

# **ANCIENT GHOST IN MODERN MASK: NEW MATTERS ARISING FROM OKOT p'BTEK'S *TWO SONGS* ON A SOCIO-LINGUISTIC EXPLORATION OF NEO-COLONIAL AFRICA**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper, Ancient Ghost in Modern Mask: New Matters Arising from Okot P'btek's Two Songs on a Socio-Linguistic Exploration of Neo-Colonialist Africa attempts a study of Okot p'Bitek's Two Songs, by looking at the form, purpose and poetic style of the writer. The poet has in this work employs the stand of the traditional bard, which is the agent of his society in the preservation of the mores of the society. He has in his poetry which is basically a satire entertains and comments on the weaknesses of the society, which he is writing about. His vision of a perfect society is that which caters for all members of the society; where the wealth is shared to all and life is made livable through sincerity show humanity by all in the life of the ordinary citizen represented in Two Songs by the vagrant prisoner. The theoretical Frameworks deployed for this study are the theories of Post-colonialism and Oral tradition whose transmission is through speech or song and may include folktales, ballads, chants, prose or verses where knowledge inherent in it is orally transmitted and thus, preserved in human history.. Through humour and pathos, he is able to show the life in the society almost objectively. The paper also comments on the situation in South Africa where apartheid is disorganizing every move by the Black towards oneness. Through his authorial empathy, p'Bitek is able to make the fictional characters, to represent the various categories of people in the society and has also greatly explored their psyche.*

**Keywords:** Ancient Ghost, Modern Mask, *Two Songs*, New Matters Arising, Socio-Linguistics Exploration and Neo-Colonial Africa.

## **Introduction**

The publication of Song of Lawino in 1966 brought Okot p'Bitek into the lime-light of African Literature and thus brought to an end the literary drought which had persisted for a long time and nearly cost the cultural, political, economic, social and historical identities of the people of East Africa. This particular work became a spur in the literary circle and actually influenced the writings of such writers as Ukello Oculi and Joseph Buruga. It was a literary experiment which actually succeeded. He has since published Song of O'ocol and Two Songs. The success of Song of Lawino seemed to have beclouded the subsequent publications of O. p'Bitek as a master Craftman in the literary world. While Song of Lawino is mainly concerned with the destruction of the traditional institutions in Acoliland, a plea for preservation of some of these institutions by naïve Lawino, the fictitious characters-three in 'Song of Prisoner' which is the first part of the work. Although p'Bitek models the work by greatly applying the traditional poetic form and style, what he actually writes about is very modern. He centres this work on the traditional past but uses the present day Acoliland for the time and place of this work.

It is the awareness of the background to a large extent, by the reading audience that makes the work realistically relevant and also fulfilling the purpose of satire in general, coupled with the utilitarian nature of traditional creative art. Whereas Song of Lawino lampoons the emergence of Western class structure in Acoliland, and the emergence of the political parties', Two songs on the other hand is concerned with the effects of these parties in Acoliland. It emphasizes how the emergent Black leaders toyed with the political power and destiny of their country (Acoliland) through the support of the masses from the colonial powers.

## **Post Colonialism as a Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Postcolonialism as its theoretical framework. It is an academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of the colonized people and their lands. On a deeper level, postcolonialism examines the social and political power relationships that sustain

colonialism and neo-colonialism, including the social, political and cultural narratives surrounding the colonizer and the colonized. This is what is realistically portrayed in Okot p'Bitek's preoccupation in his *Song of Lawino* and *Two Songs*, which this study explores.

### **The Thematic Concerns, the Various Literary and Poetic Devices Employed by the Poet.**

O. p'Bitek's thematic concerns in *Two songs* are in neo-colonialism in Africa, economic forces, the concept of family, societies' expression of contempt or disillusionment for prostitution as social deviant, societies' need for prostitutes and the exploitation of man by man within the society. This paper therefore, aims at showing that Okot p'Bitek borrowed a lot of materials from the oral tradition of his people to write the *Two songs*. He also borrowed the traditional form and style in his writing but he brings into the poetry, modern experiences that have influenced his society due to urbanization, technology and western education. Satire is known to have existed in Acoliland's oral literature. Satiric verses are also known to exist in Acoliland's poetry, and so, the poetry in this case, is traditional, coloured by contemporary experiences. This study accepts the poetry, of the *Two songs* as traditional poetry, seasoned with modern experiences. The ghosts are ancient but they are dressed and decorated in a contemporary costumes and masks.

Okot p'Bitek adopted a good portion of materials with which he writes '*Song of Prisoner*' from the oral tradition of his people. The traditional poetic style and sensibility are also drawn and merged together while presenting these materials in his poetry. He successfully tinted the borrowed materials with contemporary experiences of the people in politics, education and technology to make his vision of the society more modern. The elements of the work had been so organized that the effect in its entirety is traditional. P'Bitek's *Horn of Love* provides a clue to the sources of most of the materials that feature in the poet's poems. Writing about the Orak dance he says:

*"The poet is the agent of his society. He has the talent which other members of his social group may not possess, of distilling the thoughts, joy, fears, anger and sorrow, not only of the individual but also of the group, and presenting these in*

*melodic poems, composed with the rhythm of Orak dance at the back of the poet's mind". (Okot p'Bitek, 19).*

This is exactly what p'Bitek has done in Two songs. In 'Song of Prisoner', he presents the anguish in the minds of three members of the society and in 'Song of Malaya' he writes about the anger and sorrow of the prostitute, a castigated member of the society. The content of the work is basically satirical. He organizes it in verse form greatly drawn from traditional literature. The verses are presented in units of thought that give readily a clear picture of the personae's minds while the poet does not lose sight of his high thematic concern. It is clear therefore, that this episodic nature of the verse is a direct borrowing from the traditional poetic craft.

### **The Use of Episodes**

The episodic nature of this work allows the traditional bard the choice of selecting the particular aspect he wants to enact in a story. The first episode in 'Song of Prisoner' is made up of 26 lines. Here, the poet tells us where the prisoner is. This is followed by the Judge's question, "Do you plead guilty or not guilty? (Song of Prisoner P.12) The Judge's question leaves the poet enough respite to select another episode to narrate after showing that the prisoner is in a bare room with only an electric bulb shining to his discomfort. The use of traditional rites in poetry shows that it is not removed from the tradition of the people. Writing about Acoli dirges that attack the dead, p'Bitek says:

*"The body of the dead is always with great respect and fear, and the burial rites are conducted with dignity and restraint. But in this group of songs, the Acoli turn upon the dead with a viciousness which is not easy to explain". (Okot p'Bitek, 19.....)*

This is featured in 'Song of Prisoner' where the Prisoner addresses his dead father:

*Listen  
You fool  
When I get out  
Of this hell  
I will exhume your bones*

*And hang you  
By the neck (Song of Prisoner) P. 38.*

### **The Use of Apostrophe**

The poet uses **apostrophe** to make the action seem real and with it, he creates an audience for the personae. The speech by the person above falls within the framework of satirical verses which attacks the Acoli, while the Malaya uses the husband she shares. Like the traditional bard, p'Bitek uses humour to make the narration interesting. Isidore Okpe-who says of traditional bard:

*“..... The oral artist is sufficiently Aware of his duty to make an impression and so once In a while, spices u his account with a few affecting Details ...But on the whole, the humour is down- to- earth, crude carefully aimed at the raw passions of the crowd, and often delivered with sensuality or roguish mischief”. (Okpewho, 19...)*

**The language** in Two songs is unabashed and in some places the sensual touch is very conspicuous:

*My bed yells  
In rhythm  
Woman giggles  
And shrieks  
In sweet agony (Song of Prisoner) p. 44.*

*Or                    the soft drumming o the  
Dancing mattress,  
The bedstead gritting  
Her teeth (Song of Malaya) p.177.*

The duet..... (Song of Malaya pg.177) with the use of traditional rites, apostrophe, use of oblique respectful titles, use of mocking attacks, humour, episode verses and a sensual language one can rightly say that Okot p,Bitek adopted the traditional verse form in writing Two Songs. The

structure of thought in the work is pursued to show us at the end of the poem a picture of each personae although not all of them come out very clearly like the Malaya or the vagrant prisoner. The poem opens with the vagrant thrown into prison. The deprivations and pains he suffers are conveyed to the reader through the fiction of the poem. The prisoner tells us about his poor background the 'dark silence' of the prison, the hunger that his family suffers and police brutality. The Minister also hints at his past, the assassin reveals why he is in jail and the Malaya narrates her experiences with different members of the society. Through them a picture of the society is conveyed to the reader. Through them, a picture of the society is drawn and the political and social atmosphere of the society is conveyed to the reader. Each episode in the poem brings the picture of the society nearer.

Through the three characters in 'Song of Prisoner' – the loiterer, the assassin and the minister, we can visualize a society where social gap has been drawn and the political and social atmosphere of the society is conveyed to the reader. Each episode in the poem brings the picture of the society nearer. Through the three characters in 'Song of Prisoner' – the loiterer, the assassin and the minister, we visualize a society where those in power feed well and the masses starve. Where the chief's dog eats and grows fat while the tax payer cannot afford a square meal for his family.

**Two Songs** shows *a rhythm* which is controlled by the state of mind of the personae conveyed to us by the poet. Since the fiction of the poem comes to being as a result of the state of mind of the various personae, the language used hurls out both anger and revulsion. The words used are harsh where the anger of the personae mounts. This mood is sustained throughout the poem. When the prisoner remembers his wife and what the big Chief could be doing to her, his anger mounts:

*I plead  
Guilty  
To hatred  
My anger explodes  
Like grenade  
And destroys like a hurricane  
My jealousy is darker*

*Than the coming storm  
And madder than thunder. (Two Songs P. 45)*

He wants his hands and feet freed so that he can attack the ‘thief’. The words: hatred explodes, grenade, destroys, hurricane, storm, madder and thunder, all connote violence. At such points, the rhythm of the poem is fast and the lines get hurricane, storm and thunder carry implications of sounds that suggest anger and destruction. In the above passage the persona’s mind is in a chaotic storm exploding like grenade and thunder.

**The rhythm** is fast in order to keep pace with the harshness of diction which blends with the satiric content and helps to bring out the total effect of this work as a protest poetry par-excellence. Okot p.Bitek applies the thematic code judiciously by regulating the readers’ degree of imagination while visualizing the poetic personae’ where the anger subsides, the rhythm of the poem slows down:

*“Wife  
Wife  
Are you asleep already?  
Is my son kissing your teats  
In his sleep?  
Sleep peacefully, my love  
Dream about .....” (Song of Prisoner) p.58*

**The repetition** of the word ‘wife’ shows that the woman is already asleep. The line is slim- just one word. The geographical set up of the verse suggests quietude and peace. The use of the words ‘kissing’ ‘sleep’, ‘peacefully’, and ‘dream’ conjure an atmosphere of serenity. The word ‘teats’ denotes the nipples of the breast. It connotes tenderness, peace and happiness. The use soft /e/ vowel sound dominates the verse and epitomizes tranquility and safety.

Words are arranged in a way to bring out meanings and geared toward total effect realization in the poem. The climatic arrangement of word which full the poetry is spectacular:

*Listen to the drizzles  
Dancing lightly*

*On the leaf of the  
Olam trees  
Do you hear  
The faint rhythms  
Of their feet  
And of the drums?  
Listen to their  
Mocking Songs  
Accompanied by the haughty horns  
Of my brothers' jeers' (Song of Prisoner) PP 29-30*

**The music** suggesting words in this verse are arranged to produce a climatic effect. The poet arranges drizzles, rhythm, drums, Songs, horns and jeers in their climatic order carrying implications of sound. All the words except 'Song' contain the liquid /r/ which is articulated with no friction. This authenticates the meditative mood of the poetic personae. In the same vein, the Malaya questions the Big Chief:

*Why do you look at me  
As if I were a bunch  
Of hornets  
Why do you hiss  
Like a frightened Cobra  
And bark at me  
As if I were  
A thief (Song of Malaya) P.135*

The words: 'look', 'hiss' and 'Bark' are arranged in climatic order. So also are 'hornets', 'Cobra' and 'thief'. The sting of a hornet, is a little matter compared with the bite of a cobra, the thief can kill. The words suggest different forms of misfortune that can befall man but they are arranged in order of seriousness. This climate arrangement is placed strategically to give the poem a compact organization. It is placed just before the Malaya begins a quarrel with the Big Chiefs at this point, she will not be able to give vent to her anger. Its placement at that point gives the poem a firm

structure of thought carefully laid on a solid foundation which holds the work and other poetic devices together.

*The language* is full of figures of speech taken from the immediate environment. It is in the use of imagery that the poet has been able to unite traditional environment with images of modern experiences in an irrevocable wedlock which undoubtedly places the poem on a contemporary footing. It is the use of these images that helped Okot. p'Bitek to dress the ancient ghosts in modern masks:

*Listen to the ocean liner*

*Crying in labour pain*

*As she approaches the harbor (Two Songs) P.153.*

*The personification* of the ocean liner is the first thing that arrests the reader's attention. This figure of speech is hereby used by Malaya to show her state of mind. First, among the Cargoes of the ocean liner are her possible customers. The sound of the ship's movement is the labour cry. It also presents to the reader one source of Malaya's customers whom she regards as 'Maggots/Limping from the wounds/ of loneliness. The 2<sup>nd</sup> line in the above quotation ends with 'Labour pain'. What better comparison could the Malaya find when her profession entails her putting to bed? The draw-able inference, by my reckoning, is that a woman in labour pain delivers a baby as the ship delivers her cargo of lonely passengers down harbour.

The use of *imagery* by the poet is heightened here. Through the Malaya, the poet is able to create an inter-relationship between the ship sailing towards the harbour and a woman in labour pain. The image so created is derived from the poet's daily consciousness and that of his poetic personae (Malaya). These images come from the sight, and emotions plainly exhibit in a society that forms the setting of the poem. The political struggles between the parties is also captured and presented by the prisoner in the metaphor of the two bulls:

*"Two bulls wrestle*

*With their horns*

*The horn of the ruling bull breaks*

*And tumbles down*

*The smooth breast*

*Of the hill*

*And plunges into the river” (Song of Prisoner) PP. 70 -71*

**Metaphorically**, the image in the breaking of the horn is the defeat the party suffered in the elections. The election itself and the campaign before it, **is captured in this metaphor** by the word “Wrestle”. The broken horn rolls down the smooth breast of the earth. The smooth breast of the earth connotes the pleasures that go with political victory by the winning party or power. The plunging of the horn into the river has its interpretation in the present fate of the Minister now in jail. Just as the bull will not think of leaving the grazing land to the river, the Minister wouldn't have thought of exchanging his comfortable home or office which is described in words that connote comfort for the jail room and the chain around his feet. It is only in this personae in “Song of Prisoner”. Minister here re-presents the His question to the police:

*“Where is your nationalism*

*Where is your patriotism*

*Where is your love*

*For the “motherland” (Song of Prisoner, P. 75)*

These interrogations are remnants of clichés of his campaign vocabulary or slogan. The images are compact and encapsulate the turmoil in the setting of the Poem.

**The Irony** in “Love for the motherland” is quite glaring because the minister himself doesn't love his motherland. The words: nationalism, patriotism, and love are the attributes that should be found in the Minister but apparently, it is his failure to possess them that accounts for his detention. The Malaya in the other land is portrayed through flower images ironically:

*“I am an open Pollock blossom.*

*Bees, butter files, moths.....*

*Visit me by day and by night*

*Except when the moon*

*Has appeared, and the dam*

*Of the Red River is broken*

*Or when my cave  
Is celebrating the visit  
Of a newcomer” (Two Song) P. 150*

**The flower image** is the only way the Malaya looks at herself. The visit of men (butterflies, moths, bees) which will result in her cave celebrating the visit of newcomer is conveyed by the picture of the insects pollinating the flower.

**The euphemism** concerning the “broken dam, “Red River”, and the “Moon informs the reader about the menstrual cycle of the woman while “my cave” is a euphemism for the womb, where fertilized egg is sheltered and nurtured. All these are conveyed through images that are compact and connotative.

In order to reach out to the satiric butts effectively, the poet exploits his poetic license for a safe landing. Besides, there exist also linguistic and semantic violations of English Language which enable the poet to bring to the readers the impressions he wants to create in their minds. This is achieved when the poet uses a human being as the object of the verb ‘dancing’ in:

*“Big Chief  
Is dancing my wife*

*And cracking  
My sacred rook” (Two Songs) P.44*

The reader understands that he is utilizing his unchallengeable poetic prepotencies to apply **the euphemism** in expressing the ungodly or unholy affair between the Chief and his wife. The first line of that verse is not even an English expression but it is understood by Acoli reader or in fact an African reader to mean a ‘respectable person’ or a man in authority. The use of ‘wound’ as a violation of syntax: “let me dance to the cutting throbs /Of your wounded song”

With a careful organization of rhythm, arrangement of words that bring about a particular order, a compactness of thought, language rich in figures of speech that carry images which are inter-related, p, Bitek has achieved in verse, satiric eloquence that has wadded both traditional and

modern poetry that will pleased the traditional bard and surprise the modern poet due to the smoothness of the line of grafting.

A discussion of traditional poetry will not be complete if it is not mentioned that the traditional bard:

*"Has always functioned in the society (Africa) as the voice of vision in his own time". (Soyinka, 19...:..)*

Also considering the role of a writer to his society, Ogunbesan has this to say:

*...The modern African writer is a member of society and his sensibility is conditioned by the social and political happening around him". (1978)*

This makes it difficult for the problematic human conditions of his times not to feature in his writing. The mood of the times must certainly be captured by the writer in his work if his creative work must be relevant to the society and time.

Under this background therefore, a writer who adopts the traditional form to write, must also undoubtedly play the role of the traditional creative artist. The relevant artist will not only put down those problems of his society which in turn represent historical facts but also provide a vision for his society. These facts and vision will be shaped by the artist's aesthetic vision for his society, but before he achieves any essence, his focus must be on the immediate society peopled by men who are grappling with these realities of human situation.

The purpose of a writer's satirical inclination is to effect reforms in a society as well as appealing or implicitly to virtue and rational behaviour and some times that which is universally held as principle of civilized conduct. The relevance of a satirist in a society is that he exploits a contemporary issue affecting the society to write about. The success of the satire will however depend on the satirist's use of language and his ability to hold the particular foible to ridicule, using every language.

O. p'Bitek's writing of *Two Songs* is not merely to satisfy some aesthetic cravings or intellectual appeal, it is a purposeful affair that has to do with the artist's commitment to the betterment of life in his society. In 'Song of Prisoner', there is a call for social and political justice while in

‘Song of Malaya’, the sense of guilt and shame inherent in human nature is given an intense exploration. The poet of Two Songs appeals to our sense of sound, sight, colour, smell and touch in order to achieve the purpose of his poetry. He appeals to the emotion of love, fear and hate to bring the satire near to the people. His purpose is to correct, establish a new order and so he focuses on the evil of the society, to mock the society with a bit of changing it. This is achieved in various ways in the poem. The poet compares the Chief’s dog:

*“Listen to the Chief’s dog  
Barking like a volcano  
Listen to the echoes  
Playing on the hillside  
How many pounds  
Of meat  
Does his dog eat  
In a day  
How many milk? “(Two Songs) P. 22  
With the prisoner’s children:  
“Have you seen  
The mosquito – legs  
Of my children?  
A witch  
Has sprayed yellow paint  
On their heads” (Two Songs) P.22*

The social injustice in the society is captured in **this comparison**. The Chief’s dog eats meat and drinks milk whereas the prisoner’s children may whine like tiny mosquito. The Chief acquires this dog because he knows there is injustice in his society. There is a wide gap between ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ The ferocious dog is the Chief’s security against the society’s call for social justice and non-perpetration of exploitation of man by man. His alienation from his people and society makes him feels insecure. Police brutality is conveyed through the image of the animal that trickles our emotion of fear:

*“Ten uniform stones  
Breaking into my tiny hell  
Elephants trumpet  
Rhinos scream  
The earth shakes her belly  
The walls jump  
And dance  
the stone floor  
Urinate  
Organism” (Two Songs) P.30*

The policemen are uniformed stones. If they were human, they will not have scrambled so much for the blood of a single man; neither would they have beaten him. They lack human feeling. Both rhinos and elephants (The policemen) want the blood of the prisoner. And after the stampede and brutality, the prisoner tells us:

*“There is a carpenter  
Inside my head  
He knocks nails  
Into my skull” (Two Songs) P.42*

He also tells us:

*“My penis  
Is an elephant's trunk  
Vomiting blood  
Like a woman  
In her moon” (Two Songs) P. 42*

After this brutality, what remains is only the wreck of the man. While he is being manhandled by the strong hands of the biased law', the 'Big Chief is dancing' his wife and 'cracking' his 'sacred rock' A combined force of the spirits and nature could not persuade the chief to avoid the social injustice and betrayal:

*The grasses on  
The path way  
Hiss in protest*

*..... the gods riddle the car  
With yellow arrows  
Of star light (Two Songs) P.44*

But in spite of all that he has suffered in detention, he is not yet tried. Social justice demands that “an accused person is innocent until tried and found guilty”. it is in the light of this that the prisoner appeals:

*“Your honour  
Why do they  
Punish me  
Before I plead  
Or am found  
Guilty” (Two Songs) P.16*

Although the Minister is ‘Shoeless’ ‘and his feet are swollen’ he wants to write with his golden pen and;

*“..... send a fat cheque  
To my mother  
And another fat cheque  
To my old father” (Two Songs, P.87)*

He does not forget the comfortable life he used to lead. Whereas he wants to write with his golden, letters to his children and send them money, he wants them to also ‘pass their examination. The vagrant prisoner’s children will never go to school:

*“The Schools dam bursts  
And floods of hungry children  
Melt into their mother’s bosoms  
My children are  
Not among them  
My children do  
Not go to School” (Two Songs) PP. 100-101*

It is in passages like the above with very fresh *imagery* that p’Bitek makes the greatest impact. He is able to compare the life of the Chief’s dog with

that of the vagrant prisoner's children. While the vagrant prisoner is lamenting about how his children are starving, the Minister wants to stay, in detention and 'send fat cheques' to his mother, father and children. His children are in school, but the children of the vagrant prisoner will never go to school. The reader's emotion of pity is drawn into the work. The helplessness of the political prisoner and of the future in the society where political power is greatly abused is responsible for the madness of the prisoner. He wants to drink and get drunk and forgets his present predicament and dance with other dancers of the world.

*"The writer as a human being  
Is himself a product of history  
Of time and place. As a member  
Of society, he belongs to certain  
Class and he is inevitably a  
Participant in the class struggle  
Of his time" 6*

This, by my reckoning, is the purpose of p'Bitek's writing, and he has achieved it by giving vision to his society through his poetry. He teaches and enlightens. He brings a sense of realism to bear on the work. He attempts identification with the familiar objects of the environment; this, then accounts for instances in the *The Songs*, in which familiar customs are featured prominently. This is the crucial point at which politics, private sensibility and feeling coincide with issues of public concern. This seems to be the reason that the poet shifts his focus on Acoliland on some places to take a look at some other places and makes his comments. Ironically, people are dying of starvation in Nigeria, but the food planes are exploding midair, while bombs scatter the heaps of yams in the market places:

*The ash of the food  
Falls gently on the heads  
Of starving children (Two Songs) P.114*

While the two sections of Nigeria are destroying each other with bayonets, the song of the patriots is:

*The only good black  
Is a dead one (Two Songs) P.144*

By looking at both the Nigeria crisis situation and the Congo crisis, p' Bitek has confirmed the observation of Ime Ikkideh: "In a general sense, every writer is a historian of his, time, the unconscious recorder of the events and the mood of his society". (Ikkideh, 1975)

From *The Songs*, one can see how the political power was used by the black leaders after Uhuru in Acoliland. It is the vagrant prisoner in a moment of sober contemplation that discovers that:

*".....the cancer  
Or Uhuru (is)  
Far worse than  
The yaws of  
Colonialism (Two Songs) P. 50*

Through the use of *humour* such as this, the police are not left from the play of

injustice:

*You deaf brother  
Standing there with a club  
In your hand  
Can you not read  
My sign language (Two Songs) P. 107*

And the anger:  
*Cover me with the bile  
From your heart  
Pump it with your  
Your lungs  
I want to bath in it  
And mix with mine (Two Songs) p. 116*

The poet successfully comments on events in his society and directs his attacks on the weakness of the society, social injustice, political

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victimization, police brutality and exploitation in the society form the main concern of the poet, and these are the social problems explored by Okot p'Bitek.

### **The Use of Language in the Poem**

A study of Okot p'Bitek style reveals that he adapts his language to ideas. The traditional bard had no problem with the language used because he communicated to the audience in the common language of the community. The language was meaningful, but O. P'Bitek's writing in English needed to use the English in such a way that it will express his ideas and mind's intent. The idea was being needed to express his feelings of contempt for naked power used nakedly by man, against man. Unlike Song of Lawino, where naive Lawino pleads for the preservation of the traditional mode of life, the transformation in the society has advanced beyond Lawino's traditional level. The modern state has been created after the fight for Uhuru that was hinted at in the Song of Lawino.

The land is now governed by black leaders but nothing seems to come out of the sweat and blood that the people shed in the fight for Uhuru. There are no jobs and so hunger is the rule of the day. This transformation in the life of the society comes across the language of the poem, because there is a marriage between the traditional concepts, western education and technology which represent modernity. Since the bard's competence was measured by his ability to create fresh images from local materials, P, Bitek has successfully established or created something new from the experience of his society. Through the establishment of complete rapport with his materials, he has created new poetic image. He has extended the frontiers of traditionally poetic techniques and style to accommodate the new experience of Acoliland. Although he writes in English, his diction is very simple. He uses the language of common speech but employs the exact words in whatever he wants to say:

*But your father*

*Had six wives*

*Your mother*

*Was not one of them*

*Was she? (Two Songs) P.161*

But there are also places where the use of words contributes to the density of the imagery used in the poem:

*And my grandfather  
Will he burn  
In the fire below  
For living ten women? (Two songs) P.163*

The word 'fire,' used in the above quotation alludes to the Biblical hell-fire. It also shows the Malaya's total disbelief of the Christian monogamy practices, for this goes against her profession. The use of the word "yell" in the quotation below holds suggestive

*Nuances of meaning:  
My bed yells  
In rhythm  
Woman giggles  
And shrieks  
In sweet agony (Two Songs) P.44*

The word 'yell' in the first instant personifies bed, but on another level it connotes protest. It protests against what the 'Big' Chief' is doing with the prisoner's wife. It conveys the atmosphere of social injustice which is the poet's thematic concern. Words are also used to match the mood and rhythm of the poem in places such as:

*Her fist clenched  
Tears stream down her checks  
She is stamping the wooden floor  
And banging the table  
Like a mad thing (Two Songs) P.149*

The words, clenched, stamping and banging help reinforce the atmosphere around the home where the woman is. The relationship between these

words and 'mad' in the last line shows that the poet is careful in the use of words. The woman first bites her lips, clenches her fists, stamps the floor and bangs on the table. She is mad with anger. This shows that the words are used to create new rhythm as a result of change in mood.

In this use of *imagery*, O. p'Bitek has brought freshness into the employment of traditional images in writing. The poet has successfully through his use of images made the work relevant and has established its time and place. The physical world presented is a familiar one but the images are fresh and shocking in their novelty:

*The giant firefly*

*On the high ceiling*

*Rain fiery hailstones*

*Into my closed eyes.....(Two Songs) P.12*

At first reading it will be difficult to believe that a firefly can be so gigantic that it will rain 'hailstones' into somebody's eyes. Again, fireflies do not produce hailstones. A careful study shows that 'firefly' is a symbol representing electricity. The electric bulb is likened to firefly because it has light just like the firefly. The bright electric lights pierce through the prisoner's eyes and deprive him of sleep. It makes him shade his open during a rain storm.

The rays of light pierce his eyes like the pellets of ice blocks during a hailstone storm. The vagrant prisoner compares what his audiences are not familiar with what they know. The firefly metaphor in relation to electricity is very apt. When the Malaya castigates the 'Big Chief', he uses images that are familiar:

*Why do you look at me*

*As if I were a bunch*

*Of hornets*

*Why do you frightened Cobra*

*And bark at me*

*As if I were*

*A thief. (Two Songs) P.P135-136*

The atmosphere created is that of a traditional society with ‘hornets’ and ‘snakes’ still making a common sight. In a community where thief’s break into people’s houses and granaries, dogs have always proved useful at patrols. The picture shows us the Chief’s discomfort compared with what a man suffers if a ‘hornet’ is flying around. From the insects, it goes higher into the world where the ‘Cobra’ in all its fearsomeness is pictured and finally the ‘thief’.

Paradoxically, the Malaya is both a ‘hornet’ and a Cobra’. She is a ‘thief’ of another woman’s husband associating this picture with her stings and bites like the ‘hornet and Cobra’. The Irony and paradox intensify the fact that she is as guilty as the other creatures she has mentioned. The poet also takes the trouble to arrange the animals in ascending order of the evolutionary tree. The climatic arrangement of the animals is very typical of O. p’Bitek.

First, comes the insect, then the reptile and mammal. The seriousness of injuries inflicted escalated as one moves from the insect to the animal. The simile “like a frightened cobra”, presents the reader with the feelings the society has for the prostitute. She is castigated and ostracized like a thief. She is as friendless as the Cobra. The poet gives us a minuscule spotlight of the society that tells us so much in very few words.

This also affords the Malaya the opportunity to comment on the society’s moral claims. The chief is pretentious because the Malaya tells him openly that he is one of her regular customers. This is a society built on lies and pretentious foundation, a land where “the sharks of Uhuru devour their own children”.

The Prisoner remembers his children as he sits on the cool jail floor:

*“The School dam bursts  
And floods of hungry children  
Melt into their mother’s bosoms  
My children are  
Not among them  
My children do  
Not go to School  
My children will  
Never go to School (Two Songs) P.101*

**The metaphor** of the 'School dam' is supposed to convey to the reader the enmity of the number of children who go to School. The picture thereafter draws on reader's emotion of pity to discover that in a society where every child of School age is enrolled in School, it is only the prisoner's children who are not there. The situation is not only helpless but also hopeless because the children do not go to school now and will not do so in the near future. But beside the other personae in *Two Songs*, the prisoner deserves pity because he is the only person who has not exploited the society.

*The Malaya says:  
My children are healthy  
And Happy  
They do not go about  
In tattered clothes" (Two Songs) P. 180*

And on page 171, the Malaya holds a monologue with his son returning from School and uses that opportunity to vilify the society and Christianity that does not permit polygamy.

The society's lack of sense of direction is brought to the fore through the image of the candle going out:

*"Wake up  
You pressmen of the world,  
I want to speak to you  
For the candle  
Of Uhuru  
Has been blown out  
What is Uhuru  
When all my thoughts  
Are deep and silent rivers  
Blocked up by concrete walls  
Of fear and black suspicions (Two Songs) P.90.*

For the first time, the Minister is confronted with the falsehood he has been planting as an office holder in government. Now in detention, he cannot speak or make policies as he used to do. He now sees clearly that there is no sense of direction in the society.

This is clearly understood by *the image of candle of Uhuru being 'blown out'*. The Minister was not a light; otherwise, he would not have been in jail. This is a hopeless situation where the masses cannot voice their feelings which accumulate as a dammed river: "...silent rivers/blocked up by the concrete wall". Ironically, the same fear and suspicions that prayers of tax and vagrant like the prisoner used to suffer is what the Minister is passing through. The picture of the river blocked by concrete walls, submerging everything in it, gives a vivid picture of a society without social or political justice. O. p'Bitek also *relies on hyperbole* to paint a picture of the society. Most of the imageries consists of animal and plant images from the immediate society the poet is writing about. Relevance is achieved by the relation of these images to the modern realities and experience of the society.

With the use of *repetition*, the poet of Two Songs lays emphasis on certain aspects of his thoughts that he wants to acquaint the readers with. This alone adds force and clarity to the thoughts and further persuades the readers to accept his (poet's) views or read the lines again. Some repetitions come in the form of rhymes which are very few in Two Songs while others come as parallelism:

*"Open the door  
I want to go home  
I want to be with my children  
I want to talk with my wife" (Two Songs) P.76*

The use of the *parallelism* here emphasizes the Minister's urgent need for freedom. It implicitly underscores the societies' need for social and political justice which are mostly the poet's thematic concerns. It underlines the Minister's deprivation. In the same vein, parallelism is used to show the frustration and hopelessness of the life in Acoliland about which the poet is writing:

*“Who wants to know  
That his children  
Will never go to School  
Will never get a job  
Or land  
Or cow  
Or chicken  
Let me dance  
And forget! “(Two Songs) P.109*

In the above lines, the parallel repetition, coupled with the rhetorical question conveys to the reader, the prisoner's frustration and the hopelessness in the society. The naming of the objects in descending order is symbolic of the fact that, his hope in the government and the future has come to the lowest ebb.

He cannot have, even the barest necessities of life, so he wants to “drink”, “dance” and “forget.” Two Songs is a coherent work though at first reading of “Song of prisoner” one may be tempted to think that there is no consonance and concord until the reader realizes that there are three functional characters in the poem. The first character is the vagrant, arrested at the city park for vagrancy. He does not accept that vagrancy is a crime. He has a background, a family with children who unfortunately will never go to school; he was born of poor parents and wants to be released so as to joint his age mates at the dancing arena. The Minister is detained for his complicity in the assassination of a political leader. He has a family with children at school to whom he wants to send money and his aged parents. Before his detention, his picture used to appear in Newspapers and on the television.

The third character (prisoner) is an assassin. It is possible to think that the Minister in detention paid him to do the job. He, by my reckoning, must have been a political thug because according to him; the assassinated politician was:

*An obstacle blocking  
The path of our progress  
He had to be urgently removed. (Two Songs) P.72*

He (the thug) further claims that he has done a great deed by cutting the nose that was on the people's neck. It is through these fictional characters that the poet directs his criticism on the society with all its fears, frustrations, hopelessness and political injustices. The poet's concern is with social equity and he has, through the use of contrast shown us the injustice is prevalent in the society.

Although the background of the Malaya is not as clear as those of the three prisoners in 'Song of prisoners', we are still able to see something of her life and background.

She has three children and one is already of school age. She has an elder brother who has disowned her and had sworn that the day she (Malaya) would show her face in the father's compound, he would shoot her. In the last movement of the poem, she is arrested by the very police sergeant whom she claimed slept with her the night before. It is from the voices of these personae that we are shown the foibles of the society. The vagrant prisoner helps the reader to realize that Uhuru that has been won is a hoax, for it is only a toll for the exploitation of the masses. The Minister represents the 'haves' of the society, the political leaders who after assuming power have used it for personal aggrandizement and endless amass of wealth; the very group who have made nonsense of the hard-won independence which came to a reality after much sweat and blood of the hoi polloi had been sacrificed. From him, social injustice and brutality resulting from political thuggery are seriously harped on by the poet.

They eat, drink and make merry while the tax-payers wallow in objects poverty without basic necessities of life. The assassin represents the group used by the political stalwarts as thugs to eliminate real and imagined enemies and to destabilize the society, all geared towards the achievement of political vendetta while the Malaya is part of the heartless group that exploits the society. A catalogue of her preys shows the falsehood prevalent in the society. She is able to tell us something about the double standards of the leaders and members of the society. Ironically, the man

whom she exploited the previous night is her captor in the last movement of the poem.

The poet successfully builds a bridge of understanding with the humblest and most deprived people in the society (Acoliland). Through the bridge, the reader is linked with the life and problems of each of the poetic personae in particular and the society in general. Realism, coherence and relevance are all achieved by the poet in no small measure.

The poet opens the pages of society's life to the reader, laying emphasis on some aspects of life in general that are of interest to him. Impressing his feelings of dissatisfaction upon the reader, he brings a great deal of satire to play. This, he achieves through irony, repetition, and paradox.:

*"listen to the beautiful chorus  
Of the patriots  
The only good black  
Is a dead one"* (Two Songs) P.115

The different situations are portrayed with the use of poignant **images** that at once encapsulates the situation and leaves no doubt about the poet's meaning and vision.

Pieces of colour and trimmings are assembled by the poet to form a cottage which is the life in Acoliland. The ideas have been arranged so as to leave no room for doubt as to what the poet has in mind. He opens an album of life pictures as it is at the moment and shows the reader the frustration that have accompanied life so far and points to what could have been the realities of life if better handled. All these, he does through thought-provoking and heart-searching images. The poet is however, fond of climatic arrangement of ideas which tend to startle and also forces the reader to exhibit unbridle sympathy for such a society (Acoliland).

*"I plead hunger  
Fiercer than a  
Wounded Crocodile  
Olympic athletes throw Javelins  
Inside my belly"* (Two Songs) P.23

*The images* that show the prisoner's hunger startles and frightens. In another point, climatic arrangement of ideas reinforced by such devices as repetition, paradox and Irony, the poet draws in the emotion of the reader:

*"I plead for.....*

*I plead helplessness*

*I plead hopelessness" (Two Songs) p. 33*

The placement of the Minister between the two other prisoners is a special arrangement which enables the reader to see the life in the society. The experiences these characters pass through are different, but they give the reader a whole picture of the society. Through dictions, imagery, rhythm, repetition, coherence, emphatic, devices and a careful arrangement of ideas, the poet has achieved in style, something new and unique in African poetry.

### **Conclusion**

This paper attempted a study of Okot p'Bitek's Two Songs, by focusing on the form, purpose and poetic style of the writer. The poet has in this work adopted the stand of the traditional bard, which was the agent of his society in the preservation of the mores of the society devoid of foreign influences and planted it on postcolonialism as its theoretical framework in order to write an a meaningful critique of the realities of the day. He has in his poetry, which is basically a satire, entertained and commented on the weaknesses of the society, which he is writing about. His vision of a perfect society is that which caters for all members of the society; where the wealth is shared to all and life is made livable through sincerity and show of human concern by all in the life of the ordinary citizen represented in Two Songs by the vagrant prisoner. Through humour and pathos, he is able to show the life in the society objectively. The evocation of historical experiences by the poet makes this work relevant, not only to Acoliland, but African as a whole from Nigeria in the West through Congo in Central Africa.

The paper also comments on the situation in South Africa where apartheid was disorganizing every move by the Black towards oneness. Through inference we are reminded that "many countries in Africa apart

from SOWETO (then, but now free), are still on the burning Fires of neo-colonialism". Therefore, instead of using only phono-aesthetic devices, the poet also relies on images and symbols that are able to project the immediate and familiar environment in the work. Through his authorial empathy, O. p'Bitek is able to make the fictional characters, to represent the various categories of people in the society and has also greatly explored their psyche.

All these are done to teach and please. This is what Okot p'Bitek has done. In the words of Soyinka, (1968) regarding the role of a writer: "The past exists, the real African consciousness establishes this –the past exists now, this moment, it is co-existent in present awareness". Then, it is perhaps reasonable to say that Okot p'Bitek has dressed the Ancient Ghost of African traditional poetry with Masks of present day realities of Acoliland. Through his poetry, he attempts the preservation of the integrity of the society, group identity and to reflect the physical environment of Acoliland.

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