

**ORALITY IN WRITING: ITS CULTURAL AND POLITICAL FUNCTION
IN ANGLOPHONE AFRICAN, AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN,
AND AFRICAN-CANADIAN POETRY**

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Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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in the Department of English
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

By
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SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION

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of the Requirements for the

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by

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ABSTRACT

For years, critics have used Black writers' interweaving of African-derived oral textual features and European written forms to reject the concept of the Great Divide between orality and writing in literacy studies. These critics primarily see the hybridized texts of writers of African descent as a model that assists in the complex union of writing and orality. My argument is that the integrationist model is not the only way, perhaps not even the most fruitful way, to read the hybridized texts of writers of African descent. I develop a reading of Anglophone African, African-Caribbean, and African-Canadian literature that sees the synthesis of orality and writing as an emergent discourse, free of the dogmatism of textuality and of colonial literary standards, that contributes to the cultural and political aspirations of writers of African descent. In transcribing African-derived orality into writing, Black writers emphasize the ethnic component of their African identity, thereby decolonizing their literature. Consequently, the literature functions as locus or epitome of community-created culture and counter-colonial discourse, portraying the Black writer as a self-assertive community agent with the potential for forging a new historically informed identity.

My introduction identifies the scope of the study, defining what constitutes African-derived oral textual features and outlining the critical theories that will be instrumental to my analysis. I also explain why I selected the writers Wole Soyinka (African), Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Louise Bennett (African-

Caribbean), Lillian Allen, Marlene Nourbese Philip, and Clifton Joseph (African-Canadian) as examples of writers who have utilized orality in writing as political and cultural expression.

Chapter One provides a background to pre-colonial African oral discourse. Chapters Two, Three, and Four respectively focus on Anglophone African, African Caribbean, and African Canadian poets' uses of orality in writing to reflect an eclectic cultural heritage. A brief conclusion follows these chapters. It reaffirms my primary thesis that the dynamic union of orality and writing in Anglophone African, African-Caribbean, and African-Canadian written poetry functions as the expression of a new kind of cultural and political discourse, in search of a new audience and a critical approach that requires both Africanist and European critical perspectives.

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To

Adwoa, Kwabena, Papa

and

my parents

The most important people in my life; thanks for always being there for me.

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INTRODUCTION

As a consequence of colonialism, Anglophone writers of African descent living in Africa, the Caribbean, and Canada can be said to have a Janus-like access to both Western and African literary traditions. In this situation of double vision, writers have had to choose their mode of literary expression, and in many cases the choice has been a mixing of discourses, specifically a transcribing of peculiar African oral features into the European-derived written form. By oral features, I mean what has been appropriated into the literary tradition from the oral traditions derived from the indigenous African languages, that is the Creole, Pidgin, and Nation languages of the three regions being studied here; from oral traditions of any genre that were composed, performed, and, at least initially, transmitted orally; from the contexts of performance; and from oral traditions already translated or transcribed into English. Such features include ceremonial chants, proverbs, riddles, songs, folktales, the antiphonal call-and-response styles, and the rhythmic, repetitive, digressive, and formulaic modes of language use. These constitute some of the aspects of African oral discourse to which post-colonial Black writers, or in certain cases protagonists, return, in order to reclaim and rewrite these features as important components of their linguistic consciousness.

Françoise Lionnet has called the writing of these consciously hybridized texts *métissage*, a term which means mixed (*métis*) culture and an interweaving (*tissage*) of various ethnic, geographic, personal, and linguistic registers. Carolyn Cooper also has coined the term “oraliterary” to describe the blend. Her reason for using this term is that most practitioners of orality in writing are “both literate and orate” (81), and their works exhibit what Walter Ong calls the “literate orality” of the secondary oral culture (Orality 161). Ong distinguishes the primary oral culture, in which orality is not a choice, from the literate culture that aspires to create secondary -- in other words literate -- orality. Margery Fee, interpreting literature in English by Aboriginal writers, has used the term “writing orality” to describe how orality in Aboriginal literature is composed through writing but meant to be read and/or performed within an oral context. Fee’s term, like the others, could be applied to much of the literary praxis with which I am concerned here, and since all these terms allude to an utterance or text within which two or more different linguistic consciousnesses co-exist, I shall use them interchangeably.

Though studies such as Eileen Julien’s African Novels, Isidore Okpewho’s African Oral Literature, and Marlies Glaser and Marion Pausch’s Caribbean Writers show that most post-colonial texts are characterized by *métissage* critical evaluation of these hybridized texts has been dominated by Western critical approaches that are often flawed by a colonizing refusal to recognize and value the positive cultural and literary value of the traditional African oral features. By the term colonizing refusal, I suggest that Western criticism of

texts by contemporary Black authors bears alarming resemblances to colonization, which is founded on the systematic devaluation of the colonized cultures and a refusal of their aesthetics. Associated with this refusal is the Western critical notion of “art for art’s sake,” exemplified by the practice of New Criticism, which seeks to free literature of historical and societal connections, and does not, therefore, allow for a reading that locates the texts of Black writers in their historical and social contexts. Consequently, as Edward Kamau Brathwaite observes, much of what we have come to accept as literary criticism of works by writers of African descent is “work which ignores, or is ignorant of, [the literatures’] African connection and aesthetic” (Roots 204). Likewise, Christopher Miller comments that when reading criticism of “African [and Diasporic] literatures written in [English] and other European languages, one is struck by both the insistence [on] and the inadequacy of Western interpretive models” (“Ethnicity” 76), which often result in gross distortions or misreadings. This inadequacy partly explains Bill Ashcroft’s submission that the idea of “post-colonial literary theory emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing” (2). Kwame Anthony Appiah makes a similar point in his “Strictures on Structures,” and asks critics first to “locate” texts by post-colonial Black authors, to situate or embed them within their own literary, social, cultural, historical, and political realities (146). Thus, until we redefine the term literature (as applied to the works of postcolonial writers of African descent) to include not

simply its Europeaness but also its nonscribal material of traditional African oral poetry, we will fail to properly value a significant corpus of the literature.

This need to locate the text has caused a shift of critical enterprise from a Eurocentric basis to a more inclusive approach that considers the importance of an African perspective in any examination of works by writers of African descent. Interest in this present trend has led to a foregrounding of aspects of African culture in many works, and has resulted in several insightful studies. Joseph Holloway, in Africanisms in American Culture, has identified African sources for various elements of American culture, and many theorists of African culture agree that a valid and distinctive African cultural continuity exists in the Caribbean and other Black diasporic societies. Such a culture, according to Kojo Vieta, refers to cultures evolved by African peoples in their attempt to fashion a culture that gives order, meaning, and pleasure to social, political, aesthetic, and religious norms. These cultures, Vieta argues, are appreciably different from aspects of the Eurocentric cultures introduced through colonialism ("Culture" 480). Ardent proponents of this model, such as Joseph Holloway and Amuzie Chimezie, categorically refute the ideas of Robert Blauner's "Black Culture," Diane Ravitch's American Reader, and Abraham Schlesinger's Disuniting, which deny the existence of a distinct Black culture in the diaspora.

Chimezie, disputing arguments that African culture cannot exist because African peoples encompass many ethnic groups, points out that the African heritage is very much alive in the sense of the commonalties of African

traditions held by continental Blacks and those in the diaspora (216-18). Beyond what may seem to be the fragmentation of culture along ethnic, religious, ideological, class, and gender lines lie some common ideas, behavior, philosophy, and themes that run through the cultures of Africa. Whether Ibo, Asante, Maasai, Mandingo, Gikuyu, Zulu, African Caribbean, or African American, Blacks have more in common with each other than they have, for example, with Europeans or Japanese. As Kwame Gyegye's Essay, Molefi Asante and Kariamu Asante's African Culture, V. Y. Mudimbe's Invention, and Isidore Okpewho's African Oral Literature point out, despite ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity among African peoples, the unities of experience, struggle against colonialism, and origin give peoples of African descent an internal unity. Holloway also stresses that some of the early studies by anthropologists like Melville Herkovits identified a continuity of African traditions in the areas of social structure, music, burial customs, and folk beliefs. Likewise, Roger Abrahams and John Szwed's After Africa, Asante and Asante's African Culture, Joe Trotter's Great Migration, and William Bascom's African Folktales point to varying degrees of Africanisms that can be found in Black folklore, music, communal networks, religion, language, and hospitality. Bayo Oyebade's "African Studies," building upon many of these ideas, argues that "any perceived discontinuity in [Black] history at any given time is a myth. To be valid, the study of [Black] experience must be rooted in African culture" (236).

Further, Ruth Finnegan (Oral Poetry), Eileen Julien (African Novels), Harold Scheub ("Review"), and Marlies Glaser and Marion Pausch (Caribbean Writers)

have used the relationship of orality to writing in racialized people's cultures, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis, to reject and resituate the concept of the "Great-Divide" in literacy studies. Instead of an evolutionary theory of the x before y progression from oral to written literature, these theorists argue for an alternative model of integration, which emphasizes that orality and literacy are not "two separate and opposed models, but part of one dynamic in which both written and oral forms interact" (Finnegan, "Oral Literature" 35). These are all commendable efforts, and deserve to be allowed to go as far as they can lead us.

But there is an equal or greater need to explore certain lines of thought that this present Africanist trend inevitably encourages, especially if we consider the fact that linguistic choice reflects various communicative and discursive impulses, motives, and interests. Language, after all, is not simply a bag of utterances, but, as the psychologist Rom Harré observes, "the person that we are depends on the language which we speak" (87). In other words, "Language in an important sense, speaks us," as Catherine Belsey points out (2). Harré's and Belsey's statements become culturally significant when considered together with the Post-Saussurean idea that culture is analogous in many respects to language, that it is language/culture that makes possible the constructing of a world for individuals, and of differentiating between them (Belsey 4). This cultural significance of language leads inevitably to the hypothesis that a commitment to blending oral and written discourses on the part of many writers of African descent is a way of articulating a distinct identity

which derives in part from selective appropriation, incorporation, and articulation of European and African discourses. According to the cultural-functional analysis of Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky, which asserts that groups are continually changing, the artist, in an important sense, becomes a new kind of cultural worker associated with a new cultural politics to challenge the monolithic and hegemonic in the name of diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity.

The adaptation of African oral poetic techniques into the written form has significant yet paradoxical ramifications. On one hand, it gives voice to a range of past African cultural, social, political, sexual, aesthetic, and linguistic systems long muted by the history of colonialism, providing access to the best of what African oral and European written forms have to offer. On the other hand, however, such adaptation, in the face of the dominant ideology and conventions of European colonial or neo-colonial culture, puts the artist continually in conflict. As the critical practice of colonizing refusal includes refusing the oral tradition, especially denying its literary value, the very act of presenting oral features as something worthy, with their own artistic models, narrative structures, and intertextualities, becomes an act that decolonizes Black literatures, providing writers with both a distinct literary voice and a strategic position from which to speak. Consequently, writing orality not only provides a distinct cultural identity but creates a counter-colonial Afrocentric discourse which aims at emancipating the peoples of African descent from the stranglehold of colonial misrepresentation.

Thus, to add to the integrationist model of the Finnegan school, cultural and political themes almost always become part of the immediate message of the literature and so decolonize it. Political and cultural committedness, bound to the quest for decolonization, takes two forms: within the texts, in the speakers' search for cultural identity; and within the act of writing itself, which becomes the means through which the authors symbolically return to their cultural past and reclaim the identity of which they have been deprived. Politics and culture are therefore the essence of the literature. It is not a question of politics and culture being an influence on the literature or the literature possessing elements of the two; rather, politics, culture, and literature form an integrated unit. This integration is a focal point of similarity between works by Africans and those by writers of African descent, and it is in this sense of cultural and political commitment that these modern writers have begun to consider their art in sacerdotal terms, useful only when in the socio-political service of their race and culture. Thus, notwithstanding the ostensible differences among individual writers, their works have always been socio-political, in the service of the public, and bound to the culture of Black people.

Using selected works by Anglophone African, African-Caribbean, and African-Canadian poets, this dissertation, then, has a three-fold aim. First, I shall show the cultural relevance of works that have successfully adapted oral poetic techniques into the written form. Secondly, I shall put these works and writers into the context of literary engagement, an engagement born out of the poets' and their peoples' quest to be liberated from the linguistic, cultural, and

political tyrannies of colonization. And finally, I shall argue that the artists' concern with culture and politics has, as in the case of African oral literature in the past, been beneficial to the aesthetic ends of particular works.

Although all the major genres in Anglophone African, African-Caribbean, and African-Canadian literatures draw upon orality to shape a culturally distinct and politically committed literature, this study will focus on poetry, because not much work on orality in written poetry has been done, especially not comparing African, West Indian, and African-Canadian poetry. Further, since there are many poets writing orality in these three regions, one cannot hope to represent all of them here. Moreover, the use of orality in these regions might be conceived as a continuum of traditional African oral forms. While some writers imitate or make allusions to particular traditional genres or tales in their poetry, others simply echo the syntax of their indigenous languages in their works. Still others, like Ngugi Wa T'hiongo, write orality in their indigenous languages and self-translate. Michel Pêcheux has also observed that "words, expressions, propositions, etc. change their meanings according to the positions held by those who use them" (111). Thus, the writing of orality by a marxist and a traditionalist might mean differently even when both draw on the same oral features.

Consequently, I shall focus on selected writers as particular examples of the creative explosion of writing orality, highlighting the significant and predominant oral features they use, as well as the context within which they occur. From the three regions, particular attention will be focused on how orality functions in the

poetry of Wole Soyinka (West African); Louise Bennett and Edward Kamau Brathwaite (African-West Indian); Marlene Nourbese Philip, Lillian Allen, and Clifton Joseph (African-Canadian). I shall show each writer's instantiations or innovations of writing orality, as well as interconnections among them.

In my recent article on Wole Soyinka's "Dawn and the Cults of Ogun," I conclude that Soyinka's poetry is functionally analogous to the priest-poet tradition of pre-colonial Africa. I make the same argument here, but in the context of traditional African appellation and warrior poetry. I point out the priest-poet tradition in the poetry of Brathwaite and Joseph. Finally, I suggest that while Soyinka appears to replicate the dominant male and spiritual themes in traditional African war poetry, the female writers of African descent, namely Bennett, Philip, and Allen, represent the warrior tradition of Africa in a feminist context to show how the destiny of their race depends not only on men and prophetic voices, but on the activism of women also.

Another interconnection involves how these writers integrate their poems with music, performance, and other forms of African-derived oral traditions, thereby restoring an important cultural and aesthetic aspect of African traditional poetry: the realization of poetry within a musical and communal context. Kofi Anyidoho outlines the traits that govern this art form as follows:

- (a) The transformation of the poem as written/printed text into a full-scale stage production or drama. [This] means that the poet's initial, often lonely act of creation is reinforced and enriched by the complementary creative skills of other artists and technical

resource persons -- directors, actors/actresses, dancers, singers, drummers, producers, etc. -- and by such material accoutrements as costumes, props, lighting, and sound effects.

(b) Congruent with a common aesthetic norm of African performance tradition, this poetry is often fused with music, dance, mime, and gesture to form the integrated whole.

(c) The involvement and relevance of audience becomes crucial in these performances. . . . The complete elimination of the usual spatial and temporal gap between writer and reader allows for a face-to-face interaction. ("Poetry" 48)

As Anyidoho rightly concludes, "with this new development, the written/printed text is effectively reduced to little more than a pre-text, waiting to be brought to its full realization in a face-to-face dramatic encounter with a live audience" (33). According to Jawa Apronti' "Ghanaian poetry" and Robert Fraser's West African Poetry, the most important thing that this new development has introduced is the restoration of poetry to a public event in the African tradition.

Though these writers' representations of these oral traits is central to their works, their representations differ, reflecting the three levels of the uses of orality as theorized by Richard Bauman in Verbal Arts as Performance. At the first level, though the poem/poet/reader is bound to the printed text, success depends upon the speaking voice for its power, without which the poetry is rather substanceless on the page. As Samuel Selvon's Moses in The Lonely Londoners observes, something in the words is frozen on the page at this level,

and “you have to melt it to hear the talk” (19). Level two involves an intensification of the dramatic impact, and even though the poem is still designed to be read rather than performed, the text is set in an artistic frame that envisions mimed enactments of oral features that energize the poetry and lift it from the printed page into a spirited experience. At level three, the text is no longer bound to the written page, but made to reflect performance, fused with music, dance, and mime. In setting their poetry to this last level, poets strengthen their links with African traditional culture in that they come close to an important aspect of African traditional poetry, that is, the realization of poetry within a performance context.

Writers who operate within levels one and two may be described as “scribalised oral” poets (poets who write not only oral poetry but also essays, whose poetry is directed towards intellectuals, and designed to be read rather than performed), and those on level three, “performance poets” (whose poetry is designed to be performed rather than read). I use Soyinka’s, Brathwaite’s, and Philip’s works to illustrate levels one and two. For Soyinka, I focus on Ogun Abibiman because little work has been done on it. Indeed, none of the African literature studies on orality in writing discuss this important work. Moreover, Wole Soyinka has often been accused of relying too heavily on European models in his writing. Although he does not deny his use of such models, because he advocates literary eclecticism, he has consistently argued for the African basis of his poetry in essays such as “Neo-Tarzanism” and “The Choice and Use of the English Language.” Notable critics, such as Stanley

Macebuh (107), M. J. Salt (170-71), Donatus Nwoga (178), and Robins Graham (217), also agree that his poetry derives from African oral traditions, especially Yoruba mythology and Ifa divination poetry. Surrounded by controversy over its African or European sources, Soyinka's work becomes viable for a study such as this, which situates Black literatures within a new trend that would enable readers and critics to acknowledge, and discuss the significance of, the blending of European written and African oral forms.

In situating Soyinka's poetry at the confluence of two alternative media, oral and written communication, I suggest that even Soyinka's use of neometaphysical strains, double- and triple-barreled neologisms, cadences of sprung rhythm, and complex punctuation and language, which many think are derived from European forms, have their basis in Ifa divination and African apae (appellation or praise) poetry as well. As Soyinka argues in "Neo-Tarzanism," the language of his poetry is not that of the common African oral poems which, "being easiest to translate, have found their way into anthologies and school texts; it is not merely those lyrics which because they are favorites at festivals of the Arts haunted by ethnologists . . . supply the readiest source material for . . . academics" ("Neo-Tarzanism" 313). Instead, it is the kind which, like the sculpture, dance, and music of Africa, integrates various media of expression "into the moulding of the sensibility which tries today to carve new forms out of the alien words, expressing not only the itemised experience, but reflecting the unified conceptualization of the experience" (327).

Soyinka calls this strategy "selective eclecticism" (329), and argues that the "Traditional poetry [he uses] is . . . also to be found in the very techniques of riddles, in the pharmacology of healers, in the utterance of the possessed medium, in the enigmas of diviners, in the liturgy of divine and cultic Mysteries . . . in the unique temper of world comprehension that permeates language for the truly immersed" (313). There was as much neometaphysical strain and "sprung rhythm" in traditional African poetry, he adds, as in the poetry of Hopkins and the others he was alleged to have copied (319). Concentrating on Ogun Abibiman, its theme of Black nationalism, of Africa's liberation struggles, and its relations to traditional African war poetics, I argue that Soyinka manipulates and recasts existing European and African literary forms into new dimensions.

For Brathwaite, I use The Arrivants to illustrate his scribalised oral poetry, discussing a range of such oral features such as jazz, calypso, reggae, drum poetry, flute poetry, and libation poetry as examples of the survivals, syncretisms, and reinterpretations of African oral traditions in the Caribbean. Brathwaite's use of African oral discourse is enriched by his sojourn in Ghana, during which time he had the opportunity to learn more about African-derived orality. The clear advantage of this visit is that it gave him the chance to familiarize himself from within with various traditions, such as drum poetry, flute poetry, libation poetry, and "the liturgy of the divine and cultic Mysteries" Soyinka talks about. Brathwaite, like Soyinka, recasts these traditional oral features into new forms to create polyphonies that are contrapuntal in nature.

As in Brathwaite, one finds in the page-based poetry of Marlene Nourbese Philip the general cadence of the Caribbean demotic, often couched in the context of African traditional praise poetry, but with the lilt of Caribbean speech rhythms. However, Philip's writing of orality, unlike Brathwaite's and Soyinka's, has a distinctive feminist emphasis on the mother, not the father.

My discussion of Louise Bennett thematizes the African legacy of performance and the warrior tradition in the Caribbean. It centers on Bennett's persistent work to constitute the Creole dialect into a weapon against political oppression and into a revolutionary discourse of national cultural pride. Bennett historicizes this revolutionary significance of her poetry in the poem "Tengad," where she asserts:

For Jamaica talk [Creole] was less counted
 Low rated, poppishow,
 But now Jamma talk tun "culture"
 An' Jamma culture dah flow.
 Eena singin', dancin', paintin'
 Eena Church and T'eatre show,
 Jamma Culture enna "Culture"
 Any part a worl' we go!

(Jamaica Journal 11)

The cultural and political relevance of Bennett's poetry becomes even more significant in light of this assertion of international recognition, and invites an interpretation of her poetry as part of an emergent Creole discourse that

reflects the cultural aspirations of the Jamaican people. Her poetry therefore offers the medium through which one can chart how she has led her people in the process of constituting the once disrespected and actively suppressed Creole discourse, called “dutty language,” a speech-form held in utter contempt by thoroughly colonized parents, teachers, and administrators, into a functional system of shared references specific to Jamaican national experience.

On the African-Canadian scene, I focus attention primarily on a sample of Caribbean writers who have made their home in Canada. I argue that notwithstanding the change in geographical location, these still keep the vitality of African-derived orality in their performance poetry. Performance poetry as found in Bennett’s poetry of celebration of orality and political engagement is manifested particularly in what is now known as “dub poetry”: the fusion of poetry, music, performance, and action. Using the technology of sound as the primary medium of poetic dialogue, this form draws largely on African performative traits, and operates mostly in the context of live performance. As Christian Habekost argues in Verbal Riddim, the current electronic age, where much written information is nevertheless communicated through what Ong refers to as secondary orality -- the orality of telephones, radio, and television — “would make dub poetry in form and content one of the most relevant art forms of our times and, unlike many another genre of poetry, ahead of its time” (80). The irony, however, is that little work has been done on these Black Canadian writers whose works “could hardly be more ‘state-of-the-art’ at a time when the

great majority of . . . people get most of their information and entertainment not from books but from music and film" (80).

In illustrating that African-Canadian dub poetry is performance poetry, I emphasize that while Joseph appears to perpetuate the male theme of political engagement and the quest for freedom in the spiritual context of traditional African poetry, Allen celebrates the daily activism of female warriors, to whom she refers as "Sheroes" (Women 41). Thus, though Allen shares with Joseph, Brathwaite, and Soyinka the traditional African aesthetics of praise, song, appellation, and other poetic traits related to the warrior tradition, she adds a distinctive celebration of the female warrior to these traditions. She forcefully registers the point that there are numerous female warriors of African descent who merit recognition. As the title of her collection Women Do This Everyday suggests, she contends that women engage regularly in warrior activities, but are, regrettably, not given the praise they deserve.

Among the key terms that will be instrumental in this study are "discourse" and "orality," two most important concepts used in many different ways in literary and linguistic studies. My application of discourse involves two meanings: Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and "discursive practices" as Stephen Slemon uses it, and the social notion of discourse as "identity kit" as espoused by James Paul Gee in Social Linguistics and Literacies. Slemon, in his "Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-Colonial Writing," explains his view of Foucault's "discourse" theory, identifying it as the

name for that language by which dominant groups within society constitute the field of 'truth' through the imposition of specific knowledges, disciplines, and values. Discourse, in other words, is a 'complex of signs and practices which organises social existence and social reproduction, . . . and [which] . . . works to constitute 'reality' not only for the objects it appears passively to represent but also for the subjects who form the coherent interpretive community upon which it depends. (6)

"Discourse," as this definition makes clear, goes beyond language use to include power relations and hierarchical structures in society that promote the validation of particular objects, ideologies, viewpoints, values, and even ways of speaking/writing at the expense of others that are marginalized or considered inferior.

One primary point about this definition is useful for this dissertation. During the colonial period, European ways of thinking, speaking, and experiencing the world dominated or replaced those of the various colonized peoples. Since political independence, the formerly colonized, both in Africa and the Black diaspora, are not only rewriting and rereading colonial discourse but are also creating or recreating their own independent "local" identities through new discourses that deviate from the dominant European knowledges, values, and discursive structures. This practice of counter-colonial discourse is described by Richard Terdiman as "the present and scandalous trace of an historical potentiality for difference which . . . inherently situate[s] [itself] as 'other' to a

dominant discourse which by definition attempts to exclude heterogeneity from the domain of utterance and is thus functionally incapable of even conceiving the possibility of discursive opposition or resistance to it" (11).

Somewhat related to, but not identical with, the Foucauldian idea is Paul Gee's notion of discourse. Though he acknowledges that discourse involves specific knowledges, values, and allegiances to certain ways of using language, he does not stress the political use of the term. Rather, he argues that discourse is "always and everywhere social" (xix), "displaying (through words, actions, values and beliefs) *membership* in a particular social group" (142). To him, "discourse" signals the common set of things, interests, goals, and activities that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a group. Though I make clear the ways in which I use the term "discourse" at points where it occurs, Gee's and Foucault's ideas are both used to reflect the political and cultural aspects of this study.

Like ideas about discourse, ideas about orality are multiple. However, since a lot of information about orality is easily available, a brief mention of the conventional/colonial notions about orality, and some diverging views, will suffice here. Viewed through the prism of evolutionist theorists such as Walter Ong and Jack Goody, orality is considered "primitive," and is associated with an earlier and simpler era that lacked a knowledge of writing. Associating orality with pre-colonial Africa, these theorists tend to think that Africa was without writing until the arrival of Europeans. Many even go to the extent of arguing

that colonialism was beneficial because it helped introduce writing and literacy to a people who otherwise would have remained primitive and illiterate.

However, as Cheikh Anta Diop's The Cultural Unity of Black Africa, Albert Gerard's African Language Literatures, and Harold Scheub's "A Review of African Oral Tradition and Literature" have shown, writing did exist in Africa long before the arrival of Europeans. Prior to colonization, written forms, such as Egyptian hieroglyphics (Diop, Cultural Unity 184), and Sabeian Script of the fourth-century A. D. in the region that corresponds to present-day Ethiopia (Gerard 7-12), co-existed with oral discourse. However, this coexistence was not on an equal basis: the oral form was more prevalent. But since prevalence of one form over another does not mean absence, the predominant view that writing is synonymous with Europe, orality with Africa, and that the former introduced writing to the latter, is no longer tenable. Indeed, such assumptions are currently regarded as simplistic and Eurocentric, something Henry Gates rightly refers to as part of the "collective and functional fallacies in African literary criticism"(14).

The idea that orality is simplistic has also been discredited by modern theorists of oral literature, such as Ruth Finnegan in Oral Poetry, James Paul Gee in Social Linguistics, Brian Street in Literacy in Theory, and Matei Calinescu in "Orality in Literacy," who have developed the argument that oral composition is as complex as writing. As Calinescu argues:

The striking parallelism between a highly literate
experience, such as that of rereading a valued book, and

the experience of listening over again to a known story, myth, legend (whether one is literate or not) confirms once more that there is no gap between orality and literacy, and that oral modes or patterns of consciousness are not abolished in acts of communication at the most sophisticated levels of literate composition and reception.

(187)

However, Eileen Julien, while agreeing that evolutionist views are no longer tenable, counter-argues that those who defend orality tend to make “exaggerated claims for oral literature,” portraying “what was once deemed . . . primitive . . . and . . . deficient . . . as pure and virtuous,” even superior to the written form (12). Orality, to Julien, has become more or less an ambivalent and “polyvalent symbol: beauty and the beast” (10).

Julien’s view, while expressing a genuine concern by highlighting the problems associated with one definition of orality, illustrates the problems of simply reversing negative ideas, definitions, and identities ascribed to the once-colonized into positive self-images. Elleke Boehmer calls this process of making cultural capital out of degrading stereotypes about one’s heritage a double process of cleaving: “a cleaving from, moving away from colonial definitions, transgressing the boundaries of colonial discourse, and in order to effect this, cleaving to, borrowing, taking over, or appropriating the ideological, linguistic, and textual forms of [African oral traditions]” (105-06). What this double cleaving creates is a hybridity which, by proliferating differences,

contests and alters dominant pejorative meanings of orality into positive significations.

Orality as a pejorative metonymy for Africa raises another issue about the differential status of European-derived orality in Western culture. As Jacques Derrida amply demonstrates in Dissemination, major Western thinkers, such as Plato and Levi-Strauss, give primacy to the oral in Western culture. Likewise, Romanticism, the major movement in European thought in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, highly valorized orality and made successful efforts to eradicate classical discourse from Western literature and move it towards demotic ones. Suggestively, these illustrations of the primacy of the oral in Western culture point to what might be described as Western critical biases and double standards, the prejudiced idea that orality from the West and from Africa do not exist on equal terms: African-derived orality is a “beast” (subordinated to writing), whereas the Western one signifies “beauty” (superior to writing).

Though this study draws upon these controversies about orality, its aim is not to focus solely on them, but to add that the inclusion of African oral textual features into a European-derived discursive context creates a new socio-political literary discourse. In its closeness to its African roots, the poetry reflects a recreation in English of the sound and syntax of African-derived oral tradition, a process J. M. Coetzee calls “transfer,” meaning “the rendering of foreign speech in an English stylistically marked to remind the reader of the foreign original” (117). In illustrating this inclusiveness, I draw on such

hybridized and syncretic theories as "integration," as espoused by Ruth Finnegan and Brian Street; "hybridity," especially the politically subversive kind Homi Bhabha delineates in "Difference"; Françoise Lionnet's *métissage*; Bakhtin's "dialogism"; and Wole Soyinka's "double writing" or simultaneous production of texts from Western and African sources ("Neo-Tarzanism" 319), to argue that this act of integration is in essence an attempt by Black authors to create a new linguistic, literary, and cultural discourse to make their verbal arts a means of effecting a distinct cultural renaissance.

By incorporating oral features, such as call-and-response, performance, and music into the written form, poets writing orality transform the usually solitary reading experience into a more responsive act of listening. This listening requires critics to incorporate aurality within their reading of texts that use oral features as deliberate literary techniques. In equating reading with listening, I adopt as part of my theoretical base Garrett Stewart's concept of "phonemic reading" (2), which has to do not with reading orally, but with aural reading or the ability to discern and hear the oral discourse incorporated into the written text. Of necessity, literary scholarship will have to expand its traditional perspectives in order to notice this new African dimension that celebrates a cross-fermentation of cultures and discourses without any overt claims about fixed primacies.

Prominent auditory elements that are central to my discussion include oral poetry of drums and horns, rapso, rap, jazz, and dub. Josaphat Kubayanda has defined drum poetics as a "composition suitable for performing with a

drum, or for reciting aloud while accompanied by drumbeats and other percussive sounds" ("Drum" 38). As Ruth Finnegan explains, drumming or flute poetry represents the spoken utterances in a way intelligible to the listeners, and is heard as actual poetic words (Oral Poetry 119-20). Rapso poetry, labelled "riddum poetry" by Habekost (36), involves the blending of music and speech rhythms of the Creole, and is essentially a rhythmic "talking sing-song" (37) discourse that poets use to develop a music out of their poetry. Rap poetry, as Eric Pihel defines it, "is a young black urban art form where lyrics are rhymed over words sampled from previously recorded songs" (249). Jazz, like rap, is a polyphonic music. Its rhythmic syncopations are usually played against various chord patterns, as in ragtime, boogie-woogie, swing, and the "bamboula" chants from the Congo, whose mournful repetition of short insistent themes led to blues, a popular type of jazz that uses deliberately mistuned scale degrees.

Dub poetry, as Christian Habekost defines it, is "a form of poetry that can absorb and incorporate any kind of black musical rhythm" (4). Oku Onuora explains that basically a musical rhythm is dubbed into a poem: "You can dub een a South African riddim, you can dub een a kumina rhythm, you can dub een a nyabinghi riddim, you can dub een a juzz riddim" (quoted, Habekost 4). This description of the process, as Habekost admits, cannot hope to account for "nor even hint at, the unique musico-poetic concept underlying the dub phenomenon" (5). All the Africanized musical expressions, like the Cuban son, conga, rumba, and mamba; the Brazilian samba, batouque, coco and

candombe; the Trinidadian calypso (kaiso); Jamaican reggae; the Puerto Rican bomba; the Argentine tango; the Uruguayan candombe; and the North-American jazz and rhythm and blues, as well as the use of drums, cowbells, rattles, maracas, claves, gourds, and even sticks are contributors to the New World African oral tradition. In dub, no one definitive African-derived musical type dominates the poetry; instead, several different musical rhythms are dubbed into a poem to create something entirely new. Moreover, given electronic wizardry, the original tune, recognizably there in the dub version, might be stretched and bent into a new form through a process of combining, altering, supplementing, echoing, and playing with elements of the original.

My topic presupposes an older African discourse out of which Black writers derive new, albeit different, poetic forms. Chapter One provides a background to this traditional African oral discourse. Chapters Two, Three, and Four respectively center on selected examples of Anglophone African, African-Caribbean, and African-Canadian poets' intricate and unique uses of African oral discourse in the written form both to reflect and shape an advanced level of cultural and political consciousness. Though I acknowledge each writer's peculiar individual and linguistic backgrounds, I argue that they all participate and assist in the legitimation of this complex, eclectic literary and cultural expression. The concluding chapter appraises this attempt by these writers to forge out of African and European traditions something new. It draws comparisons among the various writers, highlighting the salient points of the study, in support of the thesis that oral features function in Anglophone African,

African-Caribbean, and African-Canadian written poetry both as cultural production and as political act.

CHAPTER ONE

AFRICAN-DERIVED ORAL LITERATURE: A BACKGROUND

As a way of demonstrating the relationship between and among the chapters on African, African-Caribbean, and African-Canadian literatures, I offer here a brief discussion of the African oral traditions that they return to and rewrite. Though my discussion relies on information generally known to African students through courses such as African Studies, and on research materials available in most books on African oral literature, especially those by Isidore Okpewho (African Oral), John Mbiti (African Religion), S. A. Babalola (Content and Form), Ulli Beier (Yoruba Poetry), and Ruth Finnegan (World Treasury: Oral Poetry), I differ from them in my interpretation of the data. While these critics often treat African oral literature as heterogeneous and diverse, my aim here is to underline the commonalities in African oral literatures and to demonstrate what appears uniform in the multiform. Secondly, and perhaps more crucially, I have attempted to shift from the traditional anthropological emphasis on African oral tradition to its public and artistic aspects. Also, though European oral traditions, such as the use of ballad form, are interwoven with African-derived orality in the works of African and African diasporic literatures, I focus principally on the African tradition, since that is my primary concern in this dissertation.

Oral literature, in the context of its African tradition, is not simply texts

created orally and passed on from generation to generation, but a pragmatic art with utilitarian value, intended to move its audience to action. In the words of Francis M. Deng in his discussion of Dinka poetry,

A good song should move the audience towards its objectives. A war song must arouse a war-like spirit and a dance song must excite the dancers. (93)

By way of analogy, one remembers here Sidney's psychological theory of art that in order to be moved, the audience or readers must first be delighted by means of perfect pictures concealed in figurative language (20). Nana Nketia remarks on the public significance of the figurative representations in African traditional poetry in the following words:

Our poetry has tended to give prominence to persons, interpersonal relationships and attitudes and values derived from our conception of the universe. We do not spend time on the daffodils or the nightingale, the night sky and so on as things in themselves, but only in relation to social experience. Our poetry is full of animals and plants, but these are used because they provide apt metaphors or similes, or compressed ways of reflecting upon social experience. ("Akan Poetry" 32)

Nketia's observation not only is valid but goes to the very heart of the definition of African oral poetry: it is figurative and socially significant, and artistic figures are used not merely to make the message more pleasing, but more easily to serve its essential purpose of moving people to action. Thus, the Dinka of

Sudan used the word cak (creator), something akin to Sidney's earthly maker (poet) and his heavenly maker (God) (12), to describe this socio-poetic experience of evoking emotions.

The Dinka's description of the poet as creator is traceable to the predominantly religious character of African traditional art, which captures life as a series of rituals for the living. This religious character is best explained by the Kenyan scholar, the Rev. J. S. Mbiti's concept of sasa/zamani, according to which time does not operate within the Western linear concept, but in an African metaphysical sasa/zamani system, in which time, instead of moving forward into the future, moves backward into the past, only to recur as part of a cyclical rhythm. Sasa is present time or time experienced, and once experienced, it vanishes into the past and becomes part of zamani time. The future has no existence since at best it is merely potential time. The present and the past then constitute the only actual or real time in traditional Africa, with sasa moving backward into zamani. Mbiti explains:

Before events are incorporated into zamani, they have to be realized or actualized within the sasa dimension. When this has taken place, then the events 'move' backwards from the sasa into zamani. So zamani becomes the period beyond which nothing can go. Zamani is the graveyard of time, the period of termination, the dimension in which everything finds its halting point. (29)

In this system, death is not the end but merely a change of time dimension, a movement from sasa into zamani.

According to Sunday Anozie, “death, in this sense, becomes assimilable in the collective consciousness into a synchronic time dimension -- the zero point of existence, the point beyond which life cannot go” (57). Death is the termination not of life but of diachronic motion, and becomes a confirmation of a person’s place in the timeless zone of the spiritual, where the unborn and the dead, consisting of the ancestors and the gods (who are the first ancestors), belong. The unborn are not in the future since the future has no existence. They belong to zamani time; they have already been through sasa time in previous years, and are returning as part of the eternal cycle of repetition to undergo the process of the eternal rites of passage. Birth then is a re-entry, a return, a rebirth, and a person is not so much born as reborn into sasa time to experience the rituals of sasa time.

Perhaps the most significant thing about sasa/zamani experience is that it offers opportunities for artistic creation, with each ritual having its own specialized songs or poems that go with it. Denis Osadebay explains that even though “we sing when we fight, we sing when we work . . . when a child is born [or] when death takes a toll” (48), no one may sing a particular poem unless the occasion calls for it. So unique are these occasions and the poems that celebrate them that these poems, as Geormbeeyi Adali-Mortty points out,

can be sung only on the appropriate occasion. One does not sing a mourning song unless a death has actually occurred. . . . It is

sacrilegious to sing these when feelings have not been aroused or when it is not intended to arouse feelings. (6)

Of great significance here is the functional nature of oral tradition.

Sasa experience begins with birth, according to Mbiti (114-20; 149), and in most African societies the first ritual is the outdooring, a semi-religious naming ceremony, normally occurring seven days after birth. The child is brought outdoors for the first time into the daylight to be formally presented to his or her relations and given a name. It is a public occasion marked with public recitals of traditional verse led by an accomplished performer and joined in by the entire gathering. The next stage is puberty, and the accompanying rite is initiation into adulthood (121-32). This is another public occasion, but it begins privately indoors when the age group is separated from the rest of society for several weeks while they undergo special training to prepare them for adult life. At the end of the period, a public initiation ceremony is organized amid drumming, dancing, and song in which all the initiated fully participate. In most societies, a professional poet is hired to perform publicly on the occasion, though sometimes, as with the Sotho of Southern Africa, the boys and girls are required to compose and perform their own praise poems for the occasion.

The third stage in a person's sasa passage is betrothal and marriage, whose ritualistic manifestation is the wedding (133-48). As in most cultures, this is a public affair, an occasion of great joy for the whole people, and the public festivities include feasting, merry-making, and of course poetry performance and song. In certain societies, specialist poets, such as the

Hausa Maroka poets of West Africa, are invited to perform, whilst in others, as in most of the ethnic groups of Nigeria, the bride herself composes and performs her own poems for the occasion. Although the period between marriage and death is too undetermined to contain any predetermined occasion for the rites of passage, a person's ultimate fulfillment may be achieved within that span of time. If and when this highest point is achieved, it becomes part of the ritualistic moment in a person's life, and special rites of passage are performed in that person's honour, not only to confirm the elevation but to thank the gods and ancestors for giving such success. In most ethnic groups, extraordinary accomplishments in war and/or hunting constituted such an achievement, and were celebrated publicly with praise poems.

War and hunting professions particularly offered ample opportunity for glory because the military and their wars constituted an essential aspect of traditional Africa, since the people's political destiny depended on the strength or weakness of the army. Likewise, the hunter was the provider of meat, an important food source, as this poem aptly suggests:

Well done, Huntsman;

Wild beast of the forest.

You have done well, our provider,

Father of orphans. (Hodza and Fortune 357)

The hunter, however, is more than a provider of food. He, like the warrior, is first and foremost a hero. He goes bravely and fearlessly to confront the unknown, the hidden dangers of the forest, just as the warrior faces the

unknown perils of the battlefield. These parallels explain why most traditional war poems are like hunting poems describing encounters between people and beasts. Notable examples of poems that apply equally to war and to hunting are the tebble (war and hunting) poems of the Adangme of Ghana.

Men dominated these poems because they were trained in these professions. For instance, of the numerous renowned war and praise poems in Ghana, only one thematizes a female warrior, Yaa Asantewaa. She led one of the fiercest battles against the colonial British forces. She is particularly revered because she decided to go to war against the British at a time when the Ashanti army was defeated by the British, when men, out of fear, refused to fight again, and when the Ashanti King, Nana Agyemang Prempeh I, had been captured and exiled to the Seychelles Islands. The widely repeated praise poems elevating Yaa Asantewaa to special status are indeed no different from those elevating exceptional men in praise and war poetry, where these warriors are discursively raised above ordinary mortality to the immortal heights of divinity in order to enhance their prestige.

A person's place in sasa time comes to an end with death (Mbiti 149-55). As with other rites of passage, the funeral obsequies are a public occasion with drumming, dancing, and above all, poetry performance. Among the Akans of Ghana, professional atentenben (flute players) and Nwomkoro (song group), mainly women, are specially invited to perform for very high fees. These dirges are a very essential part of the obsequies, and their importance is underlined by the fact that almost every Akan woman has some competence in their

performance. The major theme of the dirge is normally the ancestors whose ranks the deceased has just joined.

After death, national heroes become special warrior ancestors for their respective peoples, and they come to stand for inspirational strength for their people in times of war or other national emergencies. Hence, most traditional African war poems evoke the heroic dead not just as a means of inspiring the living to action, but as the agents for success, and poets make this dependence the central theme of war poetry. The following Shona detembo rehondo (battle song) from Zimbabwe, which calls on the mythical founders of the Mutumba lineage -- Rukorowori, Gumborohomwe, and Chipendo -- to help destroy the enemy in battle, exemplifies this involvement of ancestral spirits in times of war:

You too, you in the winds,
 Who witness these things as we do,
 Lead us once again
 As you led us in the past. (Hodza and Fortune 32)

Among the Ashantis of Ghana, Yaa Asantewaa is evoked especially in times when the situation seems hopeless, as in this popular war song evoking her assistance:

Kro kro hinkoo, Yaa Asantewaa
 The female who confronts the bomb
 If you do not come
 We are dying
 Kro kro hinkoo, Yaa Asantewaa. (my translation)

These ancestral spirits and the gods are considered the primary sources of military success. This battle song of the Acholi of Uganda, for instance, calls on the “god of [their] fathers” for victory in war:

God of our fathers, guide our spears, our spears which
thy lilac has touched.

. . .

Help us, high spirit. Slay with us.

Let death come to their ranks. . . . (Trask 69)

The petition “Slay with us,” which suggests the direct involvement of the spiritual (“God of our fathers”), is highly reminiscent of the sacred texts of Judaism, but asking for direct guidance of weapons (“guide our spears”), seems unique to traditional African war poetry.

Although the study of African traditional poetry is a study of a discourse in which all aspects of life from the cradle to the grave and after are represented, its emphasis is on the social function, on the fact that oral literature is expressed to meet a particular need. The artist-figure, in this functional system in which the centrality of the sasa/zamani concept is taken for granted, is not merely a gifted individual plying his/her trade. S/he is the creator of public ritual, the priest-poet of a religious society, the spokesperson for the living, the medium between the present and the past, the living and the ancestors/gods. Hence, in most African societies, the poet is also treated as a priest and/or seer “who reveals what is hidden through divine inspiration and

communication with spirits . . . [and] through his poetry links his fellow men with the spirit world” (Finnegan, Oral Poetry 207).

Nora Chadwick gives an illuminating account of this religious role of poets in Poetry and Prophecy:

This [religious role] carries with it knowledge – whether of the past, in the form of history and genealogy; of the hidden present, in the form commonly of scientific information; and of the future, in the form of prophetic utterance in the narrower sense. Always this knowledge is uttered in poetry which is accompanied by music, whether of song or instrument. . . . Invariably we find that the poet and seer attributes his inspiration to contact with supernatural powers. (14)

In this priest-poet tradition are the Ifa oracle poets of Nigeria, the Sotho divination poets of Southern Africa, and the “divine drummers” of West Africa, especially Ghana, where the sacerdotal relevance of the drummer is underlined by his official title as the creator’s drummer. Oral literature in this tradition has inherently religious forms, such as prayers, libation liturgy, incantation, invocation of spirits, or other ritualistic qualities of worship, and its religious essentiality becomes complete during performance, for it is in performance that its sasa/zamani dimensions are actualized.

Isidore Okpewho has summed up in a most remarkable albeit sexist statement both the social and religious roles of the artist in traditional African society:

A man with a very pressing sense of real and concrete presence, enjoying the closest intimacy with an environment that was both physical and metaphysical. . . . And as the truly guiding sensibility of his community, he continually led the way in recreating the progressive forms of the communal [ritual]. (53)

H. I. E. Dhlomo, the South African playwright, in describing the traditional Zulu poet, also sums up these roles in traditional African society: “the izibongo (oral poets) are the wealth of our country, the soul of our state, the dignity and meaning of the race” (quoted, Jeff Opland 27). They were the socio-religious mouthpieces who mirrored the community’s hopes and fears, and who helped to consolidate the common heritage by offering their work as communal property.

To a significant extent, the style and technique of oral poetry, as well as its major poetic devices and method of composition, are influenced tremendously by its public character. Poems are constructed in such a way that during their public performance, it may be possible for the audience to participate in their delivery. As such, no poem composed in the form of African oral literature is complete in itself, as one would, for instance, say of a poem by John Donne. The oral poem, initially usually short, is learnt and given its fullest expression during performance, when the performer lengthens it by means of his/her own contributions, such as repetitions, pauses, and paralinguistic devices. A good poet must, therefore, not only compose well but also perform well, because a good delivery, usually one that is able to arouse the audience’s

participation during performance, is what guarantees future imitation by admirers. A bad delivery, on the other hand, may doom the poem forever. Since audience participation is such a basic part of the creative process, the poem is in the final analysis made by the poet and audience. This idea suggests that the oral poem is open enough to allow space for audience participation. As such, oral art is also about spaces, about the way both primary poet and audience fill poetic space, and how the multiple voices in oral art result in a dialogic text.

I am not here trying to undermine the idea that professional artists and trained experts played a fundamental role in the composition and delivery of oral poetry. Professional oral poets in traditional Africa take their craft seriously and are in turn taken seriously by the public. So important is their position in traditional Africa that certain families, such as the Ashanti Kwadwumfo of Ghana, constitute themselves into poetic houses, and the office is handed down within the family from generation to generation. These include the professional court poets in the service of royalty or some noble family poets who are responsible for both the ceremonial praise of their rulers and the preservation of the national historical records. In this category of poets are the generally known West African Hausa Maroka of Nigeria and the Kwadwumfo of Ghana, the East African Ankole omwevugi of Uganda, the Southern African Shona marombe of Zimbabwe, the Tswana mmoki of Botswana, and the Zulu imbongi of South Africa. There are also the free-lance roving poets who, as social commentators, are the first democratically conceived spokespeople of

the public. In this group are the itinerant Hausa poets from northern Nigeria and the famous griots of Senegambia. Among the free-lance poets are famous names like the Ewe Hesino Akpalu, the Akan Okyeame Akuffo, the Hausa Mamman Shata, and the Zulu Mazisi Kunene. But however great the poet, in the final analysis, the success of his/her poem depends on the performance itself and the public contribution.

One of the most common characteristics that makes audience participation possible is the tendency toward long catalogues of seemingly irrelevant repetitive material. Ulli Beier, commenting on Yoruba poetry, has pointed out that these catalogues are poetically appropriate in the context of public performance, "but translated into English and transposed into cold print, they are as irritatingly dull as the 'and Abraham begat Isaac and Isaac begat...' chapters of the Bible" (Yoruba Poetry 19). Beier, external to the Jewish culture and belief system, indeed finds the inscription of the patriarchs' lineage dull, and his point may be illustrated by the English and Yoruba versions of a Yoruba Ijala on a Thanksgiving feast, in which the poet gives us a catalogue of Ogun's attributes. First, the Yoruba version:

Ogun l'ol 'aiye, baba, Ogun l'o l'orun

Ogun l'oni 'gbo, baba, Ogun l'o l' odan

Ogun l'o ni 'le, Ogun l'o l'ode

Ogun l'oni 'gba, Ogun l'o l'awo

Ogun l'o l'oko, Ogun l'o l'obe

Ogun l'o l'ato, Ogun l'o l'obe

Ogun l'o ba m' jalojo lojo idi mi. (Babalola 229)

Then the English version in Babalola's translation:

Ogun is Lord of the Earth, our father, Ogun is Lord of heaven

Ogun is Lord of the Forest, our father, Ogun is Lord of the Savannah

Ogun is the owner of the home, Ogun is Lord of the Streets and Squares

Ogun is the owner of all calabashes, Ogun is the owner of all plates

Ogun owns all hoes, Ogun owns all knives

Ogun owns all the male genitals. Ogun owns all female genitals

It was Ogun who helped me get rid of the foreskin in my groin. (228).

One need not have any appreciable understanding of the Yoruba language to realize that no English translation, however effective, can match the genius of the Yoruba original. In the Yoruba, the audience are not merely invited to participate; they are moved to a ritualistic climax by the repetition of the lines, which are constructed with the aim of overwhelming the audience with the volume of Ogun's attributes poured out in an uninterrupted flow of excitement. Repetitive cataloguing, therefore, serves as a technical device to achieve communal involvement.

Secondly, each line is made short enough to allow for a brief pause so as to help distinguish and mark out each pair of characteristics of the god, something the English translation, with its roundabout way of explaining simple vernacular phrases, cannot do. Thirdly, the poem is constructed in such a way that a pair of clear and decisive caesuras marks the antithesis in each line. Although each line appears on the surface equally to balance parallel qualities

of Ogun, the qualities are antithetical to each other. Heaven and earth are paired under the same metaphysics, but they are opposite ends of the ontological scale; similarly, though forest and Savannah both refer to expanses of land, one is full of trees while the other is treeless; home and streets and squares all describe areas of a city, but home is a reference to indoor life while streets and squares are for out-of-doors experience; also, calabash and plate are eating utensils, but one is native while the other is foreign. The hoe and knife are both professional instruments, though one is for farming, the other for hunting; finally, the human genitals are dichotomized into a male-female duality. One can see that the poem's rhythm is controlled by the exact division of each line into the two equal halves of the antithesis to reflect the traditional duality of Ogun's nature.

By far, the most significant distinction between the Yoruba and the English translation is the use of tonality. E. L. Lasebikan has noted that "tone is the essence of [African] poetry" (quoted, Finnegan, Oral Poetry 96), and as Léopold Sédar Senghor explains, music and tone languages are very closely interconnected:

The [African] languages are themselves pregnant with music. For these are tone languages, in which each syllable has its own pitch, intensity and duration, and in which each word may be given a musical notation. Word and music are intimately linked and will not tolerate dissociation or separate expression. . . .

Music cannot be dissociated from speech. It is no more than a complementary aspect of it. . . . (quoted, Arom 11)

In the Yoruba version, the power of assonance is very strong, and the constant repetition of the “o” sound, together with the tireless alliteration on the ‘l’ sound gives the poem an energy of tone which helps to vary the repeated elements in order to guard against boredom. The same is true with the use of parallelism in the Yoruba. The “l`o” and “l`o ni” elements ceaselessly combine with the noun components to give the poem a racy chanting quality that heightens the music of the chant for a better communal effect. Thus, although the vocabulary may change, the poem’s dominant idea, as well as its melody, is maintained in consecutive lines.

The endless repetition of Ogun’s name, awkward in the English but poetically appropriate in the Yoruba, makes it easier for the audience to pick up the spirit of the chant at the division of each antithesis. However, the repeated mentioning of Ogun’s name is much more than mere repetition. It serves as what Egbert J. Bakker calls “reinstantiation,” a continuous state of activation of a name so as to evoke the stories and heroic deeds associated with it (13). Repetition therefore establishes Ogun’s fame, rescuing the god from the forgetfulness that results from his absence from people’s consciousness. Repetition, in other words, immortalizes Ogun through the power of speech, and the performer’s repetition of the name, from the rich figurative personification of the god as the omnipotent lord of heaven and earth to the affirmation that he is the itinerant circumcision expert who owns the human

sexual organs, makes the performer a minister of fame. In part, it is this skill of giving names imperishable fame that makes oral poets the collective memory of the community.

Also present in the repetitive frame of the poem are technical devices, such as oral formulas or recurring phrases, which Milman Parry defines as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (272). These repeated phrases are useful, not because they make composing and rhyming easier, but because everybody uses them. This makes it easier for the audience to identify with the poem. Word choice, in effect, is not strictly private or individual (as in written poetry), but more traditional, reflecting widespread, communally significant phrases. This offers yet another good example of how the public nature of oral poetry determines its style and delivery. For oral poetry is public, made by and for the public, meant to be performed before and with the public, and unless one first realizes this essential character, one is likely to rush to judgement and condemn its peculiar devices, especially in English translation.

The devices I have mentioned in my discussion of the Ogun poem -- the catalogue, repetition, parallelism, alliteration, phonetic tone, and oral formulas -- constitute the predominant technical devices in traditional African oral poetry. They are not restricted to any one country or region of the continent but can be found in the traditional poetry of all Africa, though it must be added that particular techniques are sometimes more common in certain communities than in others. The catalogue and parallelism, for example, are the hallmark of

Southern African praise poetry, especially among the Sothos and the Zulus, who often compose entire poems running into hundreds of lines of catalogues. Parallelism in particular usually appears in the chorus or refrain to enhance the symbiotic interaction between the oral poet and the audience. A good example is this Zulu couplet in praise of King Ndaba:

Obeyalala wangangemimfula,

Obeyavuka wangangezintaba. (Finnegan, Oral poetry 100)

The English version, though long, does not lose the parallelism:

who when he lay down was the size of rivers

who when he got up was the size of mountains. (100)

According to Akosua Anyidoho, the major stylistic property of parallelism in traditional African poetry is the selection of syntactically equivalent structures ultimately leading to a climax. Lines follow a common sequence: the referent is introduced through a series of syntactically equivalent structures, punctuated with what are aptly called praise reference names -- personal names, epithets, totems, and appellations outlining the meritorious deeds of the referent -- and making references to heroic characteristics and place of origin (67-73). This technique lends pomp to the poetry.

Along with parallelism is the copious use of alliteration, which reaches an apogee in Somali classical poetry, in which it is such a dominant aspect of the poetic structure that sometimes every single one of hundreds of lines of poetry is alliterated by a single consonant. Each metrical line of Somali classical poetry is made up of two hemistiches, and each contains at least one

alliteration or assonance of the same consonant or vowel, so that a poem of a hundred lines may contain as many as two hundred or more words beginning with the same letter. Here are three lines (six hemistiches) of a long poem, with each hemistich containing one word beginning with the “g” consonant (I have used a stroke to separate the hemistiches of each line):

Dhaachaan ka gabangaabsaday e / waygu geliseen e

Gooddiga ban cawl buv fakhrigu / geed ku leeyahay e

Gaajada huggeedii miyaa / galabta i saaray? (Finnegan, Oral Poetry 94)

The function of these recurring “g” sounds is fourfold: they are meant to increase sound effect so that the musical qualities may move the audience towards group participation; they provide internal rhyme; they help create the rhythm of the poetry; and they function as oral formulas as defined by Milman Parry. Albert Lord, in The Singer of Tales, cites three criteria for a phrase to be considered a formula: meter, usefulness, and repetition. The recurring alliterative sounds in Somali classical poetry are repeated for metrical purposes; however, since it is only one particular sound that is repeated in an entire poem, for example the “g” sound, the traditional African poet faces a difficult task that involves years of training, practising, and performing in order to accumulate the needed repertoire of rhyming formulas.

To make his/her performance interesting, memorable, and unique, the oral poet also employs self-expressive rhetorical techniques to represent dramatically the character, voice, or behaviour pattern of a persona. For instance, Ananse, the spider, is said to speak through his nose, and the oral

poet switches easily from normal to nasalised speech whenever s/he is representing a saying by Ananse. Another important device is the effective use of exclamations of surprise, shock, or admiration. To express surprise, the oral poet may give out a direct frantic yell “Yee!”, and to produce music, s/he may add a distinctly, but perhaps not uniquely, African ideophonic linguistic system: a propensity to multiply the vowel or consonant sounds at the beginning, middle, or end of a word or sentence (example “Yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!”). Okpewho calls this ideophonic process a “phonaesthetic resource” (Myth 97), which is operational in West Africa, South Africa, and East Africa, and specifically in Zambian oral narrative and verse. Other expressive devices that the oral poet may use include onomatopoeia, which is freely used to capture the sound of falling persons, animals, or objects: “It fell in the water 'gba'.” To suggest sorrow, the oral poet may rest his or her chin in his or her palm, letting out short or long moaning sounds: “Hm! hm! hmmmmm! hmmmmmmmm!”

According to Abu Abarry’s analysis of Ga Adesa (folktales) of Ghana, oral poets generally resort to the song, often with the audience serving as the chorus in a call and response context, to “remark on specific incidents, clarify the sentiments and emotions of particular characters, or signal the approach of climactic points” (29). As the poet sings, s/he mimics specific incidents or sentiments to the amusement of the audience who sing with the poet and clap and stamp their feet, as this Adesa exemplifies:

Poet/Narrator: Anaanu gnale moko so eno-ee

Audience/Chorus: Anaanu gnale moko so eno-ee

Poet/Narrator: Kurdwe! Kurdwe! Kurdwe!

Audience/Chorus: Kurdwe! Kurdwe! Kurdwe!

Translation

Poet/Narrator: Somebody is squatting on the Spider's wife

Audience/Chorus: Somebody is squatting on the Spider's wife

Poet/Narrator: Kurdwe! Kurdwe! Kurdwe!

Audience/Chorus: Kurdwe! Kurdwe! Kurdwe! (30)

Here, the poet mimics the physical motions of copulation, emphasised by the strong alliterative sounds "Kurdwe! Kurdwe! Kurdwe!"

From this brief discussion of the more common rhetorical and poetic techniques used in traditional African poetry, one can conclude that the style is influenced heavily by the public character of the poetry. Techniques such as phonetic tone, repetition, alliteration, parallelism, and song are employed particularly to enhance the musical quality so essential for public performance. This quality explains why most of these poems are rarely spoken but either sung or recited to the accompaniment of some musical instrument, often the drum.

The drum, however, is not just an African equivalent of the Homeric lyre, or a musical accompaniment to poetic words. Sometimes, drumming itself is a form of verbalization: the poetic message is transmitted by means of drum language, and to be able to understand the message, one must understand the conventional language of drum poetry. Finnegan explains:

Drumming represents the spoken utterances in a way intelligible to the listeners, and as actual words and groups of words.

Tonal and rhythmic patterns in themselves would not be enough for full intelligibility, for many words in any language have the same patterns. But there are devices in the “drum language” to overcome ambiguity. This is partly achieved through having conventional occasions, [phrases,] and subjects for drum communication. . . . Thus – to take the drum language of the Kele people in the Congo – the conventional drum phrase for “rain” is “the bad spirit son of spitting cobra and sunshine,” for “money” “the pieces of metal which arrange palavers,” for “white man” . . . “he enslaves the people, enslaves the people who remain in the land.”

(120)

This kind of drum poetry is mainly found, though not restricted to, West Africa, especially in Ghana, Benin, and Nigeria. It is especially used to perform praise poetry in honour of a King or to transmit state history on state occasions, and its most consistent characteristic is the use of repetitions and parallelisms, which makes these poems long. Also, most of its phraseology is stereotyped phrases that are repeated several times.

Among the Akans of Ghana, drum poetry is most important in times of war when the praises of the warrior, ancestral spirits, the king or the military are drum-called not only as a source of inspiration for the soldiers, but also as a means of instilling fear in the enemy. In times of war, the talking drum calls out

loud to the entire community and the surrounding villages (it can be heard several miles away by many people simultaneously) to alert whoever hears and understands to the urgency of the situation. Note the repetitions which reinforce the musicality of the following stanza of a twenty-nine stanza drum-called historical account of the Mampong people of Ghana:

Spirit of fibre, Ampasakyi,
 Where art thou?
 The divine drummer announces that,
 Had he gone elsewhere in sleep?
 He has made himself to arise,
 He has made himself to arise;
 As the fowl crowed in the early dawn,
 Very early, very early, very early.
 We are addressing you,
 And you will understand.
 We are addressing you
 And you will understand. (Finnegan, Oral Literature 495)

In each stanza of the long poem, a warrior or ancestral spirit is introduced by name. A catalogue of praise names, and finally the divine drummer's refrain, a prayer often considered a magic formula, invoking a deity or ancestor to perform the drummer's wishes, follow.

The catalogue is also present in Yoruba drum poetry, as in the following Yoruba drum poem in praise of a King:

A serious case may worry one but it will come to an end
 A serious case worries one, as if it will never be settled
 The case will be settled, and the slanderers and gossipers
 Will be put to shame
 You met them in front, and you greet them
 You met them behind you, and you greet and greet them
 Your being courteous does not please them,
 Like being insolent
 Keep on being insolent to them and their fathers!
 . . .
 You, Adetoyese Akanji, bend one foot to greet them,
 You leave the other unbent! (Finnegan, Oral Literature 492)

Here, the catalogue is sustained by a skillful use of parallelism to convey the King's enigmatic nature.

Transmission of poetry via a musical instrument is not limited to the drum alone. Other musical instruments, such as the flute, are also used. In the following example from Nigeria, the entire poetic message is conveyed by means of a flute:

The Leopard and the Chief are coming today.
 When the good thing is coming into public,
 What will the singer do today?
 He who sits on the royal stool, Lion of lions,
 . . . the Leopard

and the chief are no plaything.

He who is fitted for the Kingship, let him be King!

It is God who makes the King. (Finnegan, Oral Literature 491)

The poem's musicality and its emphasis on animal imagery and other principal oral devices, such as repetition and parallelism, all aim to assert the centrality of its public design, which gives the poem its folk or popular character.

The colonizers of Africa did their best to silence this body of oral practices. Not only was the creative voice made silent and the high position of the artist demeaned, but the tradition itself was reduced in the colonizers' system of valuation to the level of untutored art fit only for the collector's private museum. The foreign invaders of Africa frowned on oral poetry, and they changed it into images of "savagery," "paganism," and the "uncivilized." They encouraged people to look down on it as primitive and lacking aesthetic value. Consequently, the earliest Anglophone African and African diasporic poets, such as Joseph Boakye Danquah, Gladys May Casely-Hayford, Raphael Ernest Grail Armattoe, Michael Dei Anang, and Denis Osadebay, began by imitating foreign forms without any attempt at integrating traditional African art into their works.

As Okpewho explains, however, this situation was rectified by nationalism and independence, which stressed that freedom, the inalienable right of all people, was worth fighting for, and that all peoples of the world had a right to both self-determination and respect for their native and indigenous institutions:

these writers would like to feel that even though their societies have changed drastically from what they were several generations ago and even though they communicate with the world in a language that is not their own, there must be certain fundamental elements in their oral traditions that they can bring into their . . . contemporary life. (African Oral Literature 18).

These elements, according to Okpewho, would help Blacks to “understand who [they] are, the value of what [they] do, how [they] have reached the stage of civilization [they] have achieved, and what steps [they] can take to improve [their] condition” (18). Clearly, the resurrection of past traditions through writing is a way of repossessing, recovering, preserving the past and defamiliarizing the English language, making it African and culturally distinct, so that no one would mistake it for a reflection of English culture.

CHAPTER TWO

WRITING ORALITY IN WOLE SOYINKA'S POETRY

In "New Trends In Modern African Poetry," Tanure Ojaide observes that "poetry in Africa is . . . currently enjoying an unprecedented creative outburst and popularity" (4). This popularity, according to him, seems to arise from "some aesthetic strength hitherto unrealized in written African poetry which has successfully adapted oral poetry technique into the written form" (4). Though written in English, the poetry carries the African sensibility, culture, world view, as well as the rhythms, structures, and techniques of oral tradition. This emphasis on cultural repossession is abundantly evident in the works of major African writers. To the Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo, the artist's vocation is a priestly office charged with maintaining the culture of his/her society as a whole. Heavensgate, Distances, and Limits, make this claim evident. Like Okigbo, Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor is preoccupied with African folk traditions, as well as the damaging effects of the European presence in Africa. As suggested by the title of his collection Rediscovery and Other Poems, the poetry is chiefly concerned with the plight of a contemporary Africa uprooted from its traditional past by contact with an uncomprehending Europe and the poet's attempts to regain this past.

Nor is the cultural emphasis restricted to West Africa. In East Africa, the two major poets, Jared Angira and Okot p'Bitek, use oral textual features to

reflect their identity. Okot p'Bitek's Song of Lawino, for instance, relies heavily on traditional oral literature in its use of Acoli proverbs and songs. The most obvious markers of orality in the text are the acknowledged borrowings, indented quotations, that Lawino uses to illustrate *kit Acoli* in many respects. When Lawino says "*lok wai lit loyo odo!*" (13), "Words cut more painfully than sticks" (16), she is reproducing the words of an *orak* song and proverb: "Kop loyo ado," ("Words pain more than a stick") (Oral Literature Among the Acoli and Lang'o 287).

The use of traditional African oral discourse is also discernible in the poetry of Southern Africa, especially poetry against apartheid. David B. Copland's analysis of Basotho *sefela*, (songs of the inveterate travelers), elucidates the oral content of this poetry, and it shows persuasively that *sefela* springs from traditional praise poems common throughout Southern Africa (quoted, Landeg White 7). So pervasive is the use of orature that even avowed Marxists like Ngugi, who might be tempted to abandon the past in light of their materialist historicism, still maintain orature in their works. Ngugi's I Will Marry When I Want, for instance, employs African oral discourse, especially songs, dance, and proverbs. Gicaamba, who in the play represents the masses as well as being a voice for the Marxists' materialist discourse, often calls on the masses to sing "a new song," and though the songs are full of the Marxist clichés, they are nevertheless expressed in the lively context of African oral discourse (41-2).

That a new cultural and literary orientation exists in contemporary African

literature can no longer be doubted. The long list of writers using and expanding features of oral discourse is enormous, and the particular genius of each author remains to be discussed fully. For my part, I will examine Wole Soyinka's Ogun Abibiman, one good example of this new cultural orientation that shows the influence of African-derived oral features on modern African poetry. The cultural location of the text is especially highlighted by the position taken by Soyinka in Myth, Literature and the African World, where he develops his vision of African literature (drama) and its relation to African culture through traditional categories. To him, what is important, as Stuart Sim points out, is to "demonstrate that 'the self-apprehension' of the African world in terms of concepts and categories can be embodied in properly African cultural forms, forms which can be considered to have artistic merit" (376).

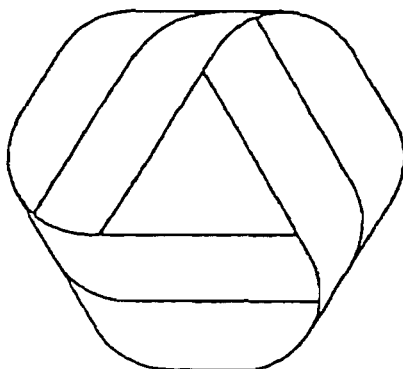
In explication of various philosophical concepts such as complementary pairs, cyclical evolution, and repetition, Soyinka uses traditional Yoruba deities such as Ogun. As god of iron, war, lightning, creation, and transition, Ogun comes to embody action, primal energy, and destruction on one hand, and passivity, regeneration, and resolution of conflicts on the other. Soyinka succinctly alludes to this multiple nature of the god in his essay "And After the Narcissist?":

Ogun is the antithesis of cowardice and Philistinism, yet within him is contained also the complement of the creative essence, a bloodthirsty destructiveness. Mixed up with the gestative inhibition of his nature . . . [is] the destructive explosion of an

incalculable energy. Contradictory as they are, it is necessary to experience these aspects of the god as a single comprehended essence. (14)

The complementary nature of Ogun is here emphasized, but Soyinka does not mince words in making the reader aware that the many sides of Ogun consolidate into one complex whole, which is nevertheless expressed as a two-sided phenomenon to reflect in both singular and plural dimensions the creative and the destructive propensities embodied in Ogun. Explicating this nature of Ogun elsewhere, Soyinka reconstructs it as "the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man" (Myth 150). The ambivalent nature of Ogun is thus expanded into an effective means of presenting the reality of both the destructive and creative potential inherent in human beings.

In Idanre, Soyinka also parallels Ogun's complementary nature to the "banked loop of the 'Mobius Strip'" (83) to emphasize the multiform nature of the god. Soyinka explains the Mobius Strip as "a mathe-magical ring, infinite in self-recreation into independent but linked rings and therefore the freest conceivable (to me) symbol of human or divine (e. g. Yoruba, Olympian) relationships. A symbol of optimism, also, as it gives the illusion of a "kink" in the circle and a possible centrifugal escape from the eternal cycle of . . . [the] evil history of man . . . for the Mobius Strip is a very simple figure of aesthetic and scientific truths and contradictions" (88):



(Figure 1. 1 Academic American Encyclopedia [1989] 488)

As Richard Priebe observes, "the 'Möbius Strip' there becomes a symbol of the poet's reinterpretation of the myth of Ogun--in fact a metonym for the god" (125).

By adopting the Möbius Strip as the Ogunian image, Soyinka represents the complementary nature of Ogun within a circular pattern: Ogun thus becomes a philosophical concept of existence, involving alternating circles of creativeness and destructiveness, each unit of the duality made a condition of the other. In their mythographic analyses of Soyinka's poetry, Afam Ebeogu has traced this underlying pattern of death and rebirth in Soyinka's mythic references, while Donatus Nwoga concludes that "the wisdom which he [Soyinka] finds [in Yoruba tradition], and what . . . emerges from his poems and gives significance to them, is recognition of the cyclic nature of death and resurrection, of destruction and new creation" (183). In Soyinka's poetic reconstruction of Yoruba traditional deities, the gods are less simply gods than complex nodes of concepts and categories.

Persistently, Soyinka has argued that an artistic system based on traditional African beliefs is not merely relevant to modern African literature, but most importantly, is its most appropriate means of expression. In view of this remark, the fact that critics have not paid much attention to African cultural forms in Soyinka's Ogun Abibiman comes as a surprise. To date, criticism on the poem, such as W. B. Last's "Ogun Abibiman" and Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie's "A Comment on Ogun Abibiman," has thematized the poem's contemporary links with Africa's liberation struggles in Southern Africa. Very little or no attention has been paid to the poem's relations to oral African war poetry; yet it is to such poetry that the post-colonial Soyinka returns, rewriting it for a socio-political purpose.

African war poetics comprise the unique discursive practices that operated as war strategies in Africa before the European colonization of the continent. These practices characteristically included making reference to the presence of, and the human dependence on, gods, spirits, supernatural forces, and ancestors in times of war or national emergencies; using an engaged poetic voice to stir up public sentiments against an imminent danger to the community; stressing the virtues of group strength, heroism, and patriotism; resorting to particular oral generic modes, like the victory ritual of song and celebration, drum poetry, dancing, and chanting, which together give the discourse a public, socio-political character; and using special technical features, like detailed descriptions of war objects and a dramatization of war situations. These descriptions, usually couched in short verse form (to fit the

urgency of a war situation), and punctuated with emphatic repetition, puns, proverbs, parallelism, appellations, alliteration, and animal and plant imagery, represented compressed ways of expressing imminent victory. These traditional devices, repressed for decades in anglophone African poetry, are the discursive strategies that Soyinka redeploys in Ogun Abibiman. They are used as counter-colonial discourse against the imposed European knowledges, values, disciplines, and institutions that were part of the imperial state apparatus during the colonial period.

Though Soyinka returns to his African roots, he considers the past not as the end sought but as the means to create an artistic and linguistic universe built on a synthesis of African and European literary values. Thus, Soyinka can be described as a traditional writer, not in the literal sense of repeating the customs, beliefs, and literary traditions handed down from generation to generation (as traditionalists do), but in the manner illustrated by T. S. Eliot in his famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Eliot, though Eurocentric in his equation of the artist with the European artist, argues that the artist's past is not changeless, forever exotic and remote, but a dynamic zone which involves "not only . . . the pastness of the past, but . . . its presence," and hence "compels [the artist] to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (14). In conformity with Eliot's concept of tradition, Soyinka particularly follows the Yeatsian precept that one

way a modern poet could explain his/her message is to create a new poetic discourse out of his/her past. So just as William Butler Yeats creates a personal mythology in which modern nationalist heroes like Parnell join forces with Irish mythological heroes like Cuchulain in a struggle which also involves classical heroes like Hercules and Agamemnon, so in Soyinka's work modern African nationalists join forces with the Yoruba god Ogun, the legendary Zulu King Shaka, and other ancestors in Africa's liberation struggle.

The title words Ogun (Yoruba god) and Abibiman, an Akan word Soyinka defines as "The Black [Abibi] Nation [man]; the land of the Black Peoples; the Black World; that which pertains to, the matter, the affair of, Black peoples" (Ogun Abibiman 23), were initially oral signifiers limited to particular ethnic groups, the Yorubas of Nigeria and Akans of Ghana respectively. But in carrying forward these references through a written form, Soyinka broadens their cultural reference to offer them as the proud property of the whole of Africa or the Black World, thus giving the text a more international character. This practice not only shows a Pan African cultural consciousness at work, but raises issues about naming and Black nationalism as well.

The name Abibiman (Africa) thrusts up several cultural, geographical, and political assumptions. Translated into a colonial language, for example English, Abibi means Black. As is well known, black in the White World has negative connotations. But in adopting an indigenous name for black, Soyinka moves away from the colonial definition of the word black to one that has more positive connotations, somewhat similar to a Negritudist redefinition of the

word. The term is invested with a sense of Black pride, which indeed constitutes a bold cultural and political venture in the context of a people whose inter- and intra-continental affairs are still dominated by neocolonial forces and colonial languages. Soyinka's naming therefore can be described in terms of what Boehmer calls double cleaving (105-06). He reverses degrading stereotypes about the Black heritage. Abibiman is of course Africa, but it names all Black peoples, including diasporic Africans, as citizens by right of color. Unlike the name Africa that encompasses an enormous assortment of peoples, including White Africans, the name Abibiman endows its principal morpheme, Abibi, with the privilege of ownership; non-black Africans are excluded from the referential implications of the word.

The positive implications of the name are, however, not without some problems. Although the name is a catch-all word for all Blacks, establishing cultural homogeneity among a wide variety of cultural groups, its constitutive implications are so gross that very little room is left for needed specification of individual parts. Such a construction, to use Arun Mukherjee's formulation, homogenizes and creates a native devoid of gender, class, and ethnicity. The logic of the name is also fraught with exclusivist and essentialist viewpoints about Africa that excludes non-Black Africans who, either by right of birth or naturalization, qualify as Africans. Exclusivism and essentialism, as Edward Said argues, reconstitute difference as identity, conferring identities by demarcating "we"/"they" (us/them) oppositions -- the same dichotomizing and essentializing discourse that the colonizer is accused of. Said argues

especially against the self-indulgence of celebrating one's own identity, since according to him, identity does not imply "an ontologically given and externally determined stability, or uniqueness, or irreducible character, or privileged status as something total and complete in and of itself" (407). In effect, no one ethnic group today can claim, if it ever could, to be pure. We are all *métissage*.

However, the problems of homogeneity and essentialism in Soyinka's definition of Abibiman wither in light of the apparently converse argument that his definition is to be understood in terms of the ideology of Black Consciousness. Steve Biko, one of the outstanding leaders of the Black Consciousness movement, defines it as follows:

Briefly defined . . . Black Consciousness is in essence the realization by the black [person] of the need to rally together with his [kind] around the cause of their oppression -- the blackness of their skin -- and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. . . . It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook on life. (quoted, Ngara 133)

As Ngara explains, Black consciousness "neither idealizes blackness nor posits a theory of racial superiority. Its argument is that white racism is the major political force in South Africa and that Africans, Indians and coloureds are branded 'non-whites' and are therefore oppressed by reason of their colour" (133). Inter alia, this ideology gives a sense of the oppression of all Blacks; it

evokes Pan Africanist ideas. But for the post-colonial Soyinka to think of all Blacks as one, especially after scholars, notably Frantz Fanon in Chapter Three of The Wretched of the Earth, "Pitfalls of Nationalism," have pronounced the death of Pan Africanism, raises questions about Black nationalism that invite a revision of current theories of it.

Critics generally identify two moments of Black nationalism in modern Africa: generalized nationalism and new state nationalism. The first, according to critics, occurred during the colonial period when reference to nationalism did not mean affiliation with any particular state but simply any form of resistance to colonialism and/or any affirmation of African rights. Abiola Irele explains that any person or group "that explicitly assert[ed] the rights and aspirations of a given African society . . . in opposition to European authority, whatever its institutional form and objectives" was considered nationalist (quoted, Miller, "Nationalism" 65). In effect, nationalism was not in the name of any particular African nation, but rather in the name of the African continent. The second, new state nationalism, refers to nationalism of a different sort that occurred after independence and was limited to specific national borders. As Miller explains, "having demanded nationhood in [a] peculiar, generalized sense, Africans found themselves subject to nationalism of quite a different, more vulgar sort. The arbitrary borders between African states, which had been ignored or critiqued as arbitrary by the theory of Pan-African nationalism, were reasserted as the armatures of a more familiar state nationalism at the service of a new elite" (65) who critiqued regimes in independent states, particularly

neocolonial regimes that were set up by the new political elite.

But as critics point out, this latter form of resistance ends up supporting and creating a national culture which in turn demystifies and strips the former type of nationalism of all its ambitions and pretensions. As Miller forcefully argues, publications attacking regimes in a new state crystallize into what Richard Bjornson calls a “universe of discourse” that is specific to a particular state. Bjornson defines universe of discourse as “the rules, procedures, assumptions, and conventional meanings that permit verbal [I will add non-verbal] communication among individuals from the same community of language users” (xi). By non-verbal I mean the organization of furniture, food, clothing, music, and artifacts into patterned sets to communicate meaning in a manner analogous to the meaning of words and sounds in sentences. Consequently, the argument goes that through the discourse of resistance to regimes in a new state, a national literature is formed, which one can use in part to determine what constitutes the literary borders as well as the system of shared references specific to a particular country.

Yet just when the debate on nationalism seems to have settled, just when the remarkable feature of Pan African nationalism looks dead because of the reassertion of colonial borders, it is brought back to life by Soyinka. This resurfacing puts us in a better position to understand the phenomenon of African nationalism as a specific cultural phenomenon produced by political relations in Black societies at particular historical moments. In times of danger to the community, Africans or peoples of Black descent unite under a Pan

Africanist umbrella to combat an enemy, but disperse into their individual communal units after the danger is removed. In times of peace, African states are multinational -- indeed before colonialism each ethnic group constituted a nation unto itself -- but in times of danger to the community, Africans see themselves as one against a common enemy. This solidarity is symbolized in lines such as "Ogun treads the earth of Shaka" (24); "Rogbodiyan! Rogbodiyan! / Bayete Ba ba! Bayete" (11); and the title Ogun Abibiman, which all suggest (through the mixture of Akan/Yoruba, Zulu/Yoruba words, and the movement from one geographical area to another) the unity of the Black race and the abrogation of geographical and linguistic borders among Blacks.

Ogun Abibiman's foreword celebrates Mozambique's Samora Machel's declaration of war against the then-White-ruled Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and appraises this event as a prelude to "the definitive probe towards an ultimate goal, a summation of the continent's liberation struggle against the bastion of inhumanity--apartheid South Africa" (Ogun Abibiman foreword). In Mandela's Earth, Soyinka's next poetry collection, he reversed this praise however when Machel retreated from his declaration by compromising with the South African government in signing the Nkomati accord, the nonaggression pact between the two countries, which pledged that the two governments would not give material aid or bases to any group threatening the security of the other. Mozambique complied by expelling thousands of African National Congress (ANC) members who had escaped the atrocities of apartheid. Soyinka bitterly condemns this act in "Apologia (Nkomati)," the last of the "Mandela's Earth"

section, arguing that such capitulation “Betray[s] our being” (25).

Though the preface to Ogun Abibiman gives prominence to the nationalist efforts of living beings like Machel, the actual poem, twenty-four pages long, does not. Rather, it is preoccupied with ancestral warrior spirits, like Ogun and Shaka, preparing and leading the offensive against Rhodesia and South Africa. This belief in the involvement of gods and ancestral spirits in the affairs of the living is perhaps the poem’s most outstanding feature that signals Soyinka’s use of traditional African war discourse.

Soyinka calls this involvement of spirits in the affairs of the living the “principle of complementarity,” which he defines as the simultaneous interaction between the supernatural and the material world. He goes so far as to caution post-colonial writers of African descent that “to ignore this [principle] and pursue the alternative route of negation is, for whatever motives, an attempt to perpetuate the external subjugation of the black continent” (Myth 19). Stephen Slemon represents this simultaneous interaction as a positive aspect of counter-colonial discourse. He sees it not just as an intrinsic part of the everyday reality of most post-colonial societies, but most importantly as a way of rereading and rewriting colonial discourse. According to Slemon, the strategy is adopted to create or recreate post-colonial local identities in order to effect not only difference but resistance to the totalizing systems of the “massive imperial centre” (11), and to confound the values and discursive structures constituted by colonial discourse.

Consequently, the opening lines of the first section of Soyinka’s poem

have Ogun reawakening to the task of leading his people to battle to destroy White racist power in Southern Africa. His appearance is felt in the whole of Abibiman:

No longer are the forests green; storms
 Assail the palm, the egret and the snail.
 Bared, the dark heart of a hidden nursery
 Of embers flares aglow, a landmass writhes
 From end to end, bathed and steeped
 In stern tonalities. (1)

His whirling, incalculable energy causes storms, "earthquakes," "a flood unseasonal" (1), and agitates the whole cosmos, penetrating even into the womb of the earth to cause the "earth [to] / Ring in unaccustomed accents" (2). Present with Ogun are ancestral spirits whom Soyinka refers to as "A horde of martyrs [who] burst upon our present -- / [marching], beside the living" (2). Though alluding to the coming of Ogun and the heroic dead to accompany the living to battle, this section also suggests the particular mode in which the traditional African experiences ancestral spirits. It shows how all of Abibiman feels Ogun's energy, and how the god's indomitable will is felt in the Black soul. As Soyinka pointed out during a question-and-answer session at the African Studies Association Conference in Los Angeles, November 1979, the belief in the involvement of gods and the heroic dead in the affairs of the living is common to many societies, but unique to Africa in this one respect: "the way it is permanently affective in the consciousness and activity of the living" (quoted,

Katrak 43). Indeed, this belief constitutes a different way of understanding life for the majority of traditional Africans, and informs " [their] sense of strife, of conflict and resolution" (43).

Ogun, who is also the god of Harvest, as Soyinka makes us aware in Idanre (86), is represented as abandoning his agricultural functions and devoting himself solely to the forging of a weapon that will bring inevitable victory to his people:

Rust and silence fill the thatch

Of Ogun's farmstead.

. . .

A planting season [is] lost.

. . .

Rust

Possesses cutlass and hoe. But listen. . . .!

Carillons in the distance. A festal

Anvil wreathed in peals, split by a fervid

Tongue of ore in whiteglow.

The Blacksmith's forearm lifts,

And dances. . . .

Its swathes are not of peace.

Who dare restrain this novel form, this dread

Conversion of the slumbering ore. . . . (3-4)

This allusion to Ogun forging a weapon recalls a far worse situation in the history of the Yoruba of Nigeria.

Yoruba myth has it that there came a time when the contemporaneous experience of the the living and the non-living, or of the mortals and gods, was upset due to rebellion on the part of mortals. This "disruption in the cosmic principle of complementarity," as Soyinka calls it (Myth 22), resulted in a long isolation of the gods from mortals which brought about an "immense chaotic growth which had sealed off reunion [between mortals and the gods]" (144). The gods tried, but failed to demolish this impassable barrier, until Ogun, "armed with the first technical instrument which he had forged from the ore of mountain-womb" (28-29), "not only dared to look into transitional essence, but triumphantly bridged it with knowledge, with art, with vision and the mystic creativity of science--a total and profound hubristic assertiveness that is beyond any parallel in Yoruba experience" (157). He thus earned the appellation "the first creative energy, the first challenger and conqueror of transition" (145). Ogun once again forging a weapon from "slumbering ore" in Ogun Abibiman serves an inspirational purpose, which stems from the basic philosophy that no problem is as big as the one the disruption in the cosmic principle caused. If Ogun was able to forge a weapon to conquer the abyss of transition, it follows logically that he would be able to forge another one to tackle the oppression of Blacks in Southern Africa. This analogy not only replaces fear with hope in the people of Abibiman, but more importantly it banishes all thoughts of cowardice and the slightest expectation of disappointment.

Witness Soyinka's imagining of the victory ritual of song and celebration, accompanied with drumming, dancing, and chanting, that develops into a "burgeoning . . . convergence of wills" as the "chimes of re-creation recalls [the people] / To an origin, a oneness":

The singer's tongue is loosened

The drummer's armpits

flex for a lyrical contention

. . .

Now self-acclaiming,

Spurs the Cause to the season of enthronement. (4)

Unlike the Homeric lyre which provides an instrumental accompaniment to singing or to the poetic words of the individual poet, drumming in this social context involves not just the stirring of group sentiment to enhance the public and socio-political character of the business at hand, but the sending of a special poetic message that exists in its own right. This is the tradition of the famous "talking drum" which is popular in Ghana and Nigeria, especially among the Akan and Yoruba, where it is used to perform poetry in honor of a king or god, to transmit state history on state occasions, convey external danger in times of war, or, as Kwabena Nketia points out, to communicate "the presence of a divinity . . . or some particular [divine] character participating in [an] event" (Drumming 229). In the case of Ogun Abibiman, the honoring of the divine presence seems the most probable purpose for the drumming, since it is Ogun's presence that sparks the excitement at this point in the poem. As a

language whose words are not spoken or sung by mouth but played out loud to help transmit messages in a sort of telegraphic code, drum language serves as an effective and strategic counter-colonial discourse: on one hand, it shuts off the colonizers from the fuller meaning and significance of what is communicated; on the other, it invites its intended African audience to listen and respond accordingly to the message of the talking drum.

Reference to the “drummer’s . . . lyrical contention” introduces not just a different poetic discourse, but another poetic voice besides that of the posited poet/speaker. The former, however, is suppressed, and comes to life only through the readers’ or audience’s imaginative evocation of the music and poetry of the primal drum. Unlike Kobina Eyi Acquah’s Music for a Dream Dance or Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s Arrivants where drum poetry is directly reproduced in the written text, Ogun Abibiman just makes reference to drum poetry to mirror its occurrence in the text. To the reader who is not familiar with the Yoruba language and the special ways in which it communicates to people, this evocation of drum poetry will seem puzzling or incomplete. But as Ulli Beier explains in the introduction to his book Yoruba Poetry, Yoruba poetic language is full of allusions and incomplete phrases which readers are left to complete in their own minds. The assumption behind such linguistic and poetic practice is that readers, upon encountering this episode of the drummer’s lyrical contention (as a reference to drum poetry), will recall and incorporate the commonly known poetry of the talking drum into the text. By incorporating this discourse of the primal drum, Soyinka demonstrates that he is in search of

participants as much as listeners, people who, by encountering a reference to the celebrative voice of the drummer, will reproduce complete versions into the text from memory. Hence the poem is couched in an artistic frame that envisions potential audience participation in order to energize and lift the text from the printed page into a dynamic experience.

As a further means of enhancing the dramatic experience, the poet, as "acolyte to [Ogun]" (4), assumes the role of the public poetic voice, arguing that war is the only just, hopeful, and logical thing to embark on because all attempts, like dialogue, sanctions, and diplomacy, aimed at attaining a peaceful solution to the Southern Africa problem, have not only failed but worsened the situation:

Sanctions followed Dialogue, games
 Of time-pleading.
 And Sharpeville followed Dialogue
 And Dialogue
 Chased its tail, a dogged dog
 Dodging the febrile barks
 Of protest--
 Always from beyond the fence.
 Sharpeville
 Bared its teeth, and that
 Proved no sleeping dog
 Though the kind world let it lie. (6)

The repetition of and pun on "dogs," a word-play Obi Maduakor mistakenly describes as "amateurish" (77), appear funny but not playful. The word-play evokes the dissimilar meanings of, and attitudes toward, notable remarks dealing with dogs in both the African and colonial worlds. The Western proverb "Let sleeping dogs lie," which enjoins people to leave things as they are, undisturbed, expresses a satisfaction with the status quo, and clashes with its opposed meaning in the African context: "Sharpeville / Bared its teeth, and that / Proved no sleeping dog. . . . / Ogun is the tale that wags the dog / All dogs, and all have had their day" (6). The African phrase dealing with Ogun's connection with the dog essentially means there is no place for "sleeping dogs" because Ogun shakes them out of their slumber. It is creatively representative of oral folk culture, stressing the belief that the current situation requires action.

Of significance is the fact that although Soyinka uses an African proverb to abrogate a Western one, he reinforces the African one with another English proverb in the subsequent line: "All dogs, and all have had their day" (6), derived from "every dog shall have its day." Since proverbs are a distillation of generations of experience reflecting particular worldviews, and therefore must be understood in the broader context of cultural transmission, it is useful to note that by reinforcing or merging an African proverb with a Western one, Soyinka uses selective appropriation to forge a new linguistic and cultural relationship, a sharing of meanings, experiences, and visions where none existed before.

Soyinka's point, that war is the only way to ensure the liberation of Blacks in Southern Africa, can be understood better from some observations

that the great African thinker and scientist, Cheikh Anta Diop, makes about the issue in a 1970 interview with Afriscope. Expressing a contemporary African reaction against dialogue, especially the Organization of African Unity's (OAU's) official policy of dialogue with South Africa, Diop argues that South Africa is not seeking dialogue, but time, the necessary time to develop her nuclear arsenal which will consequently pose the threat of extermination to Blacks who oppose White rule in Southern Africa (255). Technologically speaking, South Africa was at this time very close to the thermonuclear stage, which situation for Soyinka argued for an intensification of the liberation struggle: to move away from dialogue and other "games / Of time-pleading" to the ultimate -- what he calls a steel event, or armed struggle. His literary engagement in Ogun Abibiman is therefore tied to a particular historical moment, although we can say that like the engagement of other writers of African descent, his is also born out of the trauma of colonization.

New Criticism, which views a poem as a verbal icon, argues against any relationship between history and literature and, like Maurice Blanchot's ideas, emphasizes the death and the absence of the author. But in New Criticism and Blanchot's works, especially the latter's works that call for active public protest among writers opposed to French policies in Algeria, history and the author are very much present in allusions to historical events, or in the fact that historical events influence what he writes. Consequently, the attempt to refuse history, for fear that to attribute any historical or social role to literature will relegate or reduce the literary to a socio-political or historical tool, is, to say the least, an

impossible task: literature cannot be completely neutral, totally detached from history -- past or present. Any telling or writing involves history. Indeed, for certain writers, textualizing this relationship between history and literature is an inescapable responsibility of the artist. Soyinka points this out in "The Writer in a Modern African State," insisting that African writers have a social function because "the artist has always functioned in African society as the record[er] of the mores and experience of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time" (20). For him, writing extends not only into social realms, but also into the domain of engagement. Consequently, he makes engagement part of the very theme of Ogun Abibiman.

Though the sense of literature as engagement, revolt, and rehabilitation of an oppressed, colonized race, characterize Ogun Abibiman, significant words that Soyinka uses to reflect this sense of engagement are paradoxical. As Ngara points out, two principles run through the entire poem, and these are symbolized by the subtitle of part one: "Steel Usurps the Forests; Silence Dethrones Dialogue":

Steel refers to arms of war, to Africa's acceptance of an armed liberation struggle; while the dethroning of dialogue by silence signifies the rejection of the policy of dialogue with South Africa which had been advocated by some members of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Silence also lends weight to the tense atmosphere created in this part of the poem, an atmosphere which symbolizes a moment in African history charged with

tension and emotion, indicating Africa's preparedness for the final onslaught. (97)

Silence, often defined as utter stillness, not speaking, voicelessness, here reveals itself paradoxically as resistance, as tension. In effect, silence here speaks louder than words; it becomes what Tzvetan Todorov would consider "comportement verbal" in The Poetics of Prose, the idea that the very act of not speaking "speaks." In particular, Soyinka relates silence to dedication to a cause, the objective of freedom, to which "in vow of silence," Ogun and the people of Abibiman have committed themselves until the "task is done" (2).

Soyinka's description of this critical moment of political commitment to a future in which apartheid in South Africa is overcome involves an intricate tapestry of African-heritage poetry down the centuries, as well as the politics of the gaze, which critics, from Jean Paul Sartre to Michel Foucault and Homi Bhabha, recognize as a crucial sign of colonial control and resistance. Black soldiers, described in terms of appellations and animal imagery symbolizing action, strength, beauty, and grace, glance at their objective with a determination that pales other anticolonial representations of the politics of the gaze into insignificance:

In time of race, no beauty slights the duiker's

In time of strength, the elephant stands alone

In time of hunt, the lion's grace is holy

In time of flight, the egret mocks the envious

In time of strife, none vies with Him

Of seven paths, Ogun, who to right a wrong
 Emptied reservoirs of blood in heaven
 Yet raged with thirst -- I read
 His savage beauty on black brows,
 In depths of molten bronze aflame
 Beyond their eyes' fixated distances
 And tremble! (7)

This passage is influenced by appellation poetry, particularly its stylistic features, analysis of which sheds light on Soyinka's poetic style and his choice and use of language.

Akosua Anyidoho lists the major stylistic aspects of appellation poetry as the frequent reference to praise names, parallelism of structure, and the formation of compound words. To show the influence of this type of poetry on Soyinka, it might be useful to outline the similarities between appellation poetry and Soyinka's style, taking our example from Okyeame Akuffo's Kotohene Dammirifua Due, specifically the "Appellation to the Akwamuhene," which is reproduced in full in Appendix 1.

The poem's first property is the frequent recurrence of praise reference names: personal names, epithets, appellations, and names of animals and birds, some representing the totems of the person being adored. All aspects of this property are present in Soyinka's poem. Indeed the high frequency of names in such a short passage -- duiker, elephant, lion, egret, He of seven paths, Ogun, heaven, etc. -- may appear excessive until its significance is

grasped in the oral context. As Kojo Yankah points out, the purpose is to “individuate and depict the referent as deserving the attention of society among a paradigm of peers and co-equals” (382). Citing Ogun’s actions in heaven is particularly significant because it magnifies and elevates his status by suggesting that he has the power to make blood flow copiously even in heaven.

Parallel structures are likewise used in Ogun Abibiman to emphasize the heroic characteristics of Ogun. The selection of syntactically equivalent structures ultimately leads to the climax where Ogun is proclaimed the unconquerable warrior. And just as in the appellation poem the lexical items are restricted to the semantic field of war-related vocabulary, so they are in the passage written by Soyinka. Even the actions of the animals and birds are a type of warfare, all intended to stress the might of the referent.

Perhaps the most significant features of appellation poetry are its sound systems and tonal structure which enable artists to form compounds out of phrases and clauses. This device, as Anyidoho explains, “entails agglutinating the words in the phrase or clause, deleting the subject and attaching a nominal prefix to the new word whenever necessary” (76). F. Dolphyne’s The Akan (Twi-Fante) Language: Its Sound System and Tonal Structure explains the device in detail. D. P. Kunene’s Heroic Poetry of the Basotho, and M. Damane and P. Sanders’s Lithoko-Sotho Praise-Poems also illustrate a similar device in Zulu poetry. An example from the Akan appellation poem is “Ahu-abɔ-birim” (fierce conqueror), compounded from the clause “Ohu a ɔbɔ birim,” meaning “he sees it and panics.” These compounds, derived from phrases and clauses,

are all neologisms used to reflect major characteristics of the referent, such as his/her/its might, movements, and conduct. Examples of compounding abound in the second section of Ogun Abibiman: “Breeze-that-cools-Bayete’s-blood” (10), “blood-streams” (12), and “life-usurper’s fortress” (15).

Major consequences of this compounding device are that it produces double and triple compounds; creates obscurities, new meanings, and heightened intensity; and results in syntactic jugglery and scrambling of word order. These are the same characteristics in Soyinka’s poetry that Chinweizu, Madubuike, and Jemie, co-authors of Toward the Decolonization of African Literature, see as an imitation of European literary mannerisms parroting the “toughness” for readers of neo-metaphysical poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins. What they claim is a Western poetic tradition of complexity for its own sake they find in Soyinka’s poetry too, and they see it as not just evidence of neocolonialism, but the outcome of what they called “unsuccessful mimesis: The Hopkins Disease” (viii). Consequently, they write off Soyinka’s poetry, asserting that it is anti-African because of its lack of African values, especially the “classic simplicity and terseness” (185) of African traditional poetry. Undoubtedly, these observations are in part accurate. Soyinka himself does not deny the central charges of “wilful obscurity,” syntactic disjunction, and the subtle rhythmic texture of his poetry (“Neo-Tarzanism” 327).

In his explanation, however, Soyinka has always maintained that these characteristics of his poetry reflect positive Afrocentric literary values, rather than the neocolonial mimicry the Chinweizu group has attributed to him. In

Soyinka's "The Choice and Use of the English Language," the complexities are seen as reflecting an authentic African cultural and visionary experience:

Coming from a people (the Yoruba) whose love of language for its own sake, for its very maneuverability is probably unmatched on the continent and maybe even in the world, I testify to this capacity of the tool to, literally, possess the user. (3)

Soyinka regards his use of language as an offspring of African oral tradition, revealing the complex nature of the African character, which many European scholars had hitherto misrepresented as a boring being of idyllic goodness and simplicity. Soyinka's explanation is not to say that the "classic simplicity" the Chinweizu group talk about and his complex language are antithetical, for both are forms of oral literature, and their difference does underline the varied linguistic range of oral literature.

From Soyinka's explanation, one can surmise that he relies on what Oluwole Adejare sees as "mortised strands," a situation where "the writer incorporates texts from several sources in the production of his own" (128), to the point where the boundaries of the mortised strands may become difficult to distinguish. Moreover, the mortised strands acquire a new semiotic framework that elicits new meanings. Adejare's book outlines instances in other works by Soyinka where he relies on this strategy. Critics, however, have been quick to identify the European sources rather than the African ones, a misunderstanding that most critics from Africa and the Black diaspora are also guilty of. The problem with Black critics, however, is not insufficient attention, but their

internalizing of a Western frame of reference to the point where identification of Western sources occurs before that of African poetics.

Titled "Shaka!," the second section of Ogun Abibiman features a shift in focus from preoccupation with the gods' involvement in the affairs of the living to that of the famous Zulu King, Shaka, an ancestral warlord. Shaka, described by Soyinka as "Africa's most renowned nation builder," and as a "military and socio-organizational genius" (23), epitomizes ancestor-warriors who, though they have transcended mortality to become god-like heroes, are traditionally believed to participate in the military affairs of the living. The involvement of Shaka in Abibiman's independence struggle is also crucial in a counter-colonial way: his presence reinforces the nationalist and postcolonial argument of an unbroken chain of resistance to colonial rule. Said explains:

The question of dating the resistance to imperialism in subject territories is crucial to both sides [the colonizer and the colonized] in how imperialism is seen. . . . To the colonizer, the Natives "were really happy until roused by troublemakers, "but for the liberation/nationalist fighter[s], leading the struggle against the European power, legitimacy . . . depend[s] on their asserting an unbroken continuity leading to the first warriors who stood against the intrusive white man. (197)

Soyinka's appeal to the past is therefore not just an evocation of precolonial culture, but also his disagreement with a colonial history that teaches that those who started the resistance to colonialism invented their nationalism in colonial

schools, not by emulating the resistance of their ancestors. Thus, although Shaka generally epitomizes precolonial ancestors, put in this context of dating anti-colonial resistance, he particularly epitomizes historical personalities such as Yaa Asantewaa, the Ashanti Queen-mother who led one of the most stubborn and effective military resistance efforts against the British colonial presence in Africa.

Shaka's military invincibility and his past achievements are the theme here. Soyinka alludes to how Shaka accomplished the seemingly impossible task of turning a petty Zulu chieftaincy, to any of the borders of which one could walk in less than an hour, into a kingdom which encompassed the whole of South-Eastern Africa, extending from the great Kei river in the Cape to the Zambezi, and from the Indian Ocean to the farthest confines of Bechuanaland. E. A. Ritter observes that "from a rabble of 500 men, [Shaka]. . . increased his army to 50,000 warriors whose discipline exceeded that of the Roman legions at their best" (345). These achievements are appraised in the following lines of Ogun Abibiman:

Shaka, King and general
 Fought battles, invented rare techniques, created
 Order from chaos, coloured the sights of men
 In self-transcending visions, sought
 Man's renewal in the fount of knowledge.
 From shards of tribe and bandit mores, Shaka
 Raised the city of man in commonweal. (15)

This recounting of Shaka's achievements is designed to inspire confidence in the people of Abibiman. The most important inspiration, however, comes from the fact that as a warrior, Shaka never lost a battle. Zulu war and royal heroic poetry capture this feat in what may be described as traditional Africa's poetic equivalent of the homeric epithet: "the ever-ready-to-meet-any-challenge," which epithet usually is used with other Zulu war songs in Shaka's honour, especially this: "He has annihilated the enemies! / Where shall he now make war? / He has vanquished all the Kings! / Where shall he make war?" (Finnegan, World Treasury 134).

Because Shaka and Ogun are set on the same course of action -- to annihilate the enemy in Southern Africa -- Soyinka uses expressions which seem to merge the two spirits: "Shaka, roused, / Defines his being anew in Ogun's embrace" (9); "I feel and know [Ogun's] tread as mine" (10); "Our histories meet, the forests merge / With the savannah" (11). All that this merging of identities means in the oral context is that these two spirits, god and heroic dead, both invincible in war, approve of war, and have come to lead Africa against the colonial regimes in Southern Africa. The choral battle song in Yoruba, which portrays Ogun and Shaka shaking hands, symbolizes both this leadership role and the two leaders' approval of war:

Ròbòdiyàn! Ròbòdiyàn!

Ogún re lé e Shákà

Ròbòdiyàn

Ogún gbo wó o Shákà

O di ròbòdiyàn (9)

Soyinka's English version reads:

Turmoil on turmoil!

Ogun treads the earth of Shaka

Turmoil on the loose

Ogun shakes the hand of Shaka

All is in turmoil. (24)

But the translation is not very useful since its semiotic significance must be decoded from the original form. The switching from the English to the Yoruba choral song in this and other parts of the poem is significant in that the tonal structure of the Yoruba language has a powerful effect on the melodic structure of the poem. And as the persona of Acquah's "Ol Man River," points out, "there are some things / Which can only be said in song / Only in the mother tongue" (29). The Yoruba choral song, therefore, becomes Soyinka's major means of revealing phonetic tone as a traditional textual characteristic of his poetry.

In the Yoruba version, the power of assonance in conveying meaning is very strong. The constant repetition of the "o" sound which is variably produced in high, medium, and low tones, together with the tireless alliteration and repetition of the consonants "g," "b," "d," gives the poem an energy of tone which helps to intensify the ritualistic atmosphere of frenzy. The use of parallelism is also more effective in the Yoruba. The " re lé e" and " gbo wó o" elements in the second and fourth lines combine with the repetitions of "Ogun" and "Shaka" in both lines to give a racier tone to the chant, which in turn

heightens its musical quality. Although the "re lé e" and "gbo wó o" elements sound differently, they contain two syllables that have the same tonal pattern. As well, they are semantically related. Levin has called this phenomenon in which there is parallelism on both the phonological and semantic levels "true coupling," which he argues is a mark of good poetry (quoted, Anyidoho 75).

Throughout this section of the poem, much emphasis is put on choral verse chants that appear in the context of a leader-and-chorus song. The poet/speaker as leader of the chorus speaks a eulogy to Shaka with the chorus responding with refrains such as "Sigidi! Sigidi! / Sigidi Baba! Bayete!" (11); "Ròbòdiyàn! Ròbòdiyàn! / Bayete Baba! Bayete" (11); "Bayete Baba! Bayete!" (12); "Shaka! Shaka! / Bayete Baba! Bayete!" (12); "amaZulu / Shaka! Shaka! / Bayete Baba! Bayete!" 12-13). After each refrain, the poet as speaker/Shaka continues the telling with a fresh theme.

Ogundipe-Leslie likens Shaka's speech following the Yoruba choric acclaim of turmoil to "a royal monologue in the best Shakespearean tradition" (198), and describes his performance as "strikingly Elizabethan both in language and in the exploration of character and motivation" (199). While Ogundipe-Leslie's analysis points to parallels with and even the use of, the Western literary tradition, another perspective on the speech, especially its peculiar uses of animal imagery and references to African warrior and hunting traditions, would stress the use of oral literary heritage. To give but one example, Shaka's mention that he is the "dread that takes bull elephants by storm . . . / And brings them low on trembling knee" (9), immediately portrays

him as a master hunter and warrior in a manner familiar to African praise discourse. As Nketia points out, an individual achieves special status as a hunter or warrior if he or she is able to kill a number of wild elephants (Music 47). Here as elsewhere, Soyinka relies on semantic ties of similarities between two discourses, Shakespearean or Elizabethan royal monologue and African warrior and hunter poetic traditions, to forge a synthesis from his traditional African and Western literary discourses.

The point of Shaka's argument, however, is not one of "aggrandizement," as W. B. Last suggests (196), to draw awareness to his status as a superb warrior, but the communication of the resolution that he will allow nothing to stand in his way. This idea is especially conveyed, albeit obscurely, in the Zulu word "Sigidi," which Soyinka partially glosses as "The song of the spear-blade as it bites: I have eaten!" (24). The metaphorical relationship between this Zulu word and the warrior's vow that nothing will stand in his way is aptly described by the popular imigubo war song from the Ngoni of Malawi: "All [those] who oppose us / Quickly our spears / Shall pierce their breasts" (Finnegan, Oral Poetry 210). What appears as boasting therefore signifies not vain boasting but a recounting of a warrior's former achievements as a pledge or an oath from which s/he cannot withdraw.

Another important animal metaphor in Shaka's speech that marks it as traditional African oral discourse is his comparison of white and black soldiers to termites and black soldier ants respectively:

The termite is no match

For the black soldier ant, yet termites gnawed

The houseposts of our kraals even while

We made the stranger welcome

...

The task must gain completion, our fount

Of being cleansed from termites' spittle. (12-13)

Soyinka's metaphor emphasizes the strength of the African soldier and it recalls similar ones in traditional African war poems, like the drum "call" of the Ashanti army, and the 142-line oriki (Yoruba praise poem) in honour of Ibikunle, a one-time Balogun (warlord) of the Ibadan army. In the latter poem, Ibikunle's formidable strength and his fearlessness in battle are likened to "a lone elephant that rocks the jungle / . . . [and] the whole world to its foundation" (Finnegan, World Treasury 153-54). And in the Ashanti drum call, the large numbers in the Ashanti army, an element the warriors boast of as their source of strength, is described as "locusts in myriads" to reflect the group's strength in "thick numbers" (Nketia, Drumming 111-12). Soyinka's animal imagery also belittles the strength of the enemy so as to boost the confidence of the Black soldier. Although the speaker does recognize the extent of the danger posed by the enemy's presence because of his insidious refusal to fight in the way of warriors, this recognition serves only as the better reason for a fearless determination and rigid resolve to annihilate the enemy.

Reference to imminent danger posed by an enemy is itself a common theme used in traditional African war poetry to both mobilize people for, and

justify, an impending war. The first stanza of the Shona detembo rehondo, cited earlier, deals with such a theme:

Cowards remain behind, ...
 Those who have my love, and those denied it,
 Must not fight shy today!

...

No longer is anywhere safe from death. (Hodza and Fortune 32)

Here, as in Ogun Abibiman, the seriousness of approaching danger generates a sufficient spirit of unity and patriotism to make the poet call on all Blacks, those he loves and those he hates, to come together to combat the enemy fearlessly.

The last section of Ogun Abibiman, titled "Sigidi," deals with Soyinka's positive evaluation of Abibiman's decision to embark upon a military campaign in Southern Africa. Though the section has features of the earlier two sections -- alliteration, parallelism, praise-names and chants, for example -- its major features are the use of rhetorical questions and the engaged poetic voice. The poet maintains that the purpose of the war is not vengeance, not hate, not a show of brute force, but justice, hope, and an oppressed peoples' need for self-fulfillment and self-realization:

If then we claim--the poet is now given
 Tongue to celebrate, if dancers
 Soar above the branches, and weird tunes
 Startle a quiescent world--Vengeance

Is not the god we celebrate, nor hate, . . .

. . .

Our songs acclaim

Cessation of a long despair, extol the ends

Of sacrifice born in our will, not weakness.

We celebrate the end of that compliant

Innocence of our millineal trees. (20)

Although critics, especially Obi Maduakor, see this portion as the section's central message, I think there is more to this final section than critics to date have asserted. It deals with the nature of sorrow songs as well as gives Soyinka's response to some of the specific derogatory remarks that he anticipates the neo-colonial world will pass about Abibiman's decision to engage in an "mfekane" (19) -- "a crushing total war" (24).

Soyinka observes that the colonial world, "whose rhetoric is sightless violence" (19), is likely to forget all too soon about the cesspools of violence in Guernica, Lidice, and Sharpeville, and rather condemn the Oguns, Shakas, and their African warriors as a primitive horde of blood-thirsty anarchists, models of Yeats's rough beast that unleashes disorder, chaos, and a blood-dimmed tide on a peaceful world. Soyinka, however, counters this view with an allusion to Yeats's "Easter 1916," which contextualizes certain types of violence, like liberation struggles, as positive, and as something capable of giving birth to a terrible beauty:

When, safely distanced, throned in saintly

Censure, the prophet's voice possesses you --

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world et cetera

Remember too, the awesome beauty at the door of

birth (21)

Thus, by evoking the fundamental ambivalence of Yeats's concept of violence, especially when poems like "The Second Coming" are interpreted together with "Easter 1916," "Meditations in Time of Civil War," and others in The Tower (1928), Soyinka is able to subvert the one-sided way of looking at the armed nationalist struggle in Southern Africa, and to argue on the contrary that the mfekane in Southern Africa is a creative war bound to yield positive results, like the "cessation of a long despair" (21) of Blacks in Southern Africa. In addition, peace will return to the streets of Sharpeville and Soweto (20), and relief will come to the "[black] . . . midwives with / The dark wine . . . / Ministering to history, delivering the missing / Chapter of the text" (21).

The image of midwives with dark wine ministering to history recalls the poem "Black Singer" (Idanre 36) in which the persona, a female symbolizing the people and history of Africa, pours out in her song "the darksome wine" of her people's history of slavery, suffering, abuses, and sorrow. These songs reflect things so deep that they can be said only in song, songs like the lament of the Akan nnwonkoro, the asafo songs of Fanti and Ashanti warriors, songs of oral sages, of South African freedom fighters, and the music of the atentenben, which is above all the instrument of the dirge, of quiet reflection and mournful meditation on the Black history of pain. As Soyinka rightly observes, these

sorrow songs constitute the “missing / Chapter of the text,” meaning that the reader is asked, either through mnemonic experience or participatory role, to incorporate these songs into the text to make it complete. In a way, the full completion of the text depends on the drawing of all these voices into one coherent discourse, and the challenge, therefore, is to fulfill the poet’s quest for wholeness by including all the oral and auditory components that will confirm the text’s validity as a shared dramatic experience.

Just as in “Black Singer” the singer’s task is an arduous one, serving two important functions -- first, as a “votive vase” to bring relief to Black people everywhere and, second, as a symbol of the fusion point where the “hurt of sirens” merges into the rhythm of song to produce the necessary motivation for action -- in Ogun Abibiman, the midwives’ song brings both relief and motivation for action:

Now is the hour of song, the hour
Of ecstasy on dancer’s feet. The drummer’s
Exhortations fortify the heart.

The clans are massed from hill to hill

...

... a throb

Of feet to the ancient cry of--*Sigidi!* (22)

These functions of relief and motivation are perhaps the true essence of sorrow songs. Though they underscore unspeakable pain and express the deepest

miseries of a people, paradoxically they are meant to express hope and freedom in spite of pain and misery.

W. E. B. DuBois in "Of Sorrow Songs" defines for us this central paradox of sorrow songs:

Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope -- a faith in the ultimate justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence. Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes faith in death, sometimes assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins. (261)

Ultimately, it is this sense of hope, of mountains made low, of the ultimate realization of the magnificent Pan African ideal that Ogun Abibiman is all about. Soyinka's sketch of this moment of hope, as Black soldiers march to war, drumming, dancing, chanting, and celebrating the consequent ascendancy of Ogun, is captured in an emphatic repetition of the appellations and politics of the gaze that conclude the first section. The rest, of course, is history!

Though Ogun Abibiman is about war, Soyinka's vocabulary expressing that theme reflects a highly conscious sense of African oral poetics. Soyinka strives to achieve literary effects by drawing on two literary traditions: the African oral and the Western literary. At significant moments in the poem, he not only switches to but emphasizes the oral sources of his discourse. As well,

he represents the text as a shared dynamic experience between the writer/speaker and the audience/readers. Within the context of post-colonial studies, this style requires critics to shift the ontology of deriving meaning in post-colonial texts from its location in a fixed written text to a larger discursive context that includes orality. There is also a Pan Africanist consciousness on the part of the writer, expressed through the significations of the traditional African discourse. The author's use of traditional modes transcends national boundaries to engender a committed Pan Africanism and a genuine Black-centered consciousness. This is a welcome development since (as the subsequent chapters attempt to demonstrate) diasporic Africans are moving towards a similar consciousness.

CHAPTER THREE

AFRICAN ORAL POETICS IN THE POETRY OF LOUISE BENNETT AND EDWARD KAMAU BRATHWAITE

In spite of the impressive accounts of African retentions in the diaspora by theorists of African culture, such as Kojo Vieta, Joseph Holloway, Amuzie Chimezie, Kwame Gyegyey, Molefi Asante and Kariamu Asante, V. Y. Mudimbe, Isidore Okpewho, and Bayo Oyebade, none extensively projects orality as a way of expressing unity in diversity, or as a way of verbalizing the continuity of African heritage, group consciousness, and solidarity among diasporic Africans who use it to guard against the possibility of deculturation. Indeed, with respect to language as a part of ethnicity, the presence of African-derived oral textual features, what many describe as linguistic carry-overs from Africa, not only links the diaspora with Africa, but also marks an African-Caribbean ethnic boundary, acting as a process of what Harald Haarmann calls “ethnic fission” (differentiation based on profilation, separation, and proliferation) (47-55). In “Some Issues in Multiculturalism,” Ramesh Deosaran, drawing on the works of J. Furnival and M.G. Smith, sustains this idea of ethnic fission; however, he seems to consider only processes of differentiation, not integration based on amalgamation or incorporation, traits that show the willingness of Caribbeans to merge certain aspects of their culture.

Aspects of such integration are abundant in Creole, which is not simply

the representation of the various Caribbean “lects,” but an overlapping way of speaking, and more recently in literature writing, giving accessibility to the various “lects” in order to abrogate and appropriate the English language into a culturally significant Caribbean language. As the critics Ashcroft et al observe, the Creole, with its oral properties, has become an important site of anti-colonial struggle, of the refusal of imperial cultural categories, its aesthetics, and its illusory standard of normative or correct usage. It has become the medium through which African Caribbean writers supersede “the geometric distinction of centre and margin” (104) in order to make their language bear their cultural imprint. This shows not only how the Black diasporic communities have used selective appropriation of African and European linguistic sources to fashion a unique self-identification, but also how the use of Creole gives the opportunity to all Caribbeans, irrespective of race, ethnicity, class, and gender, to participate democratically in the formation of an egalitarian discourse. Unlike the use of writing or print technology that requires special education and training, the oral basis of the Creole endows each person with voice and, therefore, the opportunity to participate in Caribbean cultural formation.

Further, this process of integration abrogates not just English to create what Brathwaite calls un-English English (Roots 219), but also the possibility of regeneration from what V. S. Naipaul terms “nothing,” the idea that nothing new has been created in the Caribbean (28). Creole therefore acts as a distinctive cultural and linguistic phenomenon that distinguishes the ethnic ancestry of Caribbeans. J. Fishman (quoted, Haarmann 37) calls this distinguishing factor

paternity, but because such a term is sexist, I shall use the term "parentage," a gender neutral term to illustrate the principal oral features responsible for shaping cultures in the Caribbean. Moreover, the term parentage is useful in linking Caribbean writers to African and European writers. It parallels the African Caribbean writers' past with the way the past is used by Leopold Sédar Senghor in the poem "Chaka," and by Yeats in the long poem "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea." In both, the writers return to a distinctive thing in their heritage to recall a prominent idea which is never lost to a people but forever present and recoverable, making the present more meaningful by evoking the enduring discourses that mark a group and attach them to a culture from which they cannot be separated.

This idea of parentage is not to be viewed negatively as Smith and Furnival do; rather, it should be considered in the light of the evolution theory of the Catholic priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who perceives differentiation of human culture as necessary for survival. According to him, it is only in the preservation of individuality that the whole can be strengthened. In Vision of the Past, Teilhard argues that "humanity, taken in its concrete nature, is really composed of different branches. . . . And this is most fortunate for the total richness and future of man" (212). Teilhardian philosophy therefore advocates convergence of the members of the human family, a progressive development towards the union of all cultures in which each branch nevertheless is able to maintain its individuality and thereby enhance the union.

On the surface, this Teilhardian notion of the human family seems to deny diversity, but at a deeper level, it seems otherwise when considered in light of the African proverb that “a family is like the forest, at a distance, one sees it as a union, but when one draws nearer, one sees that each individual tree or member has its own individual spot.” In this context, Teilhardian philosophy reflects a union of cultures, which paradoxically in no way denies diversity.

On the basis of textual analysis of the work of two African Caribbean authors, Louise Bennett, who writes orality to try to reach the masses, and Edward Kamau Brathwaite, who writes it to reach intellectuals, I argue that besides the immediate aesthetic effects of their use of oral textual features, the ultimate significance of these features lies in the social, cultural, and political domains. Both use orality, especially Creole, as a means of ethnic fission that links African-Caribbeans with Africa. The Creole in particular acts as a distinctive discourse that evokes the idea of an enduring African-derived tradition that attaches African-Caribbeans to an ever-present African culture. The centrality of the Creole in the poetry may also be considered paradigmatic for a process which African Caribbean writers have initiated to depict the group and cultural dynamics of African-Caribbean identity.

Along with the Creole, these poets incorporate other oral features. Brathwaite adds such features as jazz rhythms, calypso, drum poetry, libation poetry, and flute poetry, most of which have inherent religious significance, such as worship, libation, prayers, invocation of spirits, and other religious

practices in the apocalyptic mode. These sacerdotal themes make Brathwaite's work functionally analogous to that in the priest-poet tradition of pre-colonial African poetry. Bennett, unlike Brathwaite, uses the Creole in the performance mode to restore the traditional poet-performer's role as social commentator and preserver of national records or the common heritage. Bennett's role as poet-performer, however, goes beyond the fundamental role played by professional oral poets in traditional Africa. Her use of Creole in the face of the colonial refusal of its literary value, at a time when most, if not all Caribbean writers have given in to colonial pressures, reflects her defiant use of Creole as a type of warfare. In a way, she is like Yaa Asantewaa who confronted the colonizers at a time when they seemed to have subjugated all the people's will to resist. Because she used the Creole in the face of all odds, Bennett emerges as a self-assertive and self-sufficient woman of strength and determination, in control of her life. She is the parallel of the strong women in Caribbean literature, such as Ma and Tansi in Merle Hodge's Crick Crack, Monkey. Like these women, she plays the role of the strong female of the nation and the family, the religious or community leader. Bennett's celebration of Creole as a discourse specific to the Caribbean national experience in "Tengad" can, therefore, be interpreted as her personal achievement in the process of constituting the Creole language into a national discourse.

Brathwaite recognizes and elaborates on this achievement. Despite his rather circuitous style, I shall quote him at length here to give full credit to his background information about Bennett and her poetry:

The poet Louise Bennett (Miss Lou) of Jamaica has been writing nation all her life . . . because of that [she] has been ignored until recently. Now this is very interesting because she is middle class, and "middle class" means brown, urban, respectable, and standard English. It does not mean an entrenched economic/political position, as in Europe. For instance, Miss Lou's own upbringing was rural St. Mary hence the honorable Louise's natural and rightful knowledge of the folk. (It was not until the post-independence seventies that she was officially -- as distinct from popularly -- recognized and given the highest honors, including the right to the title of Honorable). . . . For years (since 1936) she performed her work in crowded village halls across the island, and until 1945 could get nothing accepted by the *Gleaner*, the island's largest, oldest (established 1854), and often only newspaper. . . . She could not be accepted, even after independence, as a poet. Though all this, I say, is dramatically altered now with the revolution of the late sixties. (31)

Bennett's poetry has, moreover, exerted significant influence in many areas, especially musical expression and performance poetry. Many Caribbean writers refer to her as their model (Habekost 73). Edward Chamberlain observes that the "acceptance of dialect in poetry, as in other forms of communication, was partly a matter of fashion [and] the popularity of Bennett, whose work on radio and in newspaper as well as on stage and in books,

helped create the fashion and provided encouragement to other poets and storytellers” (99). Additionally, her works have become a source to lexicographers and linguists, such as Frederic Cassidy and Robert Le Page, who cite her as an important source of their Dictionary of Jamaican English.

Finally, insofar as Bennett’s texts seek to enculturate Black Caribbeans, most of her texts, such as Jamaica MadahGoose, produced for children, have a critical role in affirming the Creole culture to its young participants. Asked how she made her spelling choices, Jean Binta Breeze, for instance, answers: “I grew up reading Louise Bennett from the page and that would certainly have been my exposure to Jamaican on the page.” She concludes: “So I would think, a lot of my spelling would come from how Louise spells” (quoted, Muhleisen 176). This exemplifies the central place that Bennett’s texts have in the education and enculturation of the younger generation.

In bringing Creole into wide currency as Caribbean language, Bennett adopts rhetorical tropes, figures, and conversational style from traditional African orality, expressed in the traits of precise and apt imagery, lucidity or classic simplicity of language that is rooted in communal communication, and is communicated through the mass media for the whole community, especially the masses. She adopts discursive strategies that foreground African-derived orality as a socio-semantic force and a catalyst for the change of negative attitudes toward Creole. In one poem, she puts Creole on an equal footing with English:

Meck me get it straight, Mass Charlie,

For me no quite undastan--
 Yuh gwine kill all English dialec
 Or jus Jamaican one?
 Ef yuh dah equal up wid English
 Language, den wha meck
 Yuh gwine go feel inferior when
 It come to dialec? ("Bans a Killing" 4)

This denial of the privilege of English is also conveyed in "Dry-Foot Bwoy" (1-2), where Bennett proves to be adept at iterative mimicry. She creates contrasting voices in dialogue to promote acceptance of Jamaican culture and language.

This deceptively simple poem presents several distinct kinds of speech: Jamaican dialect, affectedly English speech, and a Jamaican dialect voice mimicking English speech for the purpose of ridicule:

Wha wrong wid Mary dry-foot bwoy?
 . . .
 De bwoy gi me a shock!
 Me tell him seh him auntie an
 Him cousin dem sen howdy
 An ask him how him getting awn
 Him seh, 'Oh, jolley, jolley!' (1)

The narrator's tacked-on assessment of the "bwoy's" pretentious English discourse provides readers with important auditory clues to what is non-

Caribbean, encouraging us to listen to the foreign nature of the bwoy's words as contrasted with the richly textured rhythms of the Caribbean way of talking:

For me notice dat him answer
 To nearly all me seh
 Was "Actually," "What," "Oh dear!"
 An all dem sinting deh.

. . .

Hear him no?, "how silley!"
 I don't think that I really
 Understand you, actually! (1-2)

The verbal exchanges demonstrate that the bwoy's speech is not our way of talking; consequently, the narrator attempts to re-immense him in the familiar Caribbean speech patterns: "Wha happen to dem sweet Jamaica / Joke yuh use fi pop?" (2). This reminder, coupled with the girls' attitude towards the bwoy, emphasizes that the author's linguistic preference is not just her own but that of the wider society: "De gal dem bawl out affa him," mimicking his "patron discourse" – "Not going? What! oh dear!" -- at once giving the boy's discourse a reversed effect, turning it into mockery: "Miss Mary dry-foot bwoy! / Cyan get over de shock!" (2).

The poem is indeed funny, as are many of Bennett's poems, but beneath the entertainment is a serious comment on who and what is accepted into the Caribbean discourse community. It gives a focused appraisal of the linguistic and cultural patterns acceptable to Caribbeans, which ultimately

become embodied in a specific way of speaking that encompasses not only the individual utterance but also its place within Caribbean society. What seems involved, to use Paul Gee's formulation, is a "different cultural practice that in certain contexts calls for certain uses of language, language patterned in certain ways and trading on features like integration" (56) of various lects.

Michel Foucault's discourse theory is relevant here in showing that the poem's theme goes beyond language use to include the strategies used to validate Creole. All societies, according to Foucault in "Discourse on the Order of Language," have procedures whereby the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed, and the purpose of the process is to control or govern what Foucault terms discursive practices, discursive objects, and discursive strategies so that in all discourses, discursive regularities can be observed. Following this observation, one can argue that the situation in the poem depicts the subtle ways in which discursive regularities are enforced, not just by imposing certain ways of speaking on participants, but by excluding alternatives, which are presented as 'foreign.' James Wood, in a letter to the London Review of Books, is critical of strategies like this, arguing that "like ideology," such a process of discourse formation not only works "to legitimize the status quo," but is also deterministic (10). However, as Foucault argues, such processes of discourse control are necessary to ward off "powers and dangers" of colonial discourse ("Order of Discourse" 52).

The linguistic situation in "Dry-Foot Bwoy," with its heavy dependence on tones of voice, suggests that in Bennett, one ought to pay greater attention to

words in audible motion rather than to their frozen form on the page. Critics generally agree that written representation of Bennett's poetry loses some of the magnificent force and meaning her live performances or video recordings convey. The Times Literary Supplement, reviewing Jamaica Labrish, argues that the poetry is like a phonetic libretto for performance, but it cannot recreate for us the performance itself. "Not merely something but too much is lost" (quoted, Bennett, Selected Poems, Intro. xi). Though the anonymous writer has a point, because there is no exact substitute for performance, not "too much is lost" for the reader who sees the words on the page as recognizable nuances of Creole sounds, even when the spelling is Standard English. In other words, the poem in print is fully available only when readers are in touch with the oral and other cultural contexts the words imply. If readers listen carefully to the Creole reproduced in the text, they will experience imaginatively all of the oral textual features represented in the text. In this respect, Bennett surpasses other Caribbean poets in her transfer of dialect to the written page, largely because she chooses to work within rather than merely with the oral poetry as a vital art form in its own right.

However, as Gordon Rohler argues, Bennett's work is both oral and scribal, available both in performance and written form. He cautions that no "one method of approach which we use" should necessarily exclude any other "because writers who seem to be as much at home in oral traditions as in scribal ones necessitate a mixture of approaches" (quoted, Bennett, Selected Poems, Intro. xi n20). Brathwaite, while emphasizing orality in his "nation

language,” another name he gives for Creole, also advocates the need for balance between the oral and the scribal:

To confine our definitions of literature to written contexts in a culture that remains oral in most of its people proceedings, is as limiting as its opposite: trying to define Caribbean literature as essentially orature.

(History of the Voice 49)

Both Brathwaite and Rohler are not so much emphasizing that oral and written forms are integrated as providing evidence of the importance of Garrett Stewart's concept of phonemic reading, which emphasizes aural reading and invites the careful reader to 'hear' the rich texture of the covert as well as overt orality/aurality messages operating within the written discourse.

Bennett's privileging of oral performance and representing it as the best mode by which to understand her poetry has political significance. Something more than information is transmitted through the oral performance: there is energy, strength, and power. As people participate in performance poetry, their immediate presence gives power a personal form so that they may relate to it. Thus, as people participate with power as a way of relating to each other at a social event of performance poetry, they encounter power as a reality, one which is both strengthening and uplifting. One could say that it is in such a context of encounters with power that people institutionalize certain cultural, social, and political ideas. It is perhaps no coincidence that the constitution of Creole as the voice of the Caribbean people occurred around the time of

political independence of most Caribbean countries, when there were a lot of political rallies, a lot of performances by Bennett on topical issues -- food shortages, high prices, independence, Back to Africa -- and a lot of popular participation.

Even though many critics consider the Bennett poems on topical issues dated (because to make sense of them, one needs to know what provoked them), these poems, even if dated, give cultural specificity, crystallizing into what Bjornson calls a "universe of discourse" (xi). Poetry of such national significance also portrays Bennett as the strong female who is very involved in national affairs. Her poetic message becomes an act of "witness" which, according to Janice Gould, means to store an event in the communal/national memory, a memory that is at once personal and collective (798), and is both enriched by and enriches the communal heritage.

Over its relatively short history in Anglophone Caribbean poetry, use of Creole in the process of cultural decolonization has played an important role in the grounding of oral textual features in the socio-historical and cultural reality of the pre-colonial African context. And as Brathwaite argues in "English in the Caribbean," the discourse produced by incorporating orality as a deliberate technique of literary production has become a model by which the society conceives of and articulates a view of itself by specifying preferred constructions of selfhood, identity, and social relations.

Brathwaite's The Arrivants, on which I focus mainly here, is a trilogy exploring the history and experience of the peoples of African descent in the

new world. My focus, however, is not on this historical theme, which has been discussed extensively, but on stylistic aspects that display cultural, political, religious, and aesthetic functions of orality. I focus on this aspect because critics, operating mainly from a Eurocentric perspective, have not analyzed the significant socio-political themes that are communicated by the oral presence in the text.

The Arrivants draws upon a wide range of traditional African poetic and cultural elements. These include the drum, rhythm, song, liquid poetics or pouring of a poem like a prayer or libation, the musicality of tonal lyricism, and mythocultural elements such as ancestor worship. In poems such as "The Awakening" and "Tano," we encounter a whole semantic field of "liquid" poetics. In "Atumpan" we hear African-derived jitanjafora, which Alfonso Reyes defines as "agrammatical, popular, and prehistoric utterances expressing sensuality, musicality, and unintelligible noises" (quoted, Kubayanda, "Drum" 47). One can argue, however, that these jitanjafora are African-derived ideophones expressing a particular rhythm of the drum. Informed readers of these poems can also discern the use of drum poetry, flute poetry, and repetition. As well, the poetry is filled with references to musical instruments or words connected to orality, the rhythms of jazz, calypso, reggae beat, the atentenben (flute poetry), and atumpan (talking drum). This superabundance of African oral forms creates a link between the diaspora and Africa as circular or *sasa/zamani* time. This concept of time, as explained earlier, refers to a

return to ancestral memory, not as a lost past, but as a living manifestation of the present.

In his poetic style, more than in any other aspect of his poetry, Brathwaite reveals the significant influence of jazz music on his poetry. Indeed, the whole collection has been read successfully against a soundtrack of jazz (Gordon Rohler, Pathfinder), and in “Folkways,” the wistful rhythms of jazz are imaged through the riffs of boogie-woogie blues: “boogie / woogie wheels / fat / boogie — / woogie waggons / rat tat tat” (32). The syncopation of the words in the “Prelude” to Rights of Passage also creates a cascade of melodious sounds that reproduce jazz music in its own right:

Here clay
cool coal clings to glass
to glass, creates
clinks, silica glitters
the children of stars. (4)

Rohler observes that the “cool coal clings to glass” symbolizes peace, and as in jazz, suggests relaxed control. But as Brathwaite’s speaker makes clear, in the Caribbean (“here”), the “cool coal clings” creates “clinks and silica glitters,” which is an allusion not to peace, but to jazz hammered out on the anvil of African-Caribbean experience: slavery, neo-colonialism, rootlessness, poverty, pain of rejection, and loss of human dignity. The sound of “clinks” therefore establishes the key melody, not the “cool coal clings.” As a mode projecting African-Caribbean experience, jazz is “very much a social expression,

expressing the past [and present] of black experience” in the Caribbean (Brathwaite, Roots 78). Brathwaite expresses by this improvisation something distinctly Caribbean, in a way that the relaxed control of the jazz idiom is not.

Brathwaite, however, sees jazz as African-American in origin, and has declared: “as I get to know more about the Caribbean, the emphasis shifts from jazz to the Caribbean, to calypso, to reggae, to our folk music, to the (religious) music connected with the hounfour” (“An Interview” 57).

Elsewhere in the article “History” he writes:

[I]t was only when we began to discover that it was in our folk music, in our folk songs, in our rituals that the landscape had already been described and enshrined that we began to write. . . . Thomas Gray's "Elegy" didn't help. The pentameter didn't help. It was only when I discovered that the calypso (kaiso) -- that syncopated traditional music of ours, which was in fact a correlation of fragmented landscapes, that ancient and new musical form which was ours -- would help me as a poet . . . that my own poetry began to move, began to take shape. (“History” 27-28)

In “English in the Caribbean,” Brathwaite argues further that the calypso is “a model that we are moving naturally toward now” (24). He adds: it is “inconceivable that any Caribbean poet writing today is not going to be influenced by this submerged culture which is in fact, an emerging culture” 41),

and which "exists (not in a dictionary but) in the tradition of the spoken word" (24), in sound as much as in song.

Even Derek Walcott, who sees himself as a poet of betweenness, caught between the uses of Standard English and Creole, uses the kaiso speech rhythm. Like most Caribbean writers, he demonstrates that his betweenness can be molded into a liberation consciousness, into an Adamic state where the writer, through mimicry (as theorized by Homi Bhabha and Henry Louis Gates), is able to rename his/her world. He outlines this process of mimicry and Adamic renaming in the "Crusoe" poems; however, these poems indicate that great literature and thoughts emanate from Crusoe's home, not Friday's as well, which suggests in no small way the colonization of Walcott's mind. However, in the context of a poem like "The Schooner Flight" where Walcott clearly privileges Shabine's Creole over Standard English, such assertions about Walcott's colonized mind begin to fall away. Also, considering that Walcott returns to the pentameter line here, a form he and other African-Caribbean writers "have been trying to break out of" (Brathwaite, "English" 20), suggests that here he attempts to proliferate differences through what Elleke Boehmer calls "double cleaving" (105-06).

Furthermore, Walcott's representation of Shabine vulnerably as "either . . . a nobody / or a nation" (19) gives substance to both the colonially discursive "a nobody" and the counter-colonially discursive "I'm a nation." What this double cleaving creates is a simultaneous appropriation and abrogation of colonial discourse, a kind of anti-colonial hybridity that Homi Bhabha

advocates. Finally Walcott, by ending the poem with an extended image of unpredictable multiple branching (there is no "one Island but so many islands / . . . as the stars at night / on that branched tree" (19)), identifies the Caribbean as the inextricable bond between the one and the many, an allusion he uses to reflect the Caribbean as the centre of exemplary creolization and hybridization. Much of what he suggests by this allusion is given fuller elaboration in the creative and critical writing of Brathwaite.

The influence of calypso on Brathwaite's poetry can be described in a word: rhythm. As Brathwaite explains, the calypso "mandates the use of the tongue in a certain way, the use of sound in a certain way" (24) akin to music, deeply rooted in what I call the musicality of tonal lyricism, totally divorced from the traditional metric pattern of Western poetry. Through this use of tongue, Brathwaite brings his poetry as close to musical composition as possible. Thus, Brathwaite could say of Claude McKay's "St Isaac's Church, Petrograd,": "[it is] a poem that could have been written by an European, perhaps most intimately by a Russian in Petrograd . . . [or] any poet of the post-Victorian-era, . . . the only thing that retains its uniqueness [that makes it Caribbean] is the tone of the poet's voice" ("English" 26); that is, its lyricism is based on the tonality and rhythmic power of music.

Rhythm, as Brathwaite argues, is a way of getting down to more significant concerns: its context is one of action, of social life, communicating the deep modalities of Caribbean experience. As he explains, "this expression comes about because people live in the open air,. . . because people come

from a historical experience where they had to rely on their own breath patterns. . . . They had to depend on immanence, the power within themselves, rather than the technology outside themselves” (“English” 25). Rhythm therefore is not just words accentuated differently; it also communicates cultural ideas. According to Christian Habekost, it is “loaded with additional connotations – ‘it constitutes the heartbeat of the people’ or ‘the pulse of life’” (93). So important is the power of rhythm and music that it has become for Brathwaite more or less the expression of the Caribbean life force, in short, parentage.

Kwame Dawes, in his Anthology of Reggae Poetry, observes that “Brathwaite remains one of the first poets to write in the cadence and ethos of reggae in . . . ‘Wings of a Dove’” (22). Brother Man, the Rastafarian in “Wings of a Dove” summons us to hear the “beat [of] dem drum / dem” (44) drums of reggae steel band music, and the thumping booming bass drum. Like the words of Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song,” Brother Man’s language reflects the discourse of a people transformed to the Rastafarian discourse of cultural and political awakening. His words bear good omen of self-affirmation:

na
 feet feel firm
 pun de firm stones; na
 good pickney born
 from de flesh
 o’ dem bones. (“Wings of a Dove” 44)

A reprise of the reggae rhythmic patterns in “Wings of a Dove” recur in “Stone” (X/Self 93-95), which Dawes uses to demonstrate Brathwaite’s reggae poetry in his anthology. For example, the “bom si cai ca boom ship bell bom si ca boom ship bell / & a laughin more blood & / spittin out / lawwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwd” (Dawes 48), suggests a phase in the poetic moment where the rhythm is in complete control, as in reggae music.

Of all the oral features that Brathwaite uses to reflect rhythm, the drum is the most important to him, since it is the chief musical instrument used to mark rhythm and movement. Besides Brathwaite’s evocation of the talking drum tradition, he makes references to the drum in several poems as a central symbol of African culture in the diaspora. “Drum” is the very first word of The Arrivants, and it is there at the end in “Jouvert.” The persona in “Folkways” sees himself as a “drum with a hole / in its belly” (31). The persona in the “Prelude” of Masks invokes the creative powers of the drum -- “Beat heaven / of the drum, beat” (91) -- just as Brother Man in “Wings of a Dove” asks us to “beat dem drums” (44) so as to feel the emphatic rhythm of the Rastafarian beat. Brathwaite also mimics the syncopation of road march drumbeats in Caribbean carnival, an important cultural product of the Caribbean region:

Ban

Ban

Cal-

iban

like to play

pan

at the car-

nival

. . .

down

down

down. (192)

In “Shepherd,” drums are also crucial in leading towards repossession of the past. The Shepherd himself becomes a drum with which the ancestors communicate: “Slowly / Slowly / the dumb speaks” (188). The importance of drums is also registered in the African-derived religious ceremonies that permeate the collection, especially the voodoo rituals in “Negus”:

Att

Att

Attibon

. . .

Attibon Legba

Attibon Legba

Ouvri bayi pou' moi. (224)

These are drum rituals used to evoke spirits, and in “Vèvè” the gods arrive “welcomed by drumbeats” (265). These richly allusive references to the drum

supply a range of the uses of the drum as a major element of African reconnection.

Brathwaite's rhythmic imitation of the drum, what Josaphat Kubayanda would call his drum poetics, also communicates in a way that transcends the conventional Western guidelines for poetry appreciation or versification; therefore, analysis of it requires insights about drum poetics. Kubayanda lists three characteristics of this poetry that are useful for any discussion of drum poetics:

1. In drum poetry, language and sound are so interdependent that much of the meaning is lost through silent, meditative reading. The objective of the speaking voice is to explore the realm of sound,
2. Appropriate sections where the telling reaches a climax or where a particular point is emphasized are frequently marked by vigorous sonic vibrations. . . . These intensified beats can serve a thematic, dramatic, structural, and aesthetic purpose within the poem itself, and
3. Complex interweaving of contrasting . . . patterns . . . dependent upon various simultaneous cross beats from one, two, or more drums or sound devices. (38-39)

Unlike Western versification, drum poetry has a polymetric structure or what some call African "mixed meter," made up of different rhythmic beats manifested in differences in lengths of stanzas, clusters of identical vowel

sounds, buzzing consonantal vibrations, repeats, minimal expressions, and visually and audibly uneven lines. Lines diminish or increase in length almost in conformity with the pace of drumbeats. This skillful blending of long and terse phrases, long and short vowels, consonantal explosives and sibilants creates a variegated poetic pattern, which is a major characteristic of Brathwaite's poetry, dictating the form, the rhythmic pattern, principal themes, climactic moments, and the rhythmic units that arouse listeners' emotions.

Almost all the poems in The Arrivants are influenced or marked by this variegated rhythmic structure. We decipher a distinct drumbeat achieved by the syllabic organization of the words and by the particular breath or break of the lines. Just flipping through the pages of the collection, one sees a lineation of uneven lines of contrasting lean and long phrases. The poem "Tom," among others, exemplifies this rhythmic lineation very well:

the paths we shall never remember
 again: Atumpan talking and the harvest branch-
 es, all the tribes of Ashanti dreaming the dream
 of Tutu, Anokye and the Golden stool ...
 . . . and now nothing
 nothing
 nothing
 so let me sing
 nothing
 now. . .

...

(13)

Depicting a process of rhythmic acceleration (long lines) and deceleration (short lines), these lines exemplify the rhythmic cross beats from two or more musical instruments. Longer lines, denoting the rhythms of the small drum, go faster than shorter ones, which represent rhythms from the big (atumpan) drum. Hence, whenever we have the former, the effect is to speed up the pace in accordance with crisp, rapid drumbeats. The consequence is an extremely effective use of movement to accord with the movement suggested by the drum. Also, the visually lean pattern of shorter lines, among other things, skillfully reinforces the meaning of the word "nothing" or the idea of cultural uprootedness, which constitutes the poem's principal theme. The patterning of the poem, therefore, is an extension of content.

The paradox, however, is that whereas the poem stylistically reflects drum rhythms and contains numerous oral textual features, such as repetition, tonal lyricism, references to song, and mythocultural ideas, thus making possible reappropriation of root experiences, the content level offers mainly a sense of rejection of or alienation from these cultural elements. Brathwaite's use of the word "nothing" illustrates this paradox very well. In terms of style, the word "nothing," repeated several times, alludes to African-derived drumbeats. As well, its repetition represents the law of repeats which, according to Kubayanda, refers to a "polysemic musical concept governed by qualitative and quantitative processes of change and to a return to identical or near-identical sound units. It refers to the coded language of rhythms; it is a

way of emphasizing the drum percussion language" ("Drum" 46). As he further explains, repetition, which in the West connotes imperfection and stagnation, responds in African oral poetics, as in all African-derived music, to rhythmic language, among other things.

In terms of content, however, the word "nothing" emphasizes a sense of alienation from Africa, a double dislocation or pathlessness resulting in the life of the "outcast archetype," as Lloyd Brown puts it (4). Charles Bodunde also describes it as "the Caribbean complex of the deculturized individual, divested of the essence of racial identity" (24). These ideas find expression in images of exile or a journeying to nowhere in The Arrivants as a whole. Brathwaite aptly sums up this disidentification or alienation thus: "To hell / with Af / rica / to hell / with Eu / rope too" ("Prelude" 29).

Interpreted together, the stylistic and thematic implications of the word "nothing" suggest that uses of African-derived oral poetics are multidimensional and contradictory sites for identification and disidentification with ancestral cultures, simultaneous sites of estrangement and empowerment, a refiguring of orality not just as a link with or rejection of the past, but as an enabling force to help a people go beyond the ashes and sorrows of yesterday and today to something new. Consequently, orality in Caribbean literature must be understood as something new, different from orality in African. It not only effects the poem's evocation of pre-colonial African oral aesthetics but, most importantly, projects a new cultural product of Harrisean cultural plenitude

(Womb xviii), in which something new is developed in relation to the past in order to create a new communal identity.

Brathwaite stresses this cultural plenitude, especially at the end of the collection in the poem "Jou'vert" (269-70), as a melding of the sense of loss, lack, and rejection with the power of the ancestral past:

hearts
 no longer bound
 . . .
 now waking
 making
 making
 with their
 rhythms some-
 thing torn
 and new. (270)

This cultural product indicates that even though Caribbean literature contains certain elements of traditional African oral forms -- rhythmic structures, drum poetry, and other oral poetic formulae -- these elements are not exact replicas, which suggests how the original African oral forms themselves are in a state of constant flux and change.

There is political relevance to Brathwaite's rhythmic style. As mentioned earlier, Caribbean writers have been trying to mould "the entire [colonial] pentametric model . . . into a system that more closely and intimately

approaches [their] own experience" ("English" 20). Consequently, adopting a rhythmic style influenced by calypso and drum poetics serves a decolonizing function; by his writing orality, Brathwaite articulates that Caribbean English is good enough to wipe out traces of colonial expression from his mouth.

The cultural relevance of The Arrivants lies not only in its rhythm-based structure, but also in its evocation of African-derived drum poetry. Drum poetry, as Ruth Finnegan and Kwabena Nketia explain, is a cultural practice where the drum transmits poetry "of special interest to the ... community as a whole" instead of serving as mere accompaniment to or determinant of poetic rhythm ("Akan Poetry" 29). Examples of drum poems in The Arrivants are "Atumpan" (89) and "The Awakening" (156-57) but before these poems Brathwaite uses "The Making of the Drum" to describe not just the construction of the drum but also the items, such as "Gourds and Rattles" and "The Gong-Gong" (97), that are either attached to or played with the drum to enhance the quality of drum poetry. Although this poem is threaded throughout with the "speaking" drum motif, it is in the careful transposition of the talking drum tradition of the "Anyaneanyane" ("The Awakening") type in "Atumpan," meaning "a drum used for playing speech texts" (Nketia, Music 255), that Brathwaite most clearly foregrounds the orality/aurality of his text.

The phonemic transcription of the sound of the drum, "kon kon kon kon / kun kun kun kun" ("Atumpan" 98), is essential to the orality/aurality of the poem. Reproduction of these ideophonic sounds marks unique poetic moments that cannot be adequately expressed in Standard English. Like "The

Barrel of the Drum," the hollow wood cut from the tweneduru tree or "the hollow blood / that makes a womb" (95), they symbolize the aural productive space of the text, and reflect a poet's rediscovery of his African tradition.

At the outset, drum poetry is something merely reproduced to accentuate the psycho-historical reappropriation of past experiences, since Brathwaite generally repeats the most consistent characteristics of drum poetry, such as addressing the spirit of the materials out of which the drum is made:

Funtumi Akore

Tweneboa Akore

Spirit of the Cedar

Spirit of the Cedar tree

Tweneboa Kodia

... ("Atumpan" 98)

Through these repetitions of the "written" properties of drum poetry, Brathwaite provides an objective sense of relationship with Africa and invites members of the whole community to pay attention to the role of African rituals in patterning and fostering cultural relations within the Caribbean. In consonance with the African idea that one can add his or her own idiosyncrasies to make the quality of drum poetry stand out as one's own, Brathwaite also uses drum poetry to build a context for community prayer by turning the drummer's message into a collective prayer in the priest-poet tradition: "We are addressing you / Let us succeed / May we succeed . . ." ("Atumpan" 99).

There is in "Atumpan" a creatively vigorous multivocal discourse with three different points of view: the persona's voice, the "I" first-person voice of the master drummer (odomankoma kyerema), and the collective "we" of the whole community. The last emphasizes the collective wish to succeed in a society where the road to success is strewn with the dangers of imperialism and deculturation. Although in "Awakening" the "we" changes to the singular -- "let me succeed" -- John Hoppe explains that the "I" is "one who speaks from the vantage point of history, one who is really a synthesis of many others, the poet-speaker of his people's experience" (92-93). The pronouns "I," "he," "we," and "they," though not interchangeable, reflect a communal sensibility that Robert Fraser identifies as the plural sensibility and explains as the "communal experience . . . which pertains to the well being of each." In effect, "the poet is his people, and they are he, which paradoxically in no way reduces his individuality" (336).

Frederic Jameson, citing such allegorization of various subject positions as a constitutive element of third world literature, argues that the technique of isolated psyche is absent in third world literature; instead, the literature, according to him, is grounded in the shared material conditions of each culture:

[None] of these [third world] cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous; rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism--a cultural struggle that is itself a reflection of the economic situation of such areas in their

penetration by various stages of capital. . . . Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic, necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory: the story of the private individual is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society. (68-69)

This description should be no surprise, because traditional African poetry has always come out of a public context. However, the fact that third world literature operates at an allegorical level does not preclude the fact that it also operates at the level of the individual subject. One can therefore argue that third world literature is inherently richer because it is always multi-levelled.

Along with the stylistic aspect of Brathwaite's drum poetry is the semantic field of poetry of horns, in which the acoustic effects are intersected by references to key musical units and liquid imagery, such as libation. Poetry of horns is an oral practice in which horns transmit poetry instead of serving as mere accompaniment. Nketia explains that this kind of poetry "tends to be in the lyric style" ("Akan Poetry" 29). As well, it is often in the heroic mode. Horn blowers convey state history on state occasions and offer praises in honor of some prominent person. On some occasions, horn poetry is used to convey songs of mourning, as Brathwaite uses it in "Mmenson" (102) and "Tano" (151). Brathwaite defines Mmenson as "an orchestra of seven elephant tusk horns used on state occasions to relate history" (274), but the poem's subject matter and driving rhythm convey a troubled history:

recount now the gains and the losses:

Agades, Sokoto, El Hassan dead in his tent,
the silks and the brasses, the slow weary tent

of our journeys down slopes, dry river courses;

. . .

Blow elephant

trumpet; summon the horses,
dead horses, our losses. . . . (102)

The poem thus underscores sorrow, which is captured in the melody of the horn.

Like the "Mmenson," the dominant mood of "Tano" is one of muted sorrow, conveyed through a mixture of ideophones ("dam dam"), Akan words ("damirifa due"), and atentenben interludes ("due due due"):

dam

dam

damirifa

damirifa due

damirifa due

damirifa due

due

due

due (151)

The music of the atentenben is a fixed tune played at funerals, and its major significance is to create a definite mood or atmosphere of sorrow, as the tune of the atentenben is the epitome of the dirge. The poem is particularly striking for its repeated patterns of African oral discourse: the "damirifa due" interludes (151-152); "I am an orphan . . . water from eyes / from my eyes / falls upon me" (151, 152); "we walk / we walk /we walk Nana Tano / and it will soon be night " (152, 154). Each functions as an example of what Robert F. Thompson calls "apart-playing" or the "separation of parts," a pause or break in which independent oral modes can be recalled, repeated, or re-affirmed into the cross-rhythmic relationships of oral poetics (93-94).

The various independent oral modes are emphasized in the poem's three-part division. Each part also corresponds to the poet's reflection on his history: his past (death of his parents and slavery); his present (exile and orphan state); and finally his future, when he hopes to overcome his fragmentation. Division 1 uses the dirge form (atentenben flute) and conveys the idea that death "does [not] overlook" anyone. The second shifts to the libation/prayer mode and concludes with the refrain "we walk / we walk" (154). The final section continues the libation/prayer mode, but its vision is prophetic, foretelling a future in which "a new star splits / into darkness. When the / drum sticks / bend and the drum- / mer climbs out of the dark-/ness. . . ." (154). Such "apart-playing" effects new combinations, creating both a cross-fermentation of art forms characteristic of African traditional oral poetry and a bringing together

of a number of oral genres -- flute, prophetic, and libation poetry -- into a kind of collage, what Elaine Savory calls a "pan-generic textuality" (209).

The apocalyptic aspect of the prophetic vision of a better future is, however, not to be forgotten. In X/Self where this theme is less obscure, the most necessary function of the gods' coming is to bring about the death of the old order, imperialism/capitalism, in order to create a new order:

The bison plunge into the thunders river
hammering the red trail blazing west to Chattanooga

. . . .

j

p morgan is dead

coca cola is drowned

the statue of liberty's never been born

(X/self, "Xango" 109)

Destruction of the old order, Brathwaite argues, is both a necessary and justifiable prelude to new birth. He suggests that destruction and rebirth requires both human action or maroonage (guerrilla warfare of Africa and the Caribbean) and faith in prayer and invocation of gods, specifically Ogun and Shango, the gods of iron and thunder.

Both "Nam" (73-79) and "Stone" (93-95) offer maroonage and prophecies of the apocalypse as the phenomena that will bring about positive change:

and we rise
 mushroom
 mau
 kilimanjaro
 silvers of eagles
 tears
 savannas
 nzingas of rivers
 Umklaklabulus of mountains
 and the unutterable metal of the volcano

rising
 rising
 rising
 burning

(X/self, "Nam" 79)

Here, as in "Stone" (93-95), which thematizes the historic resistance efforts of Nanny Nanahemaa, the Jamaican Maroon Queen Mother, maroonage is advocated through the allusion to the guerrilla activities of the Mau Mau. But to Brathwaite, complete victory requires not just human effort, but apocalyptic destruction of the old world order resulting from the coming of the gods Ogun (lord of iron) and Shango (lord of thunder). These gods are respectively symbolized by "unutterable metal of the volcano" and "umklaklabulus" (Zulu

word for thunder-claps). As in Soyinka's Ogun Abibiman, it is the gods who bring about victory, but unlike in Abibiman, the gods cause complete destruction of the old order with howling hot fire. Brathwaite emphasizes this prominent role by printing the poem in the form of a volcano.

The fundamental role of the gods becomes more pronounced in poems such as "Dies irie" (37-39), "Citadel," and "Xango", where Brathwaite becomes more shamanistic in conveying his apocalyptic message. In "Citadel", he thematizes "iron/metal speaking freely of the fire," "Fire/harp blaze howling hot....in the grip of god" (101). This apocalyptic message recalls both New Testament and Old Testament prophecies in Genesis, Revelation, and Peter that the old or present world order will be destroyed by fire. But in "Citadel," the apocalypse is described as "fire/harp," which signifies the two sides of apocalypse: the destructive sound of hell fire, and the creative birth of a new and better world.

"Xango," the final piece in X/self, captures these two sides beautifully through allusions to Yoruba mythology. The poem employs images of the forge, flame, anvil, and blacksmith, which when translated into Yoruba mythology, evoke familiar ideas about the gods Ogun and Shango and their destructive as well as creative capacities. Thus the poem begins with the words "hail there is new breath here" (107) as a way of acknowledging the gods in the latter context to underscore the theme of renewal, and the idea that the gods are more interested in life-enhancing qualities than in destructive ones.

The rest of the poem describes this phenomenal renewal as the necessary result of an equally phenomenal destruction of the old order:

touch

him

he will heal

you

. . . .

he will shatter outwards to your light and calm and history

your thunder has come home

("Xango" 111)

Throughout these apocalyptic poems, Brathwaite assumes the role of the priest-poet, the seer of the apocalypse.

Two other poems from The Arrivants, "Prelude" and "The Awakening," in which the regenerative powers of Asase Yaa, the Akan earth goddess, is invoked, also imitate the priest-poet discourse of the sacral fixed form of pouring libation. Elements denoting sacral utterances of libation include "Asase Yaa, / You, Mother of Earth / . . . drink" ("Prelude" 91-92), and "Asase Yaa, Earth, / If I am going away now, / You must help me" ("The Awakening" 156). What Brathwaite pours forth in prayer is very traditional, and his pouring forth of the verbal formulas of libation discourse become the written equivalent to libation pouring. Though the African traditional basis of the poetry is

unquestionable, Brathwaite creates something new because of his "apart-playing" style that fuses various oral modes. But whether one's reference is to Brathwaite's stylized version or the original version from the African continent itself, one conclusion can be safely drawn: African ancestors and gods come to the fore in the context of what Mbiti calls "anthropocentric ontology" in African religions, meaning the human's mystical union with spirits and the dead ancestors who are believed to be the custodians and fertilizing agents of the land (15-16). Additionally, the spirits and ancestors are considered to be the invisible ones who effect this union and act as the source of human possibilities.

Thus names of gods, sacred objects, ancestors, towns, places, and other symbolic objects play an important role in Brathwaite's poetry. Names appear in the context of appellation poetry, which, according to Yanka, individuates prominent people, ancestors, gods, and places as deserving special attention (382). In composing "Tutu," a poem exalting Osei Tutu, the royal founder of the Ashanti Nation (Arrivants 274), Brathwaite adopts the apae heraldic formula to describe the movement of the referent:

And slowly slowly
 ever so slowly
 see how he slowly
 comes to his feet
 slowly slowly
 ever so slowly

take care not to stumble

you of the palanquin. (141)

This section is captured in the mode of drum poetry, the type Nketia categorizes as a third group of drum poetry "used for heralding the movements of a chief" ("Akan Poetry" 31).

Following this heraldic theme is the depiction of the rich paraphernalia of Osei Tutu: "see the bright symbols he's clothed himself in: / gold, that the sun may continue to shine / bringing wealth and warmth to the nation" (141); "bota beads, bodom beads / proclaim / his prosperity" (142). Through careful selection and manipulation of metaphors, praise names known in Akan as nmrane, and phrases such as "the lion," "cracker of iron," "Atakora Frimpong / who sought and seized kings; / black rock where the battle axe sings," "Birempon Tutu," and "Sasabonsam [devil] of darkness will ever fear / his black rugs of iron," the king's might, invincibility, and meritorious deeds are underscored.

Brathwaite also cites names of towns, such as "Kumasi" (138) and "Ougadougou" (104); of rivers, "Chad" (105), "Volta" (107), and "Bosompra" (136); and "The Golden Stool" [symbol of the Ashanti Nation] (143), to give a sense of the strong metaphysical attachment people have to their places of origin, no matter how long they may have lived elsewhere. But here names do not appear as belonging to separate African ethnic groups; rather, they serve as deep structural and inspirational symbols of racial and cultural affiliation and continuity. Brathwaite, whether intentionally or unintentionally, redefines these

names of towns, ancestors, and rivers into metaphors particularizing a Black Caribbean culture that draws upon nostalgic visions of an African ancestry. Forced by slavery and exile to dwell in a land far away from their origins, Black Caribbeans imaginatively particularize these nostalgic names of places and people in order to authenticate their identity. As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson explain, "imagined communities come to be attached to imagined places as displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined homelands, places or communities in a world that seems increasingly to deny such firm territorialized anchors in their actuality" (10). Nostalgia and the imaginaire therefore enable Black Caribbeans to construct and sustain salient cultural ideas that go beyond their regional boundaries to suggest the unity of Black Caribbeans.

Notions of African "Caribbeanness" emerging from the literature are highly interesting. A quality of national identity is tied up with concepts of place and the relationships between place and the human subject, and individual subjectivity is shaped within an ongoing interaction between an African and Caribbean social and linguistic panorama. This relationship, however, is informed by nostalgia. Abundant evidence of this nostalgia exists in the poetry of Brathwaite and other writers who use specific African oral textual features to maintain an older African discourse as part of their Caribbean identity. However, as African oral textual features are reappropriated and recycled into African-Caribbean cultural icons, they enter into different contexts and accrue to themselves other meanings, the most pertinent being that Caribbean

oraliterary poetry intersects with appropriated African cultural forms to reflect a Caribbean identity that goes beyond the boundaries of the Caribbean.

Taking the ideals of the central importance of their African identity forward, poets tend to de-emphasize the colonial cultural imprint on the African-Caribbean psyche, and to allow the Creole culture to move forward into the limelight. The poetry, therefore, as Bennett's "Tengad" highlights, reflects the current wave of ethnocultural aspirations of African-Caribbeans. As Norman Manley, former Jamaican Prime Minister, once said, even though the Caribbean should use all that English colonial education has to offer, "we must reject the domination of her influence because we are not English, our own cultural needs must be our best judges" (quoted, Huggins 13). In the words of the former Jamaican first lady, Edna Manley, "The immediate past has attempted to destroy the influence of the glory that is Africa, it has attempted to make us condemn and mistrust the vitality and the vigor that we get from our African ancestors" (14). One can surmise from these statements that the poets' use of African-derived oral discourse has drawn the people's attention to the viability of an Africanist perspective in their cultural and linguistic consciousness, providing them some insulation against those colonial standards that have caused dysfunction in the Caribbean.

CHAPTER FOUR

BUILDING COMMUNITY: SURVIVAL STRATEGIES AND THE NEW LIFE OF ORALITY IN AFRICAN-CANADIAN LITERATURE

To promote the central importance of their African identity, African-Canadian writers reproduce in new forms most of the themes of national culture that dominate African-Caribbean and African literatures. Two major challenges are, however, associated with this progress toward the creation of an African-derived sensibility. One is the difficulty of constructing such a culture in a complexly organized trans-national world. As Abner Cohen observes, "Ethnicity in [metropolitan] society is the outcome of intensive interaction [and strategic manoeuvring] between different culture groups . . . over new strategic positions of power within the structure of the state" (96). Alongside this struggle is the challenge of numbers. Though the various groups that form the African-Canadian community used to be the dominant group in their various places of origin, in Canada and North America in general they are a minority among minorities. Peoples of African descent, Douglas Massey points out, are "marginal participants in the North American migration system," overshadowed by such groups as Latin Americans and Asians (15). Notwithstanding their small number, African-Canadian writers have succeeded in carving out a distinct cultural niche in the metropolitan economy.

This distinct "space" enunciates this chapter's primary point that in an increasingly intermeshed global economy, cultural particularity and

heterogeneity persist. Modernity, intensive interaction amongst cultures, and free market liberalism do not result in a metropolitan monoculture or the wholesale hegemony of "Western" norms. Rather, culturally specific modes of livelihood flourish, although this is marked by what Linda Hutcheon describes as doubleness: "[d]oubleness ... is the essence of the immigrant experience...; caught between two cultures and often languages, the writer negotiates a new literary space" (quoted, Morrell 9). W. H. New calls this condition an Arnoldian "dislocation" between "two worlds" (3), which enables the writer to reproduce in his/her daily metropolitan life a transnational identity that particularizes him/her from others.

In this context, African-Canadian culture is emerging, and it displays a number of transnational themes. One, perhaps the most widespread, is the identification with a strong idiom of socio-political activism that belongs to the literature of resistance that spans the Caribbean and Africa. The difference in degree partly stems from the minority status of African-Canadians, from their cognizance that Black culture in Canada is in danger of extinction or assimilation. In the Caribbean, for instance, African presence is the majority experience, so much so that though Brathwaite insists on interculturalism or creolization as "the tentative cultural norm of the society," he believes, nevertheless, that "the culture of [the] ex-African majority [has to be accepted] as the paradigm and norm for the entire society" (Contradictory Omens 5-7, 30). His more recent History of the Voice outlines this norm for Caribbean poetry, arguing that to a significant extent the African presence is currently the

major determinant of Caribbean national discourse. Not so in Canada, where the issue is one of basic survival. Alarmed by this threat, the majority of African-Canadian writers use a stronger political message to fight against erasure and affirm their African identity in the Canadian cultural mosaic.

Commentators like George Elliot Clarke in Eyeing the Northing Star (xvi; xviii) and Carol Morrell in Grammar of Dissent theorize that these writers also emphasize the political "because of what they call . . . systemic racism" (9), sexism, classism, stereotyping, cultural prejudice, and discrimination against minorities. Morrell cites Black writers' political intervention as their "distinctive contribution to Canadian literature, [in that they] insert their own and other voices into what has (following the European tradition) been considered the 'high culture' of poetry" (13). She uses the works of Claire Harris, M. Nourbese Philip, and Dionne Brand to illustrate these overlapping themes (racial, patriarchal, and cultural prejudices); these writers' works show how the legacy of slavery and colonization has worked to marginalize Blacks, in particular women of color, who are disadvantaged in multiple ways. Representing the plight of women of color as a double and sometimes triple marginalization, they particularly encourage women of African descent to fight back and present their political activism as a double-edged sword to combat both colonial and patriarchal practices.

Relevant to this struggle is the dominance of female authors who invoke feminist ideas not only as a political intervention for women's empowerment, but as a recovering of the powerful influence that some women enjoyed in their

relationship with men in traditional African societies, particularly the matrilineal societies of the Ashantis of Ghana, the Lele of Zaire, and the Bundu of Sierra Leone. Both Agnes Aidoo and Benneta Jules-Rossette discuss this influence that some African women used to have in traditional politics and religion as a situation that was adversely redefined as a result of colonialism. The emergence of women's voices from both continental Africa and the diaspora can be viewed as the cultural recovery of the traditional African women's influence, rights, and leverage in their relationships with men.

As a further objective directed towards Black cultural development, writers foreground conceptual boundaries to mark African-derived cultural forms. The literature is dominated by African-derived oral features, symbolism of the Black color, ideas of African communal heritage, body projects, and eruptions of the speaking voice in the text -- a kind of poetics that incorporates (in the written text) adapted sound-poetry, drum poetry, performance, recording, and audio-visual technology.

Though these transnational themes are articulated as part of a larger African-Canadian discursive formation, each writer's work is stylistically different. As well, immigrant African-Canadian writers, both scribalised oral and performance poets, present these themes differently. The term "immigrant African-Canadian" writers designates recent African-Canadian writers, mostly Caribbeans and people from various African countries. They are in Canada for various reasons, some as landed immigrants or citizens; some for school and work; others as refugees and illegal immigrants. This latter group forms an

imagined community of "deep. . . comradeship" (Anderson 7) with their various countries of origin. Their values are built upon the precepts of cultural identity that are fundamental in their countries of origin. This situation arises primarily from their recognition that their stay in Canada is but a brief interlude in a life based not "here" but "there." Although some might eventually end up living permanently in Canada, many will eventually return to their old country -- a process known as circular migration.

David Reimers, in his studies of migrant Caribbeans in New York, observes that Caribbean immigrants in New York and North America in general do not have the intention of not returning, nor do they see their relocation as an end to their connection to their old country. This holds true, according to him, even if they decide to naturalize. According to Jama Adams' "Description of Some Perceptions and Psychological Features of Jamaican Immigrants," this circular migration may be due to the strong cultural identity that many Caribbeans exhibit. Indeed, many African-Canadian writers of Caribbean origin adopt Caribbean cultural aesthetics, and sometimes their works appear as a continuity of Caribbean aesthetics, providing an ongoing connection with an old country, and making this group a part of a relatively continuous flow of ideas and practices in their old country.

Another important group of African-Canadian writers who need to be acknowledged here is what I call "native or earlier African-Canadian writers." These are writers who are the descendants of Blacks who came to Canada as slaves, Empire Loyalist, escaped slaves from the United States, pioneers from

the United States, and invitees of the government (in British Columbia). Notable poets from this group include Maxine Tynes and George Elliot Clarke, both belonging to the Nova Scotia Black community. These writers have no special attachment to an old country, although they assert the authenticity of African culture vis-a-vis the dominant White Canadian culture through a particular adherence to oral textual features as a way of shoring up their African identity. Though there are a number of talented earlier African-Canadian poets, I limit my discussion to "scribalised oral" immigrant Black poetry and Dub or performance poetry in order to show their ongoing connection with an old country in their uses of orality in writing. My selected example for the scribalised oral poets is Philip, and for the performance poets, Joseph and Allen. My categories do not, however, suggest isolable sets, but rather a continuum of contextually determined African-Canadian literature.

For Marlene Nourbese Philip, writing orality is a quest for a recipe about words and language, for happiness and wholeness -- a state where the Black presumably lives with no sense of alienation. Philip hopes by this quest "to engender by some alchemical practice a metamorphosis within the language from father tongue [the colonial edicts] to mother tongue [learning to speak in a new way]" (90). Philip's own illustration of this new discourse, as her poetry suggests, entails a scribalised oral form, privileging a hearing and reading aloud of the poem, and capable of resulting in a language marked by rhythms and musicality. As Philip explains, this language is and is not English, and can "keep the deep structure, the movement, the kinetic energy, the tone and pitch,

the slides and glissandos of the demotic within a tradition that is primarily page-bound" (23).

Stylistically, Philip often employs syntactic suspension or interruption of words/sentences to register the oraliterary dimensions of her poetry. In "Testimony Stoops to Mother Tongue," the fracturing of words or phrase with slashes and dashes draws attention to the demotic:

the prison of these walled tongues

- speaks

this///

fuck-mother motherfuckin--

this///

holy-white-father-in-heaven--

this///

ai! ai!! ai!! ai!

tongue (She Tries Her Tongue 79)

This style reaches an extreme in the poem "Discourse on the Logic of Language" where readers' normal expectations of word/sentence completion are often frustrated by the use of suspension with particularly strong oral intermissions:

A mother tongue is not

not a foreign lan lan lang

language

/anguish

anguish

a foreign anguish. (56)

Here, Philip constructs repeated fractured parts into unusual part-rhymes to announce the oral basis of her poetry. Also, suspension is designed not only to interrupt or impede reading and draw the reader's attention to the demotic, but also to suggest a sense of stuttering, a stuttering that marks the oral, and describes the movement from the oral to the written. Sound and sense therefore cooperate to intensify communication of the music of the poetry as well as its meaning.

Added to this use of suspension is the use of typography, a fracturing of the poem into parts that are juxtaposed with one another. First is a mother tonguing the new born child, "THEN . . . BLOWING WORDS -- HER WORDS . . . INTO HER" (58). This part is capitalized. Next to this is a scribal-oral text that depends on a host of technical devices -- fracturing, suspension, and repetition -- for effect. After this come edicts that include definitions of body parts as well as historical information about the colonial injunctions that resulted in the African's "foreign . . . /anguish" (56). For example, it was common practice for West Indian colonialists to cut out the tongue of any slave caught speaking his/her indigenous language. Such dense juxtaposition of the oral (mother's) and scribal (colonial) discourses compels a deciphering response. Readers must try to decode the metaphorical implications of these oraliterary textual features, even if most of the words are chosen more for their sound or shape than for their denotation.

The poem's spatial arrangement suggests the ways in which Philip describes the problem of language. The text, which is typed sideways on the left edge of the page, describing the mother "licking her baby" clear of the white substance covering it, then "blowing" her indigenous language into the child's ear/mouth, represents yet another example of the strong female warrior who fights against the colonial establishment. The Edicts, on the other hand, represent the father tongue, and within these two lies the oraliterary script that combines the mother and father tongues. Using Brathwaite's important word "dumb," with its echoes of the African drum, Philip suggests the silencing of the mother tongue by colonial discourse:

I have no mother tongue

tongue

no mother tongue

no tongue to mother

to mother

tongue

me

I must therefore be tongue

dumb

dumb-tongued

dub-tongued

damn dumb

tongue

(56)

Yet, in voicing her silence (dumb-tongued) with the sounds the mother blows into the child's ear/mouth, she begins to signify (dub), thus wresting new space for the mother's words.

Though Philip writes with the same awareness of dispossession and multiplicity of language common in works by Black diasporic writers, such as Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, and Derek Walcott, her gendered perspective or woman-centredness extends such ideas further. Thus, whereas in Brathwaite one encounters archetypal figures such as Uncle Tom, "father / founder" ("Tom" 15) of the Caribbean and the repository of African memory in the New World, in Philip, the major archetype is the mother. This foregrounding of women, either as the mother losing her child or the daughter seeking the mother/tongue, is a strategy shared by female writers of African descent to point out a highly problematic aspect of their male counterparts: their tendency to exclude women as cultural producers, while at the same time appropriating women's regenerative powers. Evelyn O'Callaghan, discussing works by Caribbean female writers, mentions Jamaica Kincaid, Merle Hodge, Zee Edgell, Lorna Goodison, and Jean Rhys as ardent proponents of this gendered perspective. She even goes as far as to suggest that "the critical approach to West Indian women's fiction is, generally speaking, feminist" (2), but as Kathleen Balutansky cautions, the Caribbean voice, female or otherwise, is heterogenous, and generalizations about Caribbean female writers must recognize this centrality of diversity (546).

Though Philip's gendered perspective is shared by Caribbean writers at home, hers is more intellectual: she uses a stronger political idiom through her radical multiple questioning of patriarchal and colonial discourse (She Tries 21-22). Of significance are her sharp political dictionary-style definition of words, such as "Parsing," 'the exercise of dis-membering languages into fragmentary cells that forget to re-member' (66), and

raped -- regular, active, used transitively the again and again
 against women participated into the passive voice as in, to get
 raped; past present future-tense(d) against the singular or plural
 number of the unnamed subject, man. (66)

These serious counter-colonial redefinitions of hegemonic definitions create new challenges and possibilities that undermine radically the conventional meanings.

Morrell has suggested that Philip's "powerful [poetry] . . . brings together her concern with the West Indian loss of language and culture through slavery with the submerged power of women and with the 'science' (which can be the racist discourse) of the Western world" (19). The metaphorical complexities of the poetry are, however, numerous, for notwithstanding the lament for loss of language, the doubleness in the poetry seems related to what Philip understands as the two fundamental elements in her historical experience, as the following comment suggests:

I am laying claim to two heritages -- one very accessible, the other hidden. The apparent accessibility of European culture is

dangerous and misleading especially what has been allowed to surface and become de rigueur. . . . The other wisdoms -- African wisdom needs hunches, gut feelings and a lot of . . . free falls . . . to be caught in the last minute. It calls for a lot more hunting out of the facts before one can even get to the essence, because in almost exact reversal with European culture not much has been allowed to surface. . . . (She Tries 23)

While acknowledging two cultures as the structuring concepts in her poetry, Philip also seeks emancipatory literacy, that is, a hunting out of knowledge about vernacular languages rather than imposing colonial "standard" languages in postcolonial countries. She suggests an enlarged definition of the term "literacy" in which literacy means an ability to form critical perspectives or to decode texts by using not only the accessible European sign system, but also other non-Western cultural structures that might be reproduced in English. Ong, for example, in Orality in Literacy, has proposed the term "secondary orality" as a contrast to his "primary orality" to describe the skills needed to decode oral structures that might be reproduced in written English. Such enlarged definitions of literacy seek to stimulate new explorations of cultural and literary development through a range of new kinds of "literacy," especially awareness of traditional oral material.

Philip's incorporation of oraliterary devices in the text extends beyond suspension/fracturing of words/sentences to the use of eruptions of the body or body parts, such as the tongue, as the controlling figures in the text, and as a

creative resource emphasizing body projects. Though at the University of Saskatchewan the term “body projects” is the name for the investigation about the knowledge(s) of the body, Philip’s use of the term, together with her reference to the body, is different. She explains:

In the New World, the female African body became the site of exploitation and profoundly anti-human demands -- forced production along with subsequent forceful abduction and sale of children. Furthermore, while the possibility of rape remains the amorphous threat it is, the female body continues to be severely circumscribed in its interaction with the physical surrounding space and place. How then does this affect the making of poetry, the making of words, the making of i-mages if poetry, as I happen to believe, “begins in the body and ends in the body”? *She Tries Her Tongue* is the first blaze along the path to understanding and resolving this particular conundrum. (She Tries 24)

Thus, Philip writes from the body rather than about the body. Consequently, in “Universal Grammar,” the mother’s recipe for how to make the English language yours is to “Slip mouth over the syllable; moisten with tongue the word. Suck Slide Play Caress Blow--Love it, but if the word / gags, does not nourish, bite it off--at its source- / spit it out / start again” (67). This counter-colonial body project, caressed as it were, by lips and tongues, as in the cooing and mooing sounds of maternal talk and tonal languages, metaphorically reminds the reader not only of a Bobbitt-like retaliatory violence, but also the

rendering of a foreign speech pattern as the atomic core of African-Canadian literature written in English.

Inter alia, this Coetzean idea of transfer suggests that fuller appreciation of the poetry depends upon the speaking voice producing it. When removed from this original impulse through embodiment in conventional print culture, the poetry almost always feels unmanageable, unless one incorporates the oraliterary characteristics that signal a recreation in written English of the sound universe of orality. As well, the incorporation of body projects in the written text places the body of the speaker at center stage as actor rather than one acted upon. Consequently, through this discursive strategy associated with orality, the body becomes a site not of colonizing power, but post-colonial disruptions of that power.

This strategy in literary production occurs not because writers want to sound difficult or different or to stand in contrast to the commonplace language of Western (colonial) literature that we are used to, but mainly because writers of African descent want to signify a poetics of identity that reflects the African-Canadian use of language as a double archival symbolic, a marriage between African and English discursive practices. These are meant, as Philip observes, to “keep the vitality [of the demotic language] on the page yet not lose the widest possible audience” (quoted, Morrell 98). This attention to doubleness not only uncovers Philip’s multiple consciousness, but also foregrounds the dynamic between her poetry and cultural identity.

While Philip and other scribalised oral Black immigrant poets, such as Brand and Harris, strive to keep the vitality of the demotic on the page, Black Canadian dub poets try to free it from the page through their performance poetry. Through combinations of traditional African musical expressions and performance modes, dub poets form a general African presence that acts as a bastion of African-Canadian creative innovation. Habekost offers another significance by observing that through these combinations, an ancestral dialogue between the African diaspora and Africa is created: "the [African Canadian poet] performer implicitly points to the ancient roots of this culture [and] . . . impersonates the archetypal figure of the African griot in his traditional functions as singer, poet and storyteller" (183). Chantal Zabus also explains that "dub poets see themselves as the modern urbanized successors of the African griot voicing a sound-poetry that transfers the story-telling event from its ancestral African form to a modern structure of electronic communication" (40). Finally, these cross-fermentations of musico-poetic forms also create a poetic medley which Atukwei Okai refers to as "total art" (quoted, Kubayanda, Drum 46) intended to free the act of literary creation from fixed written forms and extend it into its musical sound realms.

In Toronto and other large metropolitan centers, this practice of total art is currently enjoying an unprecedented creative outburst and popularity. As happened in traditional African performance poetry, large audiences attend the Dance or Session and other social gatherings that usually take place on weekends and holidays just to listen to these poets and to integrate themselves

into the African-Canadian cultural fabric. Lillian Allen, who has emerged as the birth mother of dub poetry in Canada, observes that she was

invited to read at many different events by many different groups: labour unions, schools, cultural and community events, universities, art groups, women's conferences, folk festivals, new music festivals and women's festivals, literary groups, Black heritage classes, libraries, weddings, nightclubs, benefits, rallies and political demonstrations. Sometimes [her] poetry would be the keynote speech at an event. ("Poems" 260)

Habekost's Verbal Riddim reveals that many of these poets perform not only locally, but nationally and internationally, thereby popularizing African-Canadian literature, a literature that has hitherto received little critical attention.

Publicized prizes won by dub African-Canadian poets have also publicized the poetry. Allen's Revolutionary Tea Party and Conditions Critical won the 1986 and 1988 Juno awards respectively. Popularity seems to arise from the "cooperative" elements in the poetic performative event: artists and audience, as well as many genres from oral and written sources, necessarily play a part in the realization of the text.

As a consequence of these "cooperative" elements, the published piece is never final. Allen, for instance, argues that for a long time she "felt reluctant to commit [her] poetry to the page because, for the most part, these poems are not meant to lay still" ("Poems" 213). She observes:

As I prepared poems for this collection [Women Do This
Everyday], I had to "finalize" pieces I had never imagined as final.

Like a jazz musician with the word as instrument, reading and performing these poems is an extension of creating the work.

(213)

Though the printed performance poem may be important because publishing allows many different audiences to be reached through various channels of distribution, how to capture the dub performance via the printed page remains a challenge. Even though dub poets adopt Western-derived conventions of performance in print to give an idea of sound poetry, rhythm, pauses, noises, ideophones, lyricism of tonality, and the fading echo of the dub, many readers are not familiar with the notational system of print performance, as excellently discussed by Dennis Tedlock in Finding the Center, Bauman in Verbal Art, and Elizabeth Fine in The Folklore.

A good example of these typographic representations can be found in Clifton Joseph's "Freedom Chant" in Metropolitan Blues, which notates the pitch and sound of the drum:

. . . freedom DUM-

B/DUM-

B/DUM-

B/DUM

B!

. . .

. . . dumb

dumb

dumb

dumb

dumb

dumb

dumb

(24-5)

Use of the minimal expression "dumb," here transformed into the law of repeats, not only emphasizes rhythm but reflects the visualization and textualization of sound in print. Small type is used for soft passages or words, larger type for middle-level passages, and capitals for loud passages. These, as well as moving letters or words above (higher) or below (lower) the normal line, indicate changes in pitch. Such significations force one to acknowledge orality within the poetry through a poetic form that reflects many genres, especially performance and drumming that relate to a face-to-face audience.

Allen's "I Am Africa" in Selected Poems is another good example of a successful transfer of sound to page:

I

dream

Like no one

heart

can

hold

warm

breaths of Sun

I F e e e e e e l music
 my body carries the rhythms
 of **A F R I C A**

(118)

The musicality of the text is established at a very early stage in the poem, and is sustained through the transcription of rhythm as well as by the use of distinctive orthography such as "feeeeeel" and "AFRICA," which notate and allow for the reproduction of sound. The oral emphasis on this word is revealed by the textual manipulation of what might be described as an African ideophonic linguistic resource. In Allen, these ideophonic sequences return with insistent regularity, as the following passages exemplify:

"WOOooooooooOOOoooooooo" ("Unnatural Causes" 69), "slave Shippppppppp" ("Rub A Dub Style" 83), and "Fi Fit / Fffit Fffit Fffit /... / EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE" ("Anti-Social Work" 119).

Allen also indicates pauses and changes in pitch by shifting lines and words towards the right hand margin of the page. The effects of these visual dimensions of performance on the page are important in that they create clear correlations between orality and writing, between low and high pitch or tone, and between the poem on the page and its performance. This representation of pitch, tone, and other paralinguistic features reaches an extreme in "Anti-Social Work," resulting in a text that is a foreign-looking in its typographic representation of social worker's demands that the clients fit the hegemonic system:

Though African-Canadian dub poets acknowledge the need for print performance, publishing is another problem. As many have realized by now, most mainstream publishing houses publish very little or no African-Canadian poetry. Their excuse? "There is no market for such works." On the publishing issue, Allen remarks:

Publishing was another story. Rhythm and Hard-Times . . . was self published and self-distributed, and this demystified publishing for many who had never before considered publishing. Seven self-published books immediately followed. Several more have been published since. Some of these books have sold in the thousands. Rhythm and Hard Times itself sold over 8,000 copies.
("Poems" 260 - 61)

Although this lack of publishing outlets has changed dramatically now for Lillian Allen, because of both the publicized prizes she has won and the critical attention she has received, works by the majority of dub poets, especially new writers, are still difficult to come by. One hears of dub poets/writers without seeing their works. Consequently, discussing African-Canadian dub poetry calls for humility about the literature and the resources one can refer to.

Therefore, I cannot refer to many authorities because African-Canadian dub poetry has not yet been widely accepted, taught, and canonized at most Canadian/North American Universities, not because it does not have literary merit, but because of questions of power. As Gerald L. Bruns remarks, the concept of canon is not based on literary but "power criteria" (748). Susan

Gingell elaborates on one of the reasons why “the dubbers’ work” is kept “out of the Canadian poetic mainstream”:

Their poetry is often angry and politically charged and we Canadians are not used to being made uncomfortable in our own backyards, preferring to think of ourselves as the world’s amiable mediators, conciliators, and peacekeepers . . . but now poetic voices are urgently communicating a . . . message about the way white Canadian comfort often rests on black Canadian pain and labour. (4)

Brenda Carr, in recent article, also suggests that “some recent criticism continues to read dub dismissively” (11) because of the dubbers’ refusal to “conform to ‘standard English’” (10) and “traditional assumptions about the Western lyric form” (11). She cites Victor Chan’s 1998 review of two volumes of dub poetry (11), and an article on “West Indian Poetry” in the 1993 Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics as notorious examples.

Consequently, one of the existing urgent tasks for African-Canadian critics and writers is to join critics, such as Habekost, Gingell, and Carr, in urging that dub poetry be viewed as positive attempts by African-Canadian writers to create a Black specificity within the Canadian cultural mosaic, a specificity marked by distinct linguistic, political, social, and cultural forms in rhetorical practices. For my part, what I will do is look at the poetry of Joseph and Allen as examples of the literary efforts by African-Canadian dub poets to

constitute African-Canadian dub aesthetics through the process of circular migration and deep comradeship.

In the Dance or the Session, the social gathering that normally takes place on the weekend or holidays, recent immigrants usually gather not just to socialize, but to tune in to information from their old country that is relevant to the new community. This act of comradeship is of fundamental importance to an intra-group African-Canadian sense of identity. Clifton Joseph's "Chuckie Prophecy" in Metropolitan Blues aptly uses this weekend activity to mirror an existence in two worlds. One is an underprivileged world where the recent immigrant is exploited ad nauseam, where s/he has to work long hours in adverse conditions for low pay:

im wuk

innah wan smelly

. . . sweaty

. . . stinkin' / dutty FAC'TRY

innah de daytime

. . . nighttime

. . . early morningtime

Fuh very Likkle. Likkle money. (26)

Contrasting with this world is a less constrictive one that serves as a lifesaver for the Black immigrant, breathing life into a hostile world where exploitation, shift work, oppression, and estrangement rule:

. . . but come de WEEKENDTIME

BACKSIDE: IM FLASHY FLASHY FLASHY
 see im poppin style innah im CADILLAC
 watch im pull innah de station
 fuh some GAS/O/LINE
 hear im as he tips im FEATHERED/FEDORA/HAT:
 ayyyyyy Jack: Fill she up. . .
 wid a dollar's worth of GAS/O/LINE
 watch im as he digs innah de pockets
 of im THREE/PIECE/GAB/ER/DINE
 an shift innah im CHICAGO/GANGSTER/LEAN. (26)

Habekost, in his analysis of this poem, emphasizes the ironic undercutting of Chuckie's expensive appearance, depicted as somewhat pretentious, and the celebrated party spirit of the Dance Hall culture of the Caribbean immigrants, but he fails to add that this "WEEKENDTIME" is synonymous with tuning in to cultural communication with their old country. This deep horizontal connection authenticates their old rather than their new national character, a process that spans time and space to bring them closer to the life they have left behind.

Authentication of the old national culture is expressed on both the content and expression planes of the poem. "WEEKENDTIME" embodies the Black immigrants' self-preservation in the face of the struggles, hardships, and inhuman working conditions in the "new country," empowering them in these very struggles of life in "dis here/ COLD/COLD/COLD NORTHERN CLIME" called "BABYLON," meaning "wicked land" in Caribbean Rastafarian discourse.

Escape from this vicious circle is suggested by "Chuckie's Prophecy": "the fall of Babylon," when the whole dehumanizing system responsible for his suffering disintegrates in a massive ravaging "fire," a phenomenon reiterating Brathwaite's apocalyptic account of the destruction of the present world order.

The expression plane is also characterized by a variety of African oral textual features. The most discrete occurs in the poem's first two sections where the language is ordered along a Creole-lexifier dimension. Expressions like "im wuk," "innah wan," "im cussin," "im pull innah de station" as well as multiplication of words such as "sweaty, sweaty," "daytime, nighttime, early morning time," "Likkle Likkle," "FLASHY FLASHY FLASHY," "COLD/COLD/COLD," all reveal, as Cassidy points out, the writer of African descent's preference for multiplication of words for effect (69ff). According to Cassidy and Habekost, this multiplication of words achieves intensification: pretty pretty = very pretty; beg beg = begging all the time, etc. (Habekost 181).

In African oral discourse, however, these repeats function in an interesting way as an example of off-beat phrasing. They suggest a pause or break or gap in which key musical units or instruments, such as the drum, can be inserted or recalled. In the poem's performance version, these points of multiplication, which usually end a section, are followed or marked by a musical interlude. The repetition of "Down" (in the last section), for instance, is matched by a single drumbeat. The repeats also enable the poet-performer to reflect on his or her composition and effect new combinations in the ensuing sections. It is therefore not by accident that after each significant multiplication or repeats

of words, Clifton Joseph continues the telling with a new subject. Finally, at these junctures, readers/listeners/audience are invited to participate in the poetry by keeping time by clapping or tapping feet and/or by repeating the sounds and words rhythmically. Repeats therefore determine the interactive dynamics of the text, indicating moments of echoing, repeats, fades, and the dropping in and out of instruments to create new textual rhythms. The fuller meaning of the poem is therefore concealed in what appears to the uninformed reader to be a pointless superabundance of word multiplications or repetitions. Yet these features are not only meaningful in the context of African oral discourse, but essential within the mechanics of the poem.

Unlike the poem's first part, the latter part of "Chuckie Prophecy" is closer to English than to Creole:

TIME WILL COME AROUND
 WHEN CHUCKIE'S DISGRUNTLED FROWNS
 WILL SEND SKYSCRAPERS/ON/FIRE
 TUMBLING DOWN
 DOWN
 DOWN
 . . .
 DOWN DOWN DOWN TO THE GROUND
 IN THESE HERE NORTHERN BABYLON / TOWNS. (27)

This code-switching suggests that the individual speaker is polylectal. As well, his/her incorporation of the multiplication "DOWN DOWN DOWN" and the use

of "IN THESE HERE NORTHERN BABYLON / TOWNS" suggests what Jacques Arends et al call the non-discrete characteristics of a Creole continuum where discrete boundaries between the varieties do not exist. Rather, the varieties -- "mesolects, [transitional varieties between the two extremes], the acrolect [variety that is closest to the local version of the lexifier language], and basilect [variety that is most divergent from the lexifier language] -- form a gradient scale that shade into one another" (54). Joseph's placing of this property of the Creole continuum at the end is not to suggest a polylectal model, showing a basilectal to acrolectal dimension or variance (or opposite points of orientation), but to introduce an acculturative program, the creation of a new non-discrete way of speaking drawn from characteristics of both the old and new countries' cultures.

The performance version of the poem, included on the album Oral / Trans / Missions, brings additional dimensions to the poem. The use of repetitions, variant volume, minimal expressions, and verse breaks indicates sections where the telling reaches a climax or where a new point is introduced and emphasized. These points are marked by vigorous sonic vibrations and intensified beats that serve a thematic, structural, and aesthetic purpose. They become paradigms of how drum "language" and other African-derived oral features and the complexities of written poetic language can interconnect to produce a cross-fertilization of written and percussive polyrhythmic text that exceeds the boundaries of any fixed system of categorization.

The musical backing to the performance is an imitation of the singing style of Eek-A-Mouse, to be precise, of his reggae song "Wa-Do-Dem" (1980/81). Eek-A-Mouse's song, as Habekost explains, was one of the mega-hits in Jamaica and its expatriate communities when it came out in 1980/81:

No dance hall sound system could satisfy its followers unless it played Eek-A-Mouse, and no party could do without his notorious "Wa-Do-Dem". This success was attributed chiefly to the unusual and innovative style of the artist, who employed his voice like an instrument, amplifying his words by adding sound effects. . .or producing a flow of percussive syllables. . . This technique stems from the 'scat' tradition of jazz singers. . .and continues to be a dominant feature of modern black American musical idioms like rap. (182)

The musical backing points to the poem's links with rap music.

Rap music, as defined earlier, is a talkover style in which the poet raps over a preestablished musical rhythm. The only confinements in the rap, as Los Angeles free-stylist T-Love explains, are: "First it should rhyme; second be comprehensible; and third, be on the beat, if done to music" (quoted, Pihel 254). Joseph's poem conforms to T-Love's criteria. He uses rhymes and assonance that help maintain and develop the musicality of the poem, especially through the use of the vowels "i," and "o," as in "smelly," "dine," "line," and "im poppin," and "down." Another rhyming tool is adding suffixes to certain words at lines' end, such as the suffix "-time" in daytime, nighttime, and early

morning time. The poem is also comprehensible in thought and expression, even though the work is broadly a cultural recreation of some of the codes of behaviors of the African-Caribbean immigrant in the specific context of the Caribbean dance hall culture.

Along with using rhyme and exhibiting semantic clarity, Joseph's poem is also on the beat. The rhythm of his rap fits over the beat of the music track, and the rap is determined by the music's beat rather than by a set meter derived from written verse. In other words, the rap can be broken down into rhythmic beats rather than metrical units. To assure that each unit of a rap takes up equal time over the beat, Joseph either (1) uses caesuras, hesitating or pausing before delivering the next phase, or (2) overloads words into a short space. For instance, the words "innah wan smelly" are said so fast that they take up the time of a single word, such as "sweaty," delivered at the same speed. The rhythmic techniques not only make the poem interesting, but return rap to its oral foundations. As Habekost explains, use of "percussion" pays homage to its crucial role in "[Black] culture as both a means of entertainment and an outlet for frustration and rage" (183), a rage which often translates into the idiom of political activism and Black resistance rhetoric against stereotyping, racism, sexism, cultural degradation, and oppression of minorities.

Allen's "I Fight Back," like Joseph's "Chuckie Prophecy," also projects a vivid portrait of the recent immigrant's hardships in Canada. The poem, however, thematizes the female warrior, the hardships she face, the perpetrators of her hardships, and her defiant counter-attack on her

oppressors. Unlike Joseph's poem which thrives on the observer's perspective, depicting Chuckie's hardships, his weekend parties, his frustrations, hopelessness, and his spiritual consolation that one day a holocaust will topple the racist capitalism responsible for his hardships, Allen's uses the personal experience narrative. The persona/l narrator thus becomes the performer and political activist.

The extractable story of "I Fight Back" is deceptively simple, but this plainness is not to be confused with transparency. The poem reflects, as habekost explains, Allen's definition of dub poetry as an "aesthetic of information with a political purpose" (149). This definition emphasizes how dub poetry is loaded with more political and cultural information than meets the eye. The poem begins by naming corporate giants, such as "ITT ALCAN KAISER" and "Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce" (1-2) as the enemy responsible for the exploitation of the persona, as well as "Third World" resources. By naming transnational or big companies as the enemy, Allen reveals a deep political understanding of the seemingly omnipresent and omnipotent influence of big business on not only the Western governments of their origin, but also the governments in developing countries.

John Ralston Saul, in The Unconscious Civilization, reveals a vivid but disturbing picture of the destructive influence of big business on political structures and individuals. According to Saul, Western society is "tightly held at this moment in the embrace of a dominant ideology: corporatism" (2), and he maintains that corporate giants are the ones who influence the general direction

of society to a dangerous degree. They influence government policies: low wages, long hours of work, and other inhumane working and living conditions that adversely affect individuals, especially disadvantaged groups. As well, they tend to co-opt the loyalty of governments from concern about the welfare of their societies to that of corporate giants.

For Saul, the destructive influence of corporate giants extends across national boundaries through their expansionist and neo-colonial activities. Tom Barry's The Other Side of Paradise: Foreign Control in the Caribbean adds that Western countries team up with transnational companies to exploit developing countries. He explains that

through trade rather than direct colonial ties, Canada [or the West, through its corporate grants] gained major economic influence in the West Indies. The Caribbean has been Canada's primary imperial frontier: its source for tropical produce, outlet for manufactured goods, and region of leading growth for its mining companies [such as ALCAN] and banks [such as Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce]. (87)

Contextualized by Saul's and Barry's arguments, Allen's criticism of big business becomes larger, indicating that these companies' destructive economic and political power goes beyond their Western countries of origin to the Caribbean (Jamaica), the birth place of the persona. Consequently, the persona's reference to "my country" (3) is what Habekost calls a "double

reference" (150) in the context of circular migration to refer to both Jamaica (her old country) and Canada (her other country).

Like Saul, Allen cites specific dehumanizing acts perpetuated by large business corporations:

My Children Scream

My Grandmother is dying

I came to Canada

And Found The Doors

Of Opportunities Well Guarded

I scrub Floors

Serve Backra's Meals on Time

Spend two days working in one

And Twelve Days In a Week

Here I Am In Canada

Bringing Up Someone Else's Child

While Some Else and Me in Absentee

Bring Up My Own. (5-18)

For long hours, the persona has to leave her children in the care of someone else or behind altogether in Jamaica, in order to care for her employer's children. Habekost points out the absurd implications of this arrangement:

The immigrant is caught up in a seemingly inevitable trap of a perverted system that, regardless of class and race, produces only stepchildren – out of indolence in the case of those who can afford to keep a baby-sitter for their children and spend their lives free of care and labour – and out of material necessity in the case of the overworked immigrant. (151)

Along with this anti-children and anti-family arrangement, the immigrant is also forced to do grinding jobs that summon forth images of modern slavery. She does the dirtiest jobs, serves Backra's -- Backra being the White master, in the terminology from colonial days -- meals on time, and works excessively long hours, two days in one and twelve days in a week.

But unlike Saul, whose portrayal of the evils of corporatism revolves around society's "apparent inability to deal with [corporatism]" (18) and acceptance of it as the inevitable direction of the future, Allen's poem manifests a persona who fights back and presents combativeness as the way to conquer corporatism. The repetitive use of the title phrase "I Fight Back," a kind of refrain, underscores this combativeness as the preventive measure that would stop corporate giants from holding countries and individuals to ransom. Through this combative stance, she suggests that large business corporations are not as invincible as many think, but are institutions whose powers can be significantly reduced by the efforts of concerned, thoughtful individuals dedicated to fighting for a better economic and political future.

This strongly voiced combative stance characterizes the second part of the poem (18-34). This part reveals two major types of combats that the persona engages in. First is combat in the context of verbal exchanges between the persona and some White Canadians:

And Constantly they ask
 "Oh Beautiful Tropical Beach
 With Coconut Tree and Rum
 Why did you Leave There
 Why on Earth did you Come?"

AND I SAY:

For the Same Reasons
 Your Mothers Came.

The retort suggests a readiness to "fight back" despite the persona's position of weakness, and it reveals the exchange as combat in the form of a signifying contest. Signifying contest, as Henry Gates explains, is a ritual often involving two or more participants exchanging words. These contests are held to see who can come up with the cleverest exchange. Those who develop exceptional skills in signifying gradually accumulate a storehouse of quick replies for various contests, and these ready-made replies come in handy in tight situations when a participant has to come up quickly with a reply.

Henry Gates, in his detailed account of this tradition in The Signifying Monkey, explains that it is derived from the Signifying Monkey poems, a group

of poems that originated during slavery and began to be recorded in the twentieth century by Black musicians and performers. The main theme of all the poems is how the weakest party becomes the strongest through his/her expertise in language, through coming up with quick replies ("punch lines") or getting the last word. Allen's remarks might be considered as one of the ways she uses signifying as a political tool to return poetry to its oral foundations, thereby emphasizing that the work being done is broadly cultural rather than the random invention of the isolated individual. Allen proves, through this signifying process, how she can overcome any difficulty or unexpected circumstance imposed by the larger hostile culture.

The verbal exchange also introduces the significance of conversational style in performance. In addition to the poetic voice, White Canadians are allowed to speak, and their comments and the performer-persona's responses evoke a number of interesting ideas. First, the expressions are symmetrical, in the form of question and answer or call (question) and response (answer). Second, the question is a manifestation of "folk beliefs" in the manner of what Allen calls "fairyland" conception in "Unnatural Conditions," a poem which also employs symmetrical expressions. This conception simply refers to a range of utopian beliefs about the Caribbean that emerge from advertisements or tourism conversion strategies designed to lure people to visit the islands. The conception, like advertising, is not based on reality, but fiction, and brings about the internalization of fictional ideas rather than factual knowledge. The White Canadian speakers, therefore, seem to rely more on folk belief than knowledge,

and their question displays ignorance and gullibility. The performer-persona's response, on the other hand, is based on knowledge. Allen thus reverses the traditional Western logocentricism in which the Black is portrayed as ignorant, and the White as knowledgeable.

Further, the "fairyland" conception has paradoxical implications. In one sense, it is an expression of concern that the persona might have made a wrong choice in coming to Canada. The naive White Canadian question hints at some of the dangers of coming to Canada, such as cold weather. However, it expresses that seeming concern in a fictional folk belief about the Caribbean: an interesting way of indicating concern without making the message too personal. In addition, the seeming concern is expressed to make the performer-persona view herself as a foreigner from a different place and race. Indeed, she is constantly asked this question, suggesting how continually she is made to feel this way. Thus, though the expression serves as a conversational device expressing apparent concern, in context, it nevertheless represents the immigrant as "other." Interestingly, a Black in Canada is constantly asked such questions as "Where do you come from?" "Why did you come to Canada?" "Will you go back?" which are catch-all expressions that suggest that all Blacks are immigrants irrespective of how long they have lived in Canada.

The expression invited a verbal response, and indeed, the persona did join the conversation by responding with a quick answer that she came to Canada "for the same reasons / Your Mothers Came " (25-26). In other words, she chose to accept the invitation to the verbal exchange without accepting the

invitation to see herself as other. Rather, she suggests that they are both foreigners, people who came to Canada for various reasons. This brief answer summons forth a history of the White Canadians. It evokes the harsh economic and political conditions that had compelled their forebears to migrate to Canada, and suggests that they, too, are foreigners in Canada. This historical reminder provokes a lot more questions about the Whites who had confidently represented themselves not as foreigners but bona fide Canadians: How did they become Canadians? By what authority do they claim to be Canadians? And if indeed they are foreigners, by what right do they refer to others as immigrants?

Additionally, the response has, as Habekost explains, “remarkable allusive qualities” (153). It evokes a history of people who escaped to Canada for various reasons, and this includes the legacy of escaped Black slaves. This allusion epitomizes an important political theme: an interest in the long African presence in Canada aimed at incorporating Black history, long missing from the pages of Canadian history, into Canadian historiography. Along with the works of others, like Maxine Tynes and Afua Cooper, Allen's purpose is to ensure that the over four hundred years of African people's presence in Canada is recognized, acknowledged, and given space within Canadian history.

Though Allen's allusion celebrates Black forefathers/mothers who escaped to Canada for a better life, it depicts Canada as a haven for escapees. This account is a positive yet incomplete version of African Canadian history, which the poetry of Afua Cooper builds upon yet goes beyond to add “the fact

of slavery in Canada" (Other Woman 304). According to Cooper, "there was slavery in Canada. In French and English Canada, Black people were slaves [yet] . . . Canadian history writers [have] . . . schemed to hide [this] fact . . . [because] Canada must keep its image as the haven for escaped slaves from the U.S." (304). One such slave, according to Cooper, was Marie Joseph Angelique:

Marie Joseph Angelique
 hated the chains of slavery
 she felt the strong should not oppress the weak
 that all people should be free
 she lived a slave in Montreal town
 but in her head she was free
 so the city she did burn down
 running for her liberty. (Memories Have Tongue 39)

This important history, involving the burning down of at least half of Montreal, is missing or "not recorded in [Canadian] history at all" because "slavery in Canada has been Canada's best-kept secret" (304).

Cooper's poem re/presents another version of Black Canadian history. Though oppositional in nature, Cooper's revelation appears as "repetition forwards" which Martin Heidegger, building on the ideas of Søren Kierkegaard, explains as a sort of a widening gyre, the centers of which are all moved but slightly from the previous center to the position where old ideas are brought into a new light and rewritten (355). This sense of repetition forwards makes

Cooper's umbrage against official mainstream history paradoxical, for when she thinks she is speaking suppressed truths about Canadian history, she appears to be filling in the gaps or adding new historical information. Both writers, however, are united in their attempt to rediscover Black Canadian history.

Allen's response to the White Canadian speakers is followed by another signifying remark:

They label me

Immigrant, Law-breaker, Illegal, Minimum-wager

Ah no, Not Mother, Not Worker, Not Fighter. (28-30)

Unlike the earlier remark, this one is more incriminating. It foregrounds the ways in which the cultural image of Black immigrants has been established as other in White Canadian discourse. As implied, the Black immigrant is what the White Canadian is not. In other words, White identity is defined through its difference from an/other. This has meant that in practice the dominant culture has required Blacks or other minority groups to define themselves by representing Blacks or a minority group negatively in contrast to the supposed positive identity of the White person. All Blacks, whether Native Black Canadians or recent immigrants, are defined this way.

John Sekora and Houston A. Baker, Jr., discuss the result of this racist process of othering, and draw attention to its oppressive implications:

It readily accommodated, even encouraged belief in a historical division of humankind into a virtuous "we standing against a deformed they." In a psychological sense it proved - more

conveniently than empirical evidence could ever hope to do - the existence of lower, corrupted, imperfect humanity, whether called slave or black. . . . With [Blacks] constituted as the Other, [Whites] found means to speak the unspeakable and thereby constitute themselves. They had found, that is, a powerful measure of self-worth and self-definition. (44-45)

By acrimoniously attacking the persona-performer and naming her negatively, the White Canadians both marginalize and use her to solidify their White Canadian identity. They represent her as all the things (immigrant, law breaker, and so on) that they think they are not.

For the second time, the persona responds to these negative names by using the signifying tradition to combat them. Though her response is oppositional in nature, it forges a political impetus that is very different from the one used by the White Canadians to solidify their identity. Instead of the we/them division that characterizes the White Canadians' discourse, Allen's response generates a positive Black presence through its difference from the negative attributes that the Black has been made to signify within the White Canadian establishment. Instead of attacking or labeling people, she rather deals with the discourse constructed about the African-Canadian and tries to reverse it. Her response, therefore, is metadiscursive in that it is a discourse about discourse. In a way, she foregrounds the constructedness of the categorization of the Black immigrant and the need to reverse it in order to

project the desired positive image through what Habekost explains as renaming:

Being herself denounced as “Immigrant, Law-breaker, Illegal, Minimum-Wager” (29), the persona retaliates by re-naming herself “Mother,” “Worker,” and “Fighter.” In this way her deconstruction of the racist stereotypes evokes the reconstruction of her denied identity. The enemy’s “un-naming” of the persona is reversed by her own re-naming, replacing the negative “un-names” with . . . positive attributes. . . . Through the process of (un) naming, Allen reconstructs her . . . castigated immigrant existence into a self confident and distinctly Black Canadian identity. (155)

By simply reversing the negative names attributed to the Black immigrant without attacking those who had constituted her as other, Allen avoids valorizing Black identity over any other. She avoids constructing new margins. Pointedly, she rejects the White-Canadians’ logocentric discourse that had marginalized her as other, and adopts, instead, an inclusive discourse that does not rest upon the cultural superiority or inferiority of another person or race.

The final section of “I Fight Back” goes beyond rhetorical combat in the signifying tradition. With its emphatic repetition of the title phrase, which is elaborated into a fully-fledged chorus, this section introduces a second type of combat in the warrior tradition:

I FIGHT BACK

Like my sisters before me

I FIGHT BACK

I FIGHT BACK. (31-34)

This combative stance is multi-levelled: it refers to both the warrior activities of the persona and a sisterhood of female warriors who previously had fought against oppressive systems. Part of Allen's poetic project in referring to her sisters before her is to assert both an African-derived female warrior identity, and a phylogenetic relation with it. This female-centeredness points to what Allen understands as the fundamental trait of her warrior identity.

Naming of female warriors is particularly important because it alludes to a suppressed Black female heroic lore that extends from narratives about Cleopatra, the Black Egyptian Queen, to those about Yaa Asantewaa, Marie Angelique, Nanny Nanahemaa, and Harriet Tubman, the prominent African-Canadian warrior who fought for the emancipation of Black slaves in the 1850s. The activities of these warriors, as Habekost argues, represent a long standing tradition of the involvement of women in Black liberation struggles:

Nanny, "the most legendary character of the [Maroon] wars," was not only a "chief sorcerer or obeah woman" (Price 1973: 262); she was also one of the leaders of the rebel slaves waging guerilla war against the British; and Harriet Tubman was "born a slave, . . . escaped, but *rifle in hand* she devoted her life to assisting others

to actual freedom by means of the Underground" (C.L.R James 1985: 23). (155)

Whether the reference is to the name of a particular woman or a group of women, what comes to fruition is diasporic remembrance of these Black female warriors, and the compelling idea that the instantiation of a heroic female African past becomes a symbol of anchorage, strength, intelligence, and survival. These legendary figures are crucial to both the heroic sensibility and the survival instinct of women of African descent.

Allen's writing of orality in this final part of "I Fight Back" is, in a way, also modeled on the traditional African initiation story. The initiation story, as Harold Scheub defines it, narrates the youthful life and development of its major character. Initially, the text appears to be an individual-centered narrative whose impulse is developmental, wherein the initiate, after a series of encounters, triumphs and enters a beatific state of truth. As Scheub further notes, the hero achieves his/her objective with the assistance of helpers. These may be humans, ancestors, animals, or objects, as the research of Julien demonstrates (76). The devotion of the human helpers to the hero is paramount, and they facilitate the hero's triumph, which ultimately accrues to the whole society. The initiation story therefore takes on dimensions of the collective, a supportive order which counter-discursively contrasts with the indifferent order of individualism.

The poetic structure of "I Fight Back," its didactic intention, and its major character's experiences all appear typical of traditional African initiation stories.

As mentioned earlier, the poem records the terrible experiences of an African-Canadian immigrant, presumably a single mother. Initially, the poem is individual-centered, depicting the overwhelming struggles of the persona. These experiences, among others, suggest the immigrant's cultural, economic, political, and racial marginality. The poem's ending, however, reveals that the persona gets inspirational support from Black sister-women who teach her to talk and fight strong and Black. They lay down the "fight back" warrior tradition for her to follow in order to overcome the racist political, social, and economic injustices she encounters. As well, they teach her that it is not by silence or passivity that one can win freedom, but by the get-up, stand up, and fight back survivalist and combative stance. The collective efforts of these female warriors replace the selfish, racist, and oppressive attitudes of corporate giants and their Western supporters with love and acceptance, an acceptance which makes it possible for the persona and her female sister warriors to join hands and work towards bringing lasting joy to themselves and their people.

Unlike the persona's treatment from her employers, which is based on domination, exploitation, and emotional and mental abuse, her relationship with these women is established on a sisterhood that is counter-discursively constructed in relation to that abuse. Unlike the work relationship, which marginalizes her, the sisterhood relationship empowers her: hence she identifies with the Black women warriors and draws inspiration from them. The focus on the collective efforts of this sisterhood suggests the importance of the African-derived female warrior theme in African-Canadian literature, and

affirms, as Nasta Susheila observes of post-colonial women writers, the reliance on a previously unwritten discourse and culture. “The whole poem,” as Habekost correctly observes, “is intoned by a strong female [theme]” (155), which depicts a sisterhood of Black female warriors as a prominent feature of both African-Canadian culture and the African warrior tradition. The ending also suggests that an African-derived oral tradition does not lead to depravity, as colonial discourse suggests, but to a quest for freedom and liberty. This quest theme illustrates very well how Black diasporic resistance to economic and political injustice, as well as its fight for Black cultural specificity, can find expression in traditional African modes of sustaining camaraderie, in dimensions imitative of the warrior tradition and the initiation tale of traditional African oral discourse.

The potential for non-Western elements in African-Canadian poetry represents an important addition to Canadian literature. The writers' use of oral textual features, such as African-derived percussive elements, songs, performance, and a tonal style of melodic writing, places the thematic material of interculturalism in Canada in a new dimension: a musico-poetic context. This new context puts Black Canadian writers in a strong position to contribute to the world of 21st -century Canadian literature. This achievement, however, has not been won easily: strong political activism, the unconventional promotional efforts of Black writers, and their articulate stance belied their minority status.

CONCLUSION

To study African, African-Caribbean, and African-Canadian literature is to go through a process that considers the spoken word or “Nommo,” as Janheinz Jahn first called it (101), as the source of parole. This is to say that the poetry is not fully realized unless and until it is energized by the power of African oral discourse, such as the vitality of drum language, tonal language, ideophonic units, and song.

Though each of the writers discussed herein wrote as an individual artist, commenting on life from both the individual and socio-political point of view, they all turned to traditional African literature for inspiration. To emphasize the Afrocentric perspective, they spoke with a consciousness of their African heritage and the need for a validation of that consciousness within postcolonial criticism. Their works therefore demonstrate unity in diversity, a unity emphasized by the pervasive presence of the peculiar discursive characteristics of African-derived oral textual features. This practice can be extended to African-American literature as well. Scores of discussions by Henry Louis Gates and Houston Baker, for instance, use “blues criticism” in analyzing African American literature, and Toni Morrison’s novel, Jazz, explicitly embodies this impulse. If in this dissertation I have emphasized this unity in diversity, it is not because these works are homogeneous, but because they show certain commonalities.

Wole Soyinka's Ogun Abibiman, for instance, provides a socio-political vision of the Pan African liberation struggle built on precolonial African oral discourse. Traditional African warrior traditions and culture inspire the poem. Brathwaite's and Bennett's poetry is essentially a survey of New World cultural and socio-political history, thematizing the socio-political condition of peoples of African descent who have been uprooted from their old country as a consequence of slavery and colonization. Both writers' use of Creole, to stress their African descent and to rebel against the colonizer's impositions, can be described as an unbreakable link with the resistance of the Maroons and the internationalized reggae sounds of defiance. The same socio-political emphasis is evident in the works of diasporic Black-Canadian writers, but in Canada where the socio-political agenda is assimilation of the few by the many, writers use a stronger political idiom to expose the injustices in the system. Poetry becomes an instrument of public protest, a theme forcefully conveyed in the works of Philip, Allen, and Joseph. Though all the poets affirm their common African heritage, poems by the female poets are marked by clear feminist elements. In Canada especially, a characteristic of the poetry is the dominance of female poets and a thematizing of women's issues that create a rich amalgam of feminist, African-Caribbean, and traditional African oral discourses.

The mixing of discourses and cultures by these writers is particularly interesting in terms of its revolutionary potential. Conceiving of the written text as comprising oral textual features such as dialect, song, rhythm, audience

participation, storytelling, and audio-visual material destabilizes the fixity of both published material and formalist genre typologies. Texts go beyond the individualistic fixed expression to the mutual interaction between artist, written text, oral text, and audience, a merger Brathwaite calls "total expression" because it "makes demands not only on the poet but also on the audience to complete the [work]" (English 25). This holistic context of expression, according to Brathwaite, is the "continuum where . . . meaning truly resides" (25). Though reception theory has demonstrated amply in the past twenty years the variety and subtlety of these interactions between author, text, and audience, this continuum furthers our understanding of the pact or the interactive agency between audience and the text, and suggests that the printed word may not necessarily be the definitive act of publication.

If, as Jacques Derrida observes, genres and discourses are not to be mixed since they imply the question of law, (which is often figured as "an instance of the interdictory limit, of the binding obligation, . . . the negativity of a boundary not to be crossed" ("The law of Genre" 247)), then one can argue that transcribing orality into writing, and concomitantly writing into orality, has far-reaching consequences. By mixing genres that exceed the boundaries of fixed systems of categorization, writers of African descent are redefining traditional notions of orality and writing. In so doing, they are dismantling traditional genre designations, because by working with two traditions, something of both the oral and written discourses is significantly altered and reconfigured with/in each other's discursive contexts. Just as the generic

designations of such oral components as songs, performance, and storytelling techniques are altered, so too are the written forms that the oral “partakes” in. By combining oral and scribal modes, something of each discourse is embedded into the other to create a new literary medium, and the reader/critic who seeks to understand this new form should, as a pre-requisite to interpreting it, first seek an understanding of the larger discursive context of each discourse.

According to Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, understanding oral discourse, especially in performance poetry, “can be problematic for readers and critics more accustomed to written literature, in that it encompasses much greater textual variation” (24). Consequently, they advocate “a wider reading and teaching of dub [oral] poetry, even if only in textual form, for, . . . this is a poetry which restores the need for immediate audience” (24), and demands a more inclusive critical approach that considers both oraliterary and socio-political dimensions. Another important observation has been made by Atsu Dekutsey: “[orality] will undoubtedly affect the very writing of poetry; the poet, during those silent moments as he [or she] creates . . . will have his [or her] audience very much in mind; the poetic voice will tend to be more social rather than private” (619). This, in turn, will make the poetry more public, as was the case in traditional African poetry. This socio-political dimension makes the artist a private individual concerned not only with his/her own private world, but with public life also, intellectually, culturally, and politically.

In this regard, my intent has been not only to position the writings of Anglophone African, African-Caribbean, and the African-Canadian poets within traditional African socio-political and cultural framework, but perhaps more importantly, to show that the concern of these literatures with traditional African oral discourse has been advantageous to the aesthetic end of particular works. Indeed, the use of oral textual features as deliberate techniques in literary production has been extremely beneficial in reconciling an old world reality (pre-colonial African discourse) to a new reality: the reality of print culture. These inherently hybrid texts transform the duality brought about by the collision of two cultures into an artistic and cultural asset. Such artistry may be considered the beginning of a cultural and aesthetic renaissance: the point in time when a real start was made to forge out of the traditional African and the alien European traditions something new, having elements of both, but nevertheless unique in itself.

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Appendix 1

Appellation to the Akwamuhene

Akwamuhene
Agyeman,
Aduana, Atwea Abrade Piesie se
Dammirifua due!
Aduana, Atwea ne Abrade Piesie Birempon,
Oyirifi Ampasakyi Akoto, dade a wɔmmɔ no kaɣire.
Amma Ansaɔ kunu Akoto Tenten,
Agye-ntekyirekyi, Ahu-abɔ-birim
Opumpuni a ɔwɔɔw nkaa fa mmati
Akoto, woagye me a, gye me ba.
Otupirepesi a okum Otupire,
Ɔɔɔabum, Ataamoɔ Mpiri nana Hemanni,
Agyen Kɔkɔbo nana Nyanawaseni
Gyaamo a okum Gyaamo,
Wo na woakum Kwaku Nsafoa
Agye ne nsafoa agu wo nsafoa so.
Ɔko-twa-asuo barima a ɔso ne atabon nam,
Ahwirenne panpansiakwa a ɔko
Asuo a ɔsaw subunu ani, aɔɔakoma-wo-ahene nana
Mpapakyikyɔ a ɔte n'akurogya.
Ogya a ehyee aman mu hene
Birempon a onim nea ogya firi,
Aduana kraa mu Piesie nana,
Otwa-asuo-konom-asuo
Barima a otu ne nan fi nsuom
Si ɔbotan so ma ɔkwan yera.
Agyen Kɔkɔbo ne Akoto Gyaesaayɔ nana
Tutugyagu a watutu gya agu, ama
Asammorofi adwo ma ntwea anya dabere.
Ɔdenkyennyinamoɔ a ɔte bun mu.
Na opue firi a okukuban tua n'ano.
Agyeman, Akoto se:
Dammirifua due!

[Agyeman,
 The elders of Aduana, Arwea, Abrade, clans say:
 Condolence!
 Aduana, Arwea and mighty first-born of Abrade,
 Oyirifi Ampasakyi Akoto, the metal that is never used as a head pad.
 Tall Akoto, Amma Ansa's husband,
 Fierce conqueror,
 The great man who removes rings via the shoulder.
 Akoto, if you have saved me, save my child too.
 The strongest man who kills strong men.
 Strong and powerful grandchild of Ataamo Mpiri who hails from Heman,
 Grandchild of Agyen Kokobo who hails from Nyanawase
 Gyaamo who kills his equals.
 You have killed Kwaku Nsafoa
 And added his keys to yours.
 Mighty warrior who crosses the river with boats and oars
 The strong bat who is used to drawing deep water.
 Grandchild of Afrakoma who stays at the outskirts.

 King of the fire that burns states.
 The great man who knows the source of fire,
 Grandchild of the first-born of Aduana clan
 Who crosses the river to drink water.
 The man who causes the path to disappear as he removes his foot from the
 river and places it on a rock.
 Grandchild of Agyen Kokobo,
 Who has removed firewood from the hearth to create a sleeping place
 for dogs.
 The old crocodile who lives in the deepest part of the river and surfaces
 with a bird.
 Agyeman, Akoto says:
 Condolence!]