



THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY AND ITS PSYCHO-SOCIAL EFFECTS: A CASE STUDY OF KOFI ANYIDHOHO'S SELECTED COLLECTIONS OF POEMS.

Dr Sontcha Jean-Luc TOURE

Université Alassane OUATTARA

touresontcha@gmail.com

Abstract: Poetry has always been associated with intensity of emotions expressed in literary form with a sense of rhythm and beauty. For Plato, poetry is imitation; “a poetic imitator uses words and phrases to paint colored pictures of each of the craft. Poetry task is not to take something unreal, like an idea, then make it appear real, nor is it to “invent” an otherwise uninvited world. Rather, the essence of poetry for Plato is to make “the real world” of ideas. This study identifies the language of poetry as a valuable tool which can be used in stimulating psycho social effects. It also identifies poetry as a valuable tool which can be used in raising awareness across various communities.

The objective of this paper is to highlight the psychosocial effects of poetic language on individuals, communities and institutions. This study then employs the semiotic as well as the stylistics approach. The semiotic approach to the study rests essentially upon Saussure's concepts of “signifier and signified” and the stylistics is to analyze the relationship between form and content. Thus, from assessing these entries to the poetic language, the poet Kofi Anyidoho through his collections of poem *A Harvest of Our Dreams* (1985), *Praise Song for the Land* (2002) and *The Place We Call Home* (2010) creates poems and draws pictures by the power of words to address the most worrying problems in the world. It comes out of this study that literature, more specifically the language of poetry in its playful function, has ineluctably and undeniably a psycho-social impact in all its aspects.

Keywords: Awareness - effects –emotion, imitation, language, poetry - psychology-society.

Résumé : La poésie a toujours été associée à l'intensité des émotions exprimées sous forme littéraire avec un sens du rythme et de l'esthétique. Pour Platon, la poésie est imitation. Le poète, dans la logique d'imitateur, fait recours aux locutions poétiques pour peindre le monde réel. La tâche de la poésie n'est donc pas de prendre quelque chose d'irréel, comme une idée, puis de la faire paraître réelle, ni « d'inventer » un monde autrement non-existant. Au contraire, l'essence de la poésie pour Platon est de créer « le monde réel » des idées.

Cette étude identifie le langage de la poésie comme un outil précieux qui peut être utilisé pour stimuler des changements psychosociaux. Elle identifie également la poésie comme un moyen précieux adéquat à la sensibilisation de notre société contemporaine. L'objectif de cet article est de mettre en évidence les impacts psychosociaux du langage poétique sur les individus, les communautés et les institutions. Cette étude adopte ensuite l'approche sémiotique ainsi que la stylistique. L'approche sémiotique de l'étude repose essentiellement sur les concepts de Saussure du « signifiant et signifié » et la stylistique consiste à analyser la relation entre la forme et le contenu. Ainsi, à partir de l'évaluation de ces entrées du langage poétique, le poète Kofi Anyidoho à travers ses recueils de poèmes *A Harvest of Our Dreams* (1985), *Praise Song for the Land* (2002) et *The Place We Call Home* (2010) parvient à aborder par la puissance de la poésie, les problèmes les plus préoccupants du monde. Il ressort de cette étude que la littérature, plus spécifiquement le langage de la poésie dans sa fonction ludique, a inéluctablement et indéniablement un impact psycho-social dans tous ses aspects.

Mots-clés: conscience, effets, émotion, imitation, langage, poésie, psychologie, société.

Introduction

Language has a power and it is also an effect producer. It is not just a mean of expressing thoughts. It carries a profound weight in shaping and modeling reality. The way people resort to language can affect every aspect of their lives, communities and relationships. A biblical passage stipulates in this regard that “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits” (Proverbs 18:21). This verse shows that words have the power to bring life or death, to build up or tear down. By the mean of language, ones can mold relationships, influence the atmosphere and manners, workplaces, communities and language is of course a key to unlocking cultural barriers and prejudices. Unfortunately, in the world, language misuse or manipulations has brought about some unprecedented crises and social barriers that hinder healthy interaction between people. However there exists a universal language which is mindful of the power of words and the impact they have on people. The language of poetry comes to reveal itself as a language of healing wounds, a language of peace maintenance and preservation. Rethalies P. Mogoera asserts that “poetry language is an effective communication tool which assists with tackling and challenging issues that previously would not have been raised” (M. Rethalies, 2020, p.6). She further explains that the poetry language is “a good mean to challenge and address topics that would seem to threaten the norm in a society. Poetry also provokes thinking and no one ever questions the poet for raising pertinent issues. Instead, the poets use these utterances to find solutions and bring change” (M. Rethalies, 2020, p.6). Through this assertion of Rethalies, it is obvious that Poetry language has a creative power. It can build bridges through good communication, fostering understanding, unity, and love within the society. In this perspective, Kofi Anyidoho, the Ghanaian poet uses the tools of “poetry language” to communicate at a range of social failings undermining African society but also he gives hope where there seems to be despair and life where there seems to have death. The question which is therefore raised is to know how the poet resorts to the language of poetry to bring this psychological assistance. What is then the specificity and particularity of Anyidoho’s poetic language and its utilitarian value? Unlike other poets, Kofi Anyidoho confesses that “the primary source of influence and interest...has been the Ewe Oral tradition” (Wilkinson, 1992:16). In so doing, this study aims at identifying in what manner the poetic language is expressed through indigenous poetic devices. One of the objectives is also to get acquainted with the way the poet Anyidoho



manipulates the languages of poetry with traditional standards to express his thoughts and achieve a psychological impact on individuals.

1. The Psycho-Social Effects of Poetry Language

Poetry is a personal expression of experience and repressed feeling put into words. People who resort to the language of poetry are willingly expressing or giving a response to what disturbs them. Thus the language of poetry either in singing, painting, reading or writing comes to play a cathartic role in helping to voice feeling during tough and emotional time. In this regard Robert Frost once commented on poetry language: “poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words” (F. Robert, 1966, p.39). He further explains that it helps the person to dive into the layers of their conscious and unconscious mind to bring out the hidden treasure of feelings and experiences through the fuel of poetry language. This psycho-social function of poetry is tangible in the verses of Kofi Anyidoho. His poetry is about capturing the emotions that could inhabit individuals’ deepest beings. When it evokes death, then also it finds the language of rebirth.

1.1- Voicing Rebirth out of Death.

The thought of death and the uncertainty linked to death comes to haunt individual psyche and give them to live in a constant and perpetual fear and trauma. This fear of death creates a general anxiety and disorder in the society with a feeling of dread and distress. In the same way, Simon De Beauvoir affirms that “the fear of death never left me; I couldn’t get used to the thought; I would still sometimes shake and weep he terror” (Beauvoir, 1958, p.352). These words of Beauvoir come to point out that one of the main psychological suffering of individuals in a society is their negative thought about death. People are in distress and depressed with the thought it is inevitably to confront death. They are also under constant fear that some days their loved ones will depart and create a void in them. The unanswered questions about death stem from mystery and complexity of the human experience. The poet Anyidoho addresses this mystery of death in a cathartic angle with a poetic language in order to unlock people from the negative thought of it. In most of the poems of Kofi Anyidoho, death is repeatedly evoked and painted. He does not paint death as a loss but a point of regeneration and rebirth. The poem entitled Seedtime is illustrative:

Seedtime

Do not search too hard
 For words to trap these thoughts
 The thought that bring tears
 upon the harvest of our dreams.
 They say our thoughts are threads, crossing
 And crisis-crossing into new cobwebs of life



There is no curse on us
 Our orphan laid an egg across the backyard of the skies
 [...]
 We will not die the death of dreams
 We will not die the cruel death of dreams
 [...]

There is no curse on us
 There is no curse on us. (K. Anyidoho, 1982, p. 4-5)

The poet chooses to capture the reality of death with the use of the oxymoron, “seedtime”. This aptly reveals the poet’s perception that death is not a loss. This is because he wants to get relief from the strong pain of it. The poet persona warns his people not to comfort him because he is under the yoke of “thoughts that brings the tear”. For him the decease has not passed by this “temporary stoppage of the dynamic flow of life’s energy”.

But surprisingly one could realize that the poet persona in the course of his lament expresses hope that the death of his peer is not a destruction but rather a “seedtime” in “crossing into new cobwebs of life”. The poet persona moves on negating the uncertainty associated with death that “Sungod comes to claim his own at harvest time”. And “at heaven’s gate a friendly soul appears wearing a gown of velvet flame.” For him the decease has joined the ancestors’ place and will experience the eternity. The poet persona sustains that this death must not be seen as a curse. He words it out as a refrain “there is no curse on us; he sings “there is no curse on us”. He even urges the orphans not to cry but keep on rejoicing since the “egg laid across the backyard of the skies” has been “swept all away”. Through this allegory, the poet persona is accounting for the fact that the presents the living are offering to their deceased father have been positively accepted. They don’t have to cry. The poet keeps on giving hope to those who are still alive that they “will not die the death of dreams; they “will not die the cruel death of dreams”.

This illustrative poem highlights that specific context that the language of poetry with some indigenous aesthetics of dramatic performance manifests a sort of comfort. When mourning the decease at funeral the whole community try to lessen the negative impact and uncertainty of death and cherish this belief and thought that death is a seed time. This seedtime enables the livings to join the ancestors. The poet persona is informing his people that the decease is going back “home” as a spirit and not a physical body to live a post-earthly life in the spiritual world. The poet also tries to appease the hearts of those people who think that the death of their loved ones is mainly caused by human action and seeking to avenge. The poet makes prevail the language function of poetry which consists of soothing hearts and



softening morals in times of distress. He then paints death as a fate reserved to any human being. One could read through the following poem that the happenstance of death is considered as a fate phenomenon:

Lament of The Eagle

When the elders see the vulture
Perch upon our royal Palm
They must tremble their beards
In memory of the eagle pride.

Hadada Tahibor in Atsiavi

Said it once in song:

Some bird has snatched Eagle.

A bird with name unknown has caught eagle

And dropped him among vultures

So often in my time

I flew the skies and swam against the storm

So often in my days

I combed the cloud and caught the lightning in my eyes.

I rode the winds and gathered Thunder in my voice.

So often in my youth

I dared the stars and caught the rainbow in my smile

So often in my prime

I climbed the moon and looked the sun in the face

(K. Anyidoho, 2010, p.58)

The tone of the poem and the personification of “the eagle” that laments introduces the reader to the sorrow environment of funeral. It gives a clear picture of dirge. The poem is about the dirge of a chief from the noble class whose death is announced by the “perching” of “the eagle” upon the “royal Palm”. The poet persona embodies the dirge singer “Hadada Tahibor in Atsiavi” to confirm that the chief has subdued to his destiny. The persona declares: “Some bird has snatched Eagle. “A bird with name unknown has caught eagle and dropped him among vultures”. The structure of the poem shows that it is a narrative one. The poem is written in both the present and past tense. The simple present is used to tell the activities and describe the status of the living whereas the past tense is used to speak about the actions of the departed one posthumously. The rhythm in the poem is enhanced with the repetition of the pronoun “I” and the commonest conjunction “and”. The use of simple and compound sentences in most verses draws a deliberate space symbolizing the sad and bitter separation and the created void between the poet and the deceased ones. The poet plays with the language in two main ways in the poem creating unusual metaphors and paradoxes which creates antithesis. The use of two contradictory statement in a thought, thermalized through death and life and sorrow and hope. It gives insight of the poet belief. Through these verses, the poet persona expresses his belief that the destiny of the elder was preordained as he referred to it as “the pride of the eagle”. For him, the king has lived his life according to those



predispositions. The poet words himself in this way: I climbed the moon /and looked the sun in the face.

It is then obvious from the first point that the poetic language has a restorative function of human psyche and potent to erase all fears and anguish which could fail the psychological integrity of the human being.

1.2- Weaponizing and Triggering Resilience.

Language can be a weapon in various ways. It can be used for manipulation through advertising and propaganda, as well as for psychological purposes in many domains. In this sense, Noam Chomsky asserts that “language is a weapon of politicians, but language is a weapon in much human affairs” (N. Chomsky, 1986, p.16). This is how in indigenous African societies, the poetic language serves as a mean of socialization and motivation for higher productivity. The poet Kofi Anyidoho as a traditionalist portrayed this utilitarian value of the poetic language in form of praise to trigger motivation and resilience to his fellows for them to take up challenges and hardships they face in their daily life. The praise language of poetry according to John Anthony Cuddon “...consists in eulogizing in fulsome praise an individual, institution or group of people, the unique quality of a person and giving him colorful epithet through songs and musical predilection” (J. Cuddon, 2013, p.525).

Due allowance to what is mentioned, the poem titled **Fokoko** is illustrative in:

Fokoko

A family tribute,

FOKOKO:

It was your father Abotsi Kobli

Traveler healer and poet

Who once said in song:

The lame panther

Is no playmate for antelopes

You were born panther

but you took care to learn

The gentility of the antelope.

You were born tall taller

than any man among us

but you always bent

down to the lowliest one

[...]

(K. Anyidoho, 2002, p.67)

The subject matter of this praise poem is the heroic war achievements of a chief in spite of his young age. It commences with a simile worded in praise name “Fokoko” and highlighted with epithet such as “healer”/ “poet”/ panther” / “taller” to just reveal the aspect of praise in the verses. The poet persona identifies the leader with a praise nickname “Fokoko” and praises

him as the Chief who is able to smash others by charging with his “panther” power. The poet persona exalts the power and the might of the chief warrior and posits him as a protector and care giver. The chief is not seen as an abuser of power, but “he took care to learn the gentility of the antelopes”. And it is this quality that makes him to be the one who is “taller than any man among” them. Praises are given unto the chief “Fokoko” under many forms. With a metaphor device, he is likened to a “panther”, “taller” and “gentle”. It is further told that he has “become a story of the ancestor”. They “shall tell the chief’s story”, to his “grandchildren, great-grandchildren great-great-grandchildren”. The chief warrior’s “house became council of chamber for the family friends and foe”.

The mood and tone of this praise poem denote the preparation of a military and warfare operations in indigenous or traditional African society in which praises were given to warriors to raise their morale and engage them in battles for the clan’s victory. The language of poetry in this context reveals itself to be a mean of arming people psychologically and boost their morale. Besides, another facet of praise poetry is that it can serves as a mean of motivation for higher productivity in economic context.

In indigenous African communities, the poetic language under the form of praise was used to motivate people to work harder and increase productivity in their community. This was common among people who engage in farming, fishing, or weaving. Praise were given to workers to help them perform activities efficiently without feeling tired. This aspect is noticeable in the poem that follows:

KAMPALA

I want to sing a song
For the LoverBoy who walked
The dawn across mountains
To harvest the Sun’s glory

I want to carve a poem
for the FisherMan who paddled
his hope against StormTime.
And caught the RainBow in his net.

I want to wail a song
For that orphanGirl who gathered
Her sorrows in her arms
And Danced her way through Storm
(K. Anyidoho, 2010, p.71)

In the poem above, one can notice that praise are given to three kind of people who have overcome some trials in order to gain their harvest abundant. The first stanza is about the “Lover Boy” who is praised for having challenged the hardship of farming. The poet praises

him in these words “I want to sing a song for the loverBoy who walked the dawn across mountains to harvest the Sun’s glory”. By these verses we can see that the boy is not as lazy as some in his area but he is a hard worker who through his hardworking happened “to harvest the sun’glory”. “The harvest of sunglory” is the metaphor of the hard work which brings about success. Besides the poet persona mentions another hard worker. In second stanza, he is praising the fisherman in this eulogy: “I want to carve a poem for the FisherMan who paddled /his hope against StormTime. And caught the RainBow in his net.” Here the fisherman is praised for having challenged the storm time which could have caused troubles even death. In return, he happened to “catch the rainbow in his net”, food that is substantial for the family survival. For his bravura he is receiving praises from the bard. The third person being praised is the “OrphanGirl” who did not surrender to despair by the loss of her parents supposed to be her providers. But the poet persona is impressed by her courage when he sees her working hard to challenge the “storm”. That is why he “wants to wail a song for that orphanGirl who gathered her sorrows in her arms And Danced her way through Storm”. This poem illustrates perfectly how the language of poetry can also contribute to high productivity in economic context. In addition to this language function of poetry, it can serve as a mean for moral education.

In traditional African society, praise poetry under dramatic performance through dance and music during ceremonies were used to transmit the cultural and moral values of the society to the younger generation. This enables them learn and change from bad ways and live upright life. For example, in the Ewe society of Ghana, a virgin girl is praised for her virginity. The virgin girls can receive praises during the celebration of her marriage. She can receive praises either by the members of her family to signify the integrity and the good education they have given to their daughter or the family in law to show that they are happy to receive the girl as their daughter in law.

Sometimes praise could be given to a young man during or after some ritual of initiation to exalt his manhood or the fact he transcended his adolescence without disgracing a girl. Praise poetry could be given to a boy or a girl in this sense. To better illustrate this standpoint, the following poem is quite demonstrative:

Nana Akua:
Yesterday you were eighteen.
Tomorrow you’ll be nineteen.
Once you were young and small and girl.
Today you are grown and tall and woman.
There is no birthday card wise



Enough to express what joys
What hopes & deep worries
A parent holds for a child now hold
Enough to be parent in her turn.
Always there are things in our past
We pray our children may not have to know
And in their turn must plead with life
To be kinder with their children dreams.
(K. Anyidoho, 2002, p.99)

This praise poem shows the happiness and joy of the poet persona. The poet assumes the position of a parent who is happy to see that his daughter has followed the education he prescribed to her. Now “Nana Akua” is grown up. She stayed virgin. During her adolescence she did not disgrace her parents. The poet in return is now praising her to having followed the rules of the education. The poet compliments the daughter in these terms “there is no birthday card to express what joys what hopes a parent holds for a child now old”. This happiness is reflected in metaphorical expressions in line 4 when the poet says: “there is no birthday card to express what joys what hopes a parent holds for a child now old”. In traditional African societies, honour and dignity were measured by the education parents could give to their offspring. And having sex before marriage for a young girl could be seen as a sign of not receiving good education. A point of honor was given to virginity. The girls who succeeded in preserving their virginity were given praises. It was an honor for their family. This is what the parents of “Nana Akua” in the poem above were doing. Nana Akua is considered as a heroine since she brought honor to the family and the whole community by staying virgin till marriage. As it can be seen, praise poetry in the context of education was done just to encourage the youth to get tight to the social values. And this art was performed during ceremonies such marriage, initiation.

It emerges from this section that the language of poetry is potent in weaponizing and triggering resilience. It can serve as a mean of psychological booster, providing motivation to take up challenges and hardships, and also it can be a mean of socialization and moral education.

2. The Healing Functions of Poetic Language.

When a medical doctor is treating a wound, he first of all uncovers it by removing the scabs and everything that is likely to infect and compromise its healing process. In the same way the poet uses the poetic language in a subtle and evocative style to denounce the defects and wounds of society and provides answers and solutions to free the society from its filth and lethargy. In many sections of Anyidoho’s poetry, African society is painted as an ill



society that needs to be healed. The poet Kofi Anyidoho in the posture of denunciation is using another facet of the poetic language that is song of abuse as a suitable medium, to distil the presentation and portrayal of some social malaises undermining African society. The poet in this linguistic disposition attempts to criticize social ills. In an indigenous aesthetics, the aspect of the poetic language evokes an inimitable sense of humour which endears these poems to the readers.

In this regard, the selected poems in this paper are crowded with anecdotes, the effusive use of humour, suspense and curiosity in order to criticize certain aspects of the social ills plaguing African society. As representatively exemplified in the selected poems, the language of poetry will essentially focus on the mediation of language of abuse for the impassioned criticism of social and moral vices, militating against African's socio-political development.

2-1 The Poetic Language as a Suitable Means of Denunciation

The language of poetry in this section is employed under the form of language of abuse. It is also referred to as “halo” poetry in an indigenous appellation from the Ewe people of Ghana. “Halo” poetry or “Song of Abuse” according to Daniel Avorgbedor is Ewe indigenous art that consisted in putting slanders or insults at the occasions of specific clan meetings (D. Avorgbedor, 1994, p.83). But Kofi Anyidoho raises other functions of the language of abuse by mentioning that:

Halo poetry goes back in time, being the poetic medium for satire and direct abuse. While the social code of the community forbids slanders and wanton abuse, the halo is the permitted slander, operative as a social sanction, and an avenue of dissipating animosity and other that may endanger group solidarity. (K. Anyidoho 1983, pp.17-29)

Thus, most of his poems are informed with some aspects of language of abuse deployed in various traditional stylistic devices such as caricature, irony, imagery, apostrophe, hyperbole, sarcasm, humour, and allegories. Also, the description of the complexity of life in contemporary Africa makes him resort to the language of abuse under some poetic forms such as proverbs, and anecdotes in order to satirize social vices in Africa. This is significantly demonstrated in “*Awoyo*”, a poem that utilizes the tradition of exchanging verbal insults in the Ewe cultural milieu:

Awoyo

...

The witch daughter with the face of an owl.
 Awoyo, come back here and
 I will sing to your shame.
 That night you went talking to
 Every stick and every little rope



Swearing you caught Abgenoxevi on top of me
 Doing some funny thing behind your smelly's mother's
 broken fence. ...
 The thing Agbenoxevi told you once
 At a gathering of the youth. He said
 He would not take a hundred of Awoyos .
 Not even for a gift. He said even
 If your mother gives you a ritual bath on Christmas day
 She covers up your nakedness in velvet robes even
 If she hangs diamond pearls about your stringy neck
 And gives you away with a live turkey and eggs and all
 He Agbenoxevi would send you back at noon
 To whenever you may have found your strange beauty.
 Today for me is like your yesterday.
 You spread rumors I have no womb for birth that
 At my age I must begin to think of grandchildren.
 Awoyo I am not the whore's daughter like you
 Your mother went from this village to that village
 Shitting babies all along her path across the clan.
 Did she ever suggest to you
 Who your papa could have been?
 They say the day she died the elders sighd
 And poured a long libation on her grave
 Praying her soul to come next time somewhat reformed

You witch daughter with face of an owl
 Come cross my path again
 I will spread your shame for you to crawl upon
 (K. Anyidoho, 1982, pp. 17-19)

In an introspective mood, and with a mocking tone the poem reveals serious insults that morally cannot be accepted in the society since they are immodest and shameless. The subject matter in the above poem is rivalry between two women over a man. They are sharing the same man who is "Agbenxovi". The rivalry between these women comes to permitted slanders that the poet persona has mentioned through those verses. Awoyo's rival puts serious insults to her with all kinds of exaggerations: "She shuffled away with a scowl on her evil face hoping she was smiling," / "The witch daughter with the face of an owl", / "your smelly mother's broken fence." She is publicly disgracing her rival, accusing her of having snatched her husband. Hyperbolically she puts serious insults and a sort of mockery to her in these terms: "Agbenoxevi would not take a hundred of Awoyos". / Not even for a gift." Even If [her] mother gives [her] a ritual bath on Christmas day, covers up [her] nakedness in velvet robes even If she hangs diamond pearls about [her] stringy neck and gives [her] away with a live turkey and eggs and all, Agbenoxevi would send [her] back at noon because what she calls beauty is "strange beauty" (K. Anyidoho, 1982, pp. 17-19). The poet persona has even



worsened her insults in her slander considering her rival's mother as prostitute out of common: "Your mother went from this village to that village shitting babies all along her path across the clan. / Did she ever suggest to you who your papa could have been? / They say the day she died the elders sighed and poured a long libation on her grave, praying her soul to come next time somewhat reformed. You witch daughter with face of an owl".

On the surface, the poet persona highlights a conflict experience to denounce some issues undermining African continent. Deeply the persona seems to use the conflict between these women to symbolically highlight the cultural conflict between his native (African) and foreign culture possibly westerns which is alien to them. This cultural conflict is manifest in some ills such as alienation and acculturation. The persona resorts to the device of contrast to raise this issue. The contrast lies in the standards and ideas with regard to the African cultures. The simplicity of African culture contrasts with the complexities of westerns. The complexity of western culture is depicted with the image of their beauty standards as we can read "She covers up your nakedness in velvet robes even /If she hangs diamond pearls about your stringy neck/ And gives you away with a live turkey and eggs and all/ To whenever you may have found your strange beauty". Besides these issues of culture raised by the poet persona, he also denounces some sexual immorality that is not acceptable in African society. Some sexual practices such as prostitution and indecency in clothing and irresponsible parenting are considered as social vices to be condemned. The poet persona will also resort to words of abuse to show the ugliness of these practices. One could read through the verses "Awoyo I am not the whore's daughter like you /Your mother went from this village to that village / Shitting babies all along her path across the clan. /Did she ever suggest to you/ Who your papa could have been?"

However, the reader can allusively understand the insults are so hurtful that the rivaling women cannot put any word forth. She is reduced to silence. This poem is a perfect illustration of permitted slanders. We understand that the poetic language under its aspect of language of abuse play the function of satirical attack to sanction social vices.

The poetic language of abuse is employed to discourage certain irresponsible behaviour. It carries words of moral and societal values that have positive influence on people. The poet therefore uses words of abuse to rebuke the bad practices in contemporary African society and minimize social vices. The poetic language in this sense is set to be a potent tool of denunciation. Even if the language of poetry can be used for salutary hurt, it also has another facet of healing.

2-2. Healing Social Wounds.

One of Freud's greatest contributions to psychology was "talk therapy", the notion that is simply talking about problems which can help alleviate them. Freud concept of the pleasure principle offers clarity on how to repair fragmented societies in the aftermath of destructive populism. (Freud 1963,p.17). The language of poetry reveals itself to be the suitable mean to fulfill this function. Not only can it be a language of enchantment to alleviate the social pain, but also to trigger the society healing. And an overall inspection of Anyidoho's poem gives to see that he is interested in the whole Africa in all its state components and preoccupied by the problem each is going through. One can read through these verses:

I want to sing a PraiseSong
For TheLand

I must sing a praiseSong
For our people

....

I must remind our people
Of our many many failures
... pain to measures blunders by
(K. Anyidoho 2002, p.52)

These aforementioned verses have a repetitive alternation in the poem. And the repetition devices in the poem underscore the poet persona's wishes. The poet wishes to see African society reborn from the ashes of division and fratricidal wars. He therefore resorts to one of the cathartic functions of poetic language that is praise. He announces in these terms "I want to sing a PraiseSong for TheLand". With this specificity of poetic language, he not only wants to heal the wounds and the resentments of the painful events experienced by the individuals, but also versifies a language of union and fraternity to bring his peers to unity and social cohesion. In some of the poems, he mentions Africa explicitly by even citing its countries, while in others, he alludes to Africa in the issues raised therein. He versifies Africa as a land riddled by both woes and good. For instance, the poem "**Children of The Land**" (K. Anyidoho 1992, pp. 32-47) is all about. The poem is written with unrhymed scheme and unbalanced stanzas and single and odd lines. The events in the poem are narrated in the first person's narrative. The poetic text is both is descriptive and reflective. It is descriptive in the sense that the poem describes African environment, issues events and things using words and expressions that paint vivid pictures or things and events. From an extract it reads:

...
From the mountain peak of Toubkal of the Atlas
We shout our joy across the space of sands...

All the way to Tahat in Ahaggar
 All the way to Tousside in Tibesti

...

From the Atlantic Coast to the Red sea
 From the ancient Straight Gibraltar

...

Along the seaboard of the Mediterranean
 All the way to Alexandria of our past and our future

(K. Anyidoho 1992, p.32-47).

The poem sounds descriptive, as if it is exalting Africa and its beautiful natural places. So, the poet uses a strong imagery to describe some African natural assets as heavenly places. He identifies one of the African natural places that is “Toubkal of the Atlas”. Mount Toubkal is the highest point in Morocco and the Atlas Mountains. And it is known to be an attractive place with its winter skiing and summer hiking. The poet seems to be proud of this natural beauty of Africa. He keeps on exploring other places that are “Tahat in Ahaggar” mountain in Algeria, “Tousside in Tibesti” a high mount located in Tchad. The poet also identifies Africa as a place of Joy where “We shout our joy across the space of sands”. The poet detects one of life’s important and indispensable resources that is “water”. The symbolic of water evoked in the poem posits Africa as a place of life. One can read these elements: “From the Atlantic Coast to the Red sea / from the ancient Straight Gibraltar / along the seaboard of the Mediterranean. He reckons that Africans should pride themselves with these natural resources and enjoyable places.

In a symbolic sense the poet encourages his people not to look down on themselves since they are in possession of the essence of life for their fulfilment. The poet persona continues by launching an appeal to African children for unity among themselves. The title of the poem reveals what may seem like a motto for call to unity: “Children of the land”. A thorough reading of the poem in its two sequences (version one and version two) gives insight of the issues the poet raises. The poet questions the social cleavage among Africans. In some instances, part of Africans hides behind religious, ethnic, geographical membership to destroy their fellows who don’t belong to their spheres. Thus, the poet calls African for unity, peace and social cohesion and urge them to religious tolerance and the abolition of racism.

The poet describes the people of Africa and the colour of their skin and also their geographical and cultural particularity. They all come from different background of Africa despite the culture and race, they are all “children of the land” that is Africa. One could have the following representation in the poem:

We are the children of the northern lands.

...
 From Nouakchott I am Mauritania
 From Aiun I am Saharui Arab Democratic
 From Rabat I am Morocco
 From Tunis I am Tunisia
 From Tripoli I am Libya
 And all the way from Caro of the pharaohs
 I am Egypt.
 We are children of the Northern Lands

.....
 We are children of the Eastern Lands

.....
 We are children of the western Lands

.....
 We are children of the central Lands

.....
 We are children of the southern Lands

.....
 We ALL are children of AFRICA!!!

(K. Anyidoho, 1992, pp. 32-42)

In these verses above the poet is describing people of Africa with their geographical area and race. He has mentioned all the five regions (northern, western, central, eastern, southern) of Africa with the fifty-four countries that make up the continent without omitting any. With a certain precision and imageries he is eulogising the potentiality of each part of the African continent. With the repetition device “we are children of the land”, the poet is proud of his origin. He ends up by exclaiming “We ALL are children of AFRICA!!!” This exclamation points out an important factor in the argument of the poet. The poet is advocating Africa unity.

He seeks to unify Africa and his children, not to bring about divisions by arguing over differentiation that cannot build up. All the regions, countries people, geographic places, natural and the poet mentions are found in Africa and all these things making Africa so colourful and a continent good to live in. The poet advises African people against racial discrimination, where the colour of people are used against them. But the poet shows how it matters for Africa to get united.

Conclusion

In evaluating the use of poetic language and its psycho-social function to articulate the social, cultural and political concerns in contemporary African, this paper has succinctly examined how Kofi Anyidoho uses the language of poetry as a therapeutic tool for psychological and social assistance. It then comes out of this analysis that language of poetry has a cathartic function to heal people from trauma and fear. The poetic language can be a

potent medium in weaponising people against social challenges and weird and bring them to be resilient to overcome all kind of turmoil betting them. The poetic language is also a potent medium to criticize social ills without hurting people feelings. In the selected poems, one could see that poetic language is expressed through the use proverbs, aphorism and irony which serve as indigenous poetic devices that are grounded in African oral arts and literature. The poet Anyidoho has demonstrated how the poetic language can also harness and model the elements of tradition, culture and social commitment by the means of language of abuse, to criticize the social ills in Africa. The poet has used the poetic language to create an awareness of the impact of social cleavage, racism, mismanagement to articulate abhorrence of the grinding poverty and unemployment in contemporary Africa. In sum, the language of poetry has a healing function to voice rebirth out of death, weaponise and trigger resilience, then also it is a potent medium of denunciation and healing social ills.

Bibliography

- Anyidoho Kofi, 1982, *A Harvest of Our Dreams*, Accra, woeli publishing Services.
- _____, 1985, *Earthchild & Brain Surgery*, Accra, Woeli Publishing Services.
- _____, 1992, *Ancestral Logic and Caribbean Blues*, New Jersey, Africa World Press.
- _____, 2002, *Praise Song for the Land: Poems of Hope & Love & Care*, Legon Accra, Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- _____, 2011, *The Place We Call Home and Other Poems*, United Kingdom: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Limited.
- Avorgbedor Daniel, 1983, "The Psycho-Social Dynamics of Anlo-Ewe Names: The Case of the Ahanonko." *Folklore Forum*, N°16, pp.21-43.
- Cuddon John Anthony, 1977, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and literary theory*, Great Britain, Penguin Books.
- Ngara Emmanuel, 1982, *Stylistic Criticism and the African novel*, Nairobi, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Noam Chomsky, 1986, *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use*, Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Rethalies P. Mogoera, 2020, "poetry heals wounds" *news.uct.ac.za/article* pp.2-19.
- Robert Frost, 1966, *Education by Poetry*, Hyde Cox and Lathem, New York.



Roman Jakobson, 1979, *The Sound Shape of Language*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press and London, Harvester Press.

Saunders Thomas, 1987, *Early Socratic Dialogues*, Penguin Classics.
The King James Version of the Bible. E-book edition, Project Gutenberg, 2011.

Simone De Beauvoir, 1958, *The second Sex*, Vintage book New York.

Sigmund Freud, 1963, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Pocket Books, United of America.

Wilkinson Jane, 1992, "Interview with Kofi Anyidoho," *Talking with African Writers*, London: James Currey, pp.7-16.