem in the poem “The Panther’s Final Dance”:

And so the Hippo seeks
 our stool of thorns our crown of thunder?
 Let him beware the final dance of
 soothsayers who now become our praise gatherers
 (48)

The “Hippo” in this stanza stands for a destructive politician, the definite article indicates that the referent is well known to the poet and the people. The Hippo (Hippopotamus) according to *The Cambridge Dictionary* is an animal, which “grazes on swamp vegetation and causes considerable damage to trampled plants by its enormous body weight”. The poet’s message is to the effect that, a certain politician (The Hippo) who has the capacity to destroy, is vying for a position of leadership likened to a “stool of thorns” and “crown of thunder”. These symbols are reminiscent of some African societies’ perception of kingship as being anchored on stool and crown. A king is deemed to sit on the stool (which is the throne) and wears the crown (which is the authority for kingship). However, the referent in the stanza requests a dangerous throne whose danger, he may not be aware of, due to the rhetorical nature of the lines.

Anyidoho advises the office seeker to be aware of the calamity that befell those who had sought the same office in the past (soothsayers). They were soothsayers because they promised to improve the lot of the people but turned themselves to “praise gatherers” after their failure in office. They, thereafter, seek undeserved accolades. The poet’s advice to “the Hippo” (the new entrant to politics who has the propensity to destroy) is to be wary of the people’s wrath as they (the people) will descend on him the way they dealt with the deceitful politicians (soothsayers) who failed them in the past. Anyidoho’s involvement in political activism in this poem echoes the position of Lindfors that “... writers have served not only as chroniclers of contemporary political history but also as advocates of radical social change. Their works thus both reflect and project the course of Africa’s Cultural Revolution” (22).

The intransigence of the politician results in confrontation with youths who express their disdain for tyranny and oppressive leadership. This challenge of

the youths is unknown in the annals of history and explains why Anyidoho refers to it as “a strange passion” in the next stanza:

But a strange passion came upon the children
of the land: they wielded blunt machetes.
They clipped the Panther’s claws. Somehow
they forgot the Panther’s teeth. Now our
caretaker gods are sending back the lame panther
to his place of birth in the forest zone. They say
his name has been erased from the big game hunter’s scroll.
And yet somehow they too forget his teeth,
and then of course his feet.
(48)

The protest/confrontation of the youths is symbolised as “blunt machetes” which may be seen as a drab and outright ineffective action, which the imagery connotes. The brutal politician is represented as “panther”, the ruling class in the country are the “caretaker gods”, politics is “the big game” and political activity is the “hunter’s scroll”. Anyidoho is able to achieve economy of words through the symbolic communication of his messages and he is able to touch on multifarious issues with contrived imagery which may not be realisable without symbols. Assessing the benefit of imagery, (Boulton 132) submits that: “... the imagery of a poem is often not so much like a pattern chosen for embroidery or the few well-chosen words arranged for a public speech, as like a myth or the illogical but curiously exciting pictures seen in dreams”.

The traditional resonance of the poem is realised with the deployment of words like Hippo, thunder, soothsayers, machete, panther and hunter. Thesetypes of words or ideas reflect in folklore in African societies. The essence of their use is primarily didactic. Anyidoho’s recourse to their use in the stanza is a reiteration of the rich diction of the African traditional society which emphasises revolutionary essence in the agitation for renewed social order, in line with Cultural Materialism as Nasiru notes that: Cultural Materialists are consciously political, and aim at transforming the social order; as they seek readings that focus on the marginalised and the exploited, and also look at the possibilities of subversion and resistance in both the text and the interpretive act (1). In the poem, “Kingmaker”, the poet, sustains the symbols, as he informs the people to be wary of making the wrong choice in their preference for leadership. He says:

Tell them, Demaso,
to weigh the meat with eyes
to beware rejecting a thigh for an arm
see, Madeso, see the lame Panther
plays at marbles with Duiker's child
and Duiker insists on revision of the rules
to ban the use of paws
(53)

Hence, through an intermediary (Demaso), Anyidoho enjoins the people to be circumspect in the choice of their leaders in order not to make the wrong decision that may mean discarding a good leader for an incompetent one. He advises the people "to beware rejecting a thigh for an arm". In politics, every politician gives the masses (electorate) the impression that he/she is the best and strives to outdo the opponent and, in the process, he/she preys on the people through confusing slogans. It is the committed activists/writers who show the path to tread. This is reflective of the postulation of Ajidahun that:

Every creative artist from all walks of life, irrespective of colour, race, genre or ideology, has certain functional responsibilities to the society, especially the one to which he immediately belongs. The artist is possessed with an overwhelming urge, like a compelling surge of electric current; he is driven inexorably and irresistibly into transmitting his ideological beliefs to the society. Such ideologies could be radical, revolutionary or conciliatory. Since the writer, the literary artist, is a formidable actor and member of the society, he is at a vantage point to make a critical and logical assessment of the society. (68)

Anyidoho shows his commitment to the society through his intervention which hinges on the need for the people to be wary of the deceitful nature of politicians and he does this through traditional symbolic representation.

Conclusion

The poetry of Anyidoho is in consonance with the aesthetic transposition paradigm African artists adopt to promulgate, on the one hand, the continent's literature decolonisation project, and, on the other hand, to interpret cryptically

the contemporary socio-political and economic realities through the said traditional vehicles in which folkloric apparatuses are enrooted. Analysis in this paper underscores a profusion of folkloric/traditional images in the collection like folktales, hunting and other traditional practices. Exemplifying with *A Harvest of Our Dreams*, Anyidoho leverages on these home-based resources largely at the functional level, deploying the traditional facilities to satirise individuals (persons), society and the elite. In his quest for revolutionary vision, the poet reveals aspects of traditional practices, agricultural and natural existence of the people, and native fauna and flora accessible through diverse poetic devices, as he addresses a number of social issues such as endemic corruption in the socio political and economic spheres in Ghana and the third-world nations, subjugation of cultural values and neocolonial prejudices which militate against the collective aspiration of the people. The adoption of Cultural Materialism as a theoretical framework in this paper justifies the poet's utilisation and evocation of traditional imagery for revolutionary aesthetics. In essence, both the text and the theory adopted combine, in this paper, to show the functionality of the art in the social mission to revamp the social malady.

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