



ORAL TECHNIQUES AND COMMITMENT IN THE POETRY OF OKOT P'BITEK AND KOFI ANYIDOHO: THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO MODERN AFRICAN POETRY

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ABSTRACT

Modern African poetry has come to stay, and has made outstanding contributions to world literature through its use of traditional African oral poetic techniques. In this direction, one of the earliest innovators in modern African poetry has been the Ugandan, the late Okot p'Bitek, whose poetry has had a profound effect on the African poetic canon through the decades. Another poet who has also affected the African poetic scene with his craft in the 80's has been the Ghanaian, Kofi Anyidoho. This paper attempts to study these two poets, their innovation in the use of language and oral poetic techniques, and their contributions to African poetry in terms of themes and techniques of presentation. On the whole, for both poets, the skillful adaptation and use of indigenous African Oral poetic techniques has helped to improve their craft, their effectiveness as masses-oriented poets, as well as their vision.

Key Words: Poetry, Oral, Modern, Techniques, Commitment, Contribution.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern African poetry can be said to have taken roots shortly in the immediate period before the Negritude movement. Pioneers like Osadebay, Dei-Anang, Casely-Hayford and Vilakazi started a tradition of poetry that drew largely upon an indigenous African cultural base. This trend was continued and intensified in the 40's and 50's by the Negritude poets of Africa. Negritude poets like Senghor and Birago Diop used mainly imagery drawn from the African milieu, as well as African oral poetic modes to express themselves. Their intention was to reassert the cultural values of the black man and to win back his pride.

The phenomenon known as Negritude (though limited mainly to Francophone Africa), was an overt vision of history and society for Africa which was propounded by young African students in France as an intellectual-cum-literary backing to Africa's anti-colonial movements during the struggle for independence. Though some Anglophone poets expressed themselves in ways that could be considered as being in the vein of Negritude,¹ this was the exception rather than the rule in Anglophone Africa.

In post-independence Africa, how has the modern African poet fared? How has the golden ideal in terms of vision and technique that was enunciated by poets of the Negritude phase been made use of? It is pertinent to note that the immediate post-independence era in Africa was dominated by poetry whose ideological commitment and mode of communication was abstruse². In other words, poetry became an esoteric tool for the expression of private, personal experiences, which could only be unraveled by a coterie of initiates³. Poetry, therefore, had no social commitment to an outlined African noble cause, or to the masses, neither was it open to them.

It is because of this that Africa needed poets with a commitment that re-echoed the Negritude phase, and at the same time, move beyond it to grapple with the realities of post-coloniality. It is, in spite of this fact, that during the immediate post-independence era (the 70's specifically), Africa had an exception in the person and poetry of Okot p'Bitek who transformed the entire poetic atmosphere during his time and gave back to African culture and identity what the Negritude poets had set out to achieve in their era. In addition, he has generally made several other contributions to the poetic genre in African literature.

In the 80's, another illustrious son of Africa contributed much through his poetic achievements to modern African poetry. The poet referred to is Kofi Anyidoho. His contributions in terms of vision and commitment to a communalist ethos, and his use of the Ewe traditional oral poetic modes and symbols gives us a clue to his "greatness" in the literary chronicles of modern African poetry. For, besides any other achievement, he, like p'Bitek, has also rekindled and passed on the African ethos that was initially enunciated in the poetry of Negritude, while also marrying this to a Marxist-Socialist vision of society. This vision of society has only intensified his commitment to the communalist African ethos.

Consequently, this article sets out to study selected poems of Okot p'Bitek and Kofi Anyidoho, in order to highlight their significant contributions to modern African poetry.

The poetry of obscurantism

Before the advent of p'Bitek and Anyidoho, African Poetry was obscure and private (Chinweizu, Jemie & Madubuike, 2008). Two poets that exemplify this tradition of poetry are Wole Soyinka and the late Christopher Okigbo.

Much of Soyinka's poetry to date, and most of Okigbo's early poetry lacked any definite social commitment. Besides, their poems were opaque and expressed a private vision that did not carry the masses along. For example, Soyinka's poem, "To My First White Hairs" contemplates the hopes and uncertainties of the ageing process as symbolized by graying. But even this simple idea is couched in obscure language and imagery as presented below:

Hirsute hell chimney-spouts, black thunderthroes.
confluence of course cloudfleeces-my head Sir! scourbrush
in bitumen, past fossil beyond fingers of light - until...!

.....
.....milk-thread presages
of the hoary phase ...knit me webs of winter sagehood,
...and the fungoid sequins of a crown (Idanre, 30)

The effect of this kind of poem on the reader is that of befuddlement and lack of interest, as the impression is created that the poem is too learned, and therefore, unfit for the ordinary man.

Similarly, compatriot, Okigbo, Soyinka's makes use of classical myths and legends in his poetry, whose meanings are not open to the ordinary reader, e.g

ON AN empty sarcophagus
hewn out of alabaster,
A branch of fennel on an
empty sarcophagus....(Labyrinths, 29)

At other times, Okigbo's syntactic constructions give the impression of obscurity such as could only be found in the poetry of G.M. Hopkins, e.g

Is thereis certainly there
For as in sea-fever globules of fresh anguish
Immense golden eggs empty of albumen
sink into our balcony

The cross to us we still call to us,
In this jubilee-dance above the carrion (Labyrinths, 39)

Though the lyrical quality of Okigbo's poems are immediately noticeable, in the end, they give the same impression of obscurantism like those of Soyinka. The difference between the above mentioned poets on the one hand, and Okot p'Bitek and Anyidoho on the other, can be seen below.

The poetry of okot p'bitek

Okot p'Bitek in his Song of Lawino, Song of Ocol, Song of Prisoner, and Song of Malaya, makes a definite impression on modern African poetry. In all these poems, (except Song of Ocol to some extent), he makes use of oral tradition as a basic foundation or launching pad. p'Bitek himself, justifies this approach which he says:

...the vast majority of our people in the countryside have a full-blooded literary culture so deep, so vivid and alive that for the moment the very little written stuff appears almost irrelevant (quod in Roscoe, 10)

What are p'Bitek's concerns in these "Songs", especially Song of Lawino? It is to make Africans aware of the richness and diversity of their African heritage. By this self-imposed crusade, he hopes to make meaning out of African traditions to modern-day Africans hemmed in on all sides by the destabilizing effects of modern western-oriented lifestyles. Commenting on this perspective, Roscoe (32) says:

Okot's whole career as poet,...singer.... has been concerned with the problem of making tradition meaningful to modernity and avoiding Western solutions to African problems.

From this preliminary survey of critical commentary we go into p'Bitek's actual works, beginning with Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol.

Song of Lawino depicts a heroine who laments the rejection of African tradition for western ways by the educated elite. By using the song style, the poem is not just a lament, but a series of songs meant to celebrate African culture. Cook (231) implies this trend when he says that Lawino's

Urge (is) to celebrate in (her) own right the positive qualities of a threatened tradition .

Celebration in poetry is an aspect of African traditional oral culture. Lewis Nkosi confirms this when he asserts

...In this community the poet or the artist in general is there to "celebrate" his own or his society's sense of being ...and not there to subvert its social values or moral order (quod in Cook, 231).

What are the African values that Lawino celebrates? These are: African aesthetics (or beauty), African concepts of religion, death, education and medicine, among others. These are contrasted

To this, she juxtaposes the African concept of beauty:

Ask me what beauty is
To the Acoli
And I will tell you;
.....
Young girls
Whose breasts are just emerging
Smear shea butter on their bodies
The beautiful oil from Labworomor,
You adorn yourself for the dance
If your string-skirt
Is ochre-red/you do your hair
With ochre (pp. 51, 52).

She also picks up European religion and compares it with African traditional religions. Her verdict is that the latter is more real to the African than Christianity

Ocol laughs at me
Because I cannot
Cross myself properly
 In the name of the Father
 And of the Son
 And of the Clean Ghost (p.74)

The above is a reference to Christian catechism. Next, she picks up the church catechists for bashing. The catechist she says, makes only meaningless sounds:

The teacher was an Acoli
But he spoke the same language
As the white priests
His nose was blocked
And he tried
To force his words
Through his blocked nose,
.....
Then you look at the teacher
Barking meaninglessly
Like the yellow monkey, (p.76)

Contrasted with this, is her traditional religion, which is partly symbolized by the traditional healer, whom Ocol condemns:

Ocol condemns diviner-priests
And Acoli herbalists.... (p.93)

Aside from the role of the traditional healer as a symbol of traditional religion, he also represents the African notion of medicine. Of course, Ocol as an educated man and a Christian would not allow African medicine or juju into his house. But Lawino goes on to give few examples of herbal medicines as illustrated by this traditional cough medicine.

The shoots of "lapena"
For coughs and sore throats –
You put some salt in it
And chew it!
The shoots "lapena" and "olim"
Are chewed when they have
Removed the blockage in the throat (p.96)

She contrasts this with Ocol's predilection for Western medicine:

He says
I do not know/ the rules of health,
And I mix up/matters of health and superstitions....(p.101)

In spite of this, she affirms the potency of African traditional medicine:

It is true
White man's medicines are
Strong/ but Acoli medicines
Are also strong (p. 101)

Western education also comes in for attack. And in this case, Western education is epitomized by her husband's house which she describes as a "forest of books". According to Lawino, the books have made Ocol to lose his head:

Listen, my clansmen,
I cry over my husband
Whose head is lost
Ocol has lost his head
In the forest of books
.....

My husband's house
Is a dark forest of books (p.113)

Her lament here is strident because her woes arise from the fact of her husband's education which results in his abandonment of "the old one" (Lawino)

Lawino also portrays the African conception of death as being a phenomenon that is all-powerful, and no earthly force could resist it:

White diviner-priests
Acoli herbalists,
All medicine men and medicine women
Are good, are brilliant
When the day has not yet/dawned
For the great journey/the last safari
To Pagak (p. 103).

Finally, she makes commentaries about the lot of the common man, and the mercenary activities of the political elite. She criticizes the political elite's mercenary motives:

The stomach seems to be
A powerful force
For joining political parties (p.108)

And against this mercenary motive, what is the lot of the common man? It is deplorable:

And while the pythons of /sickness
Swallow the children
And the buffaloes of poverty
Knock the people down
And ignorance stands there
Like an elephant
The war leaders
Are tightly locked in bloody
Feuds/Eating each other's liver (p.111)

To Lawino, therefore, modernity has not brought as much benefits as Ocol would want her to believe. She sums up by calling for Ocol's purification and re-admittance into tribal norms:

The blindness that you got in the library
Will be removed by the diviner!

.....
Son of the Bull
Let no one uproot
The pumpkin (pp. 118-120)

This statement or refrain is a re-iteration of African values. Ocol's reply in **Song of Ocol** lacks the cogency of Lawino's arguments. He prefers to dwell on insults:

Woman
Your song
Is the rotting buffalo
Left behind by
Fleeing poachers
Its nose blocked (p.122)

Ocol who symbolically represents the modern, educated African enamoured of European tradition, presents himself by denigrating African culture:

I see an Old Homestead
In the valley below
Huts, granaries...
All in ruins.

He is unapologetic and seems to be saying that old things must pass away so that Africa may move along with the times. Africa, to him is too backward:

Africa,
Idle giant
Basking in the sun
Sleeping, snoring
Twitching in dreams (p. 125)

He therefore calls for a reconstruction, through demolition:

We will uproot granaries
Break up the cooking pots
And water pots (p. 127)

.....
We shall build
A new city on the hill

Techniques of presentation used by okot p'bitek

What are some of the techniques that Okot p'Bitek uses in realizing his message? Some of these are as follows:

The Use of Monologue: In this case, the monologue is a song: a solo. There is a built-in audience in almost all of his poems. For example, in **Song of Lawino** we find that Lawino is addressing not only Ocol, but also her clansmen:

Husband, now you despise me
Now you treat me with spite.... (p.34).

In **Song of Ocol**, Ocol addresses Lawino:

Woman,
Shut up!
Pack your things
Go! (p.121)

In **Song of Malaya**, the persona is a prostitute. She addresses an in-built audience comprising fellow prostitutes, sailors, workers, and even wives of men who patronize her:

And you
My married sister
You whose husband
I also love dearly
(quod in Moore, 189)

Similarly, the prisoner in **Song of Prisoner** addresses himself to his captors:

Open the door,
Man
I want to dance...
(quod in Moore, 186)

The Use of the Dirge Style: The poem **Song of Lawino** is a lamentation, and true to its type, it adopts the African dirge format:

My clansmen, I cry
Listen to my voice... (p.35)
.....
Listen my clansmen
I cry over my husband(p. 113)

The Song-style: That Okot p'Bitek's poems are songs, are proven by their titles: **Song of Ocol**, **Song of Malaya**, **Song of Prisoner**, among others. And within the poems themselves, there are references to song, as in **Song of Lawino**:

And they sang silently: Song
Father prepare the kraal
The cattle are coming (p.48)

Use of Praise Names: In **Song of Lawino**, for example, Lawino makes use of praise names in addressing Ocol. This is partly to demonstrate the deep love and respect she still has for her husband. But at a deeper level, it is symptomatic of an African heroic tradition normally present in panegyrics. Some of the praise names she uses are:

- (a) Son of the Bull (p.119)
- (b) Son of a Chief (p.34)

Heron remarks that

Lawino's use of oblique respectful titles reflects the fact that she is ...living within a peasant community in which the titles and praise names are still meaningful..(quotd in Moore,183).

The Use of Exaggeration: Okot p'Bitek frequently uses exaggeration to make his points, in most of his poems. In **Song of Lawino**, Lawino exaggerates the ugliness of Clementine, with particular attention to the breasts:

They have made nests of cotton/wool
And she folds the bits of cow-hide
In the nests/And calls them breasts!

Describing the charade that was political independence, Ocol in **Song of Ocol** says:

The lamb
Uhuru/Dead as stone,
The shimmering flies
Giving false life
To its open eyes! (p.143)

Similarly, in **Song of Prisoner**, the prisoner in an attempt to describe the vigorousness of the dance he would like to take part in, uses exaggeration as follows:

I want to join/the funeral dances
I want to tread the earth

With a vengeance/ and shake in bones
of my father in his grave:
(quod in Moore, 186).

The Use of Language: Okot p'Bitek makes use of language in a unique way. Since his poems are derived from the traditional oral folklore of the Acoli people, his imagery is Acoli, and at once African. His diction is also simple, transliterating the diction and nuances of popular rendition in the African Oral arts. Commenting on this phenomenon, Roscoe (44) says:

Just as Okot's lines are largely free of inert language, so his actual choice of diction shows a preference for the plain and common core... we must see it within the realms of "orature".

He uses the language of local imagery. To underscore the use of local imagery, Lawino characterizes Clementine as a guinea-fowl; her husband's library is likened to "a forest". She brings in other images drawn from the locale, like monkey, giraffe, bee, scorpion: and even typically Acoli words like "Pollok, Jok, Malakwang, Oju, lajanawara bird, Lapena and Olim, among others. Ocol also makes references to "morán, shuka, olam, shenzi, etc.

Aside from these, Ocol, in **Song of Ocol** uses a much more sophisticated and dense language, thus:

A large arc
Of semi desert land
Strewn with human skeletons ...(p.136)

The reason for such sophisticated language is to reflect correctly, Ocol's substantial Western education. These are just few of the techniques used by Okot p'Bitek. His intention, as earlier stated, was to make tradition real to the modern African. In this regard, we can see him as holding a vision similar to that held by the Negritude writers - to re-establish the respect and pride of Africa and the Black world.

The poetry of kofi anyidoho

Kofi Anyidoho is one of Ghana's new generation poets. This generation of poets can be differentiated by their masses-oriented poetry. The implication is that their poetry is "committed", committed to the ultimate liberation of the masses from the shackles of economic and political exploitation. In other words, Anyidoho can be seen as a revolutionary of some sort. This caption fits him, as his activities fit Ngara's (13) definition of a revolutionary, as follows:

It is the duty of the revolutionary writer.... to produce works
which awaken the masses, which fire them with enthusiasm
that they unite in one single effort to transform their
environment.

He, like others in his class, writes committed literature due to a deep understanding of the class struggles in Africa as the motive force of African history. He sees the working classes as the only hope for the continent and refuses to resign in the face of corruption in despair (Agye 135-6). This, therefore, informs the vision of Anyidoho, in his poetry collection, **A Harvest of our Dreams**. Excerpts from his earlier collection **Elegy for the Revolution** included in the above-mentioned collection exemplify Anyidoho's revolutionary temper. An example is his dedication in **A Harvest of Our Dreams**

To the memory of
The revolution that went astray
And for/Those who refuse to die
Aluta continua...

Many of the poems in **A Harvest of Our Dreams** may perhaps be said to deal with the defunct Acheampong/Akuffo Regimes in Ghana, between 1972 and 1978. Why this deep attachment? Angmor rationalizes Anyidoho's seeming preoccupation with the Acheampong regime thus:

... Anyidoho belongs to the group of Ghanaian students who hailed the military coup of 1972 as a hope and an opportunity to retrieve Ghana's international image, reshape the mentality of the citizenry and restore economic security and contentment in the fortunes of the common man.... The sadness of the bitter shock of disappointment and disillusionment of the youth is the current that flows through his poems (Angmor 26)^a.

It is in this context that we observe his comments on corruption in power, in the poem "My Last Testament"

Adonu Adokli
Dancer - extra-ordinary
Who threw dust into Master-Drummer's
eyes/so you've gone the way of flesh
danced on heels in a backwards loop
into the narrow termite home....

In the above poem Anyidoho expresses his disillusionment with the corruption of usurping military rulers. Further in the poem, he says that the people's dreams of economic betterment have not yet been realized. He predicts another revolution:

Now I smell thunders
loading their cannons with

furies of storms...

and ends up reiterating his unyielding stance:

I toss these rising doubts to thunder
and stagger back into my soul, still
holding firm onto this growing confidence

Anyidoho stands as one who would fight on behalf of the less privileged in society. For this reason, the tone of his poems remains unyielding. Another example of this unyielding and resolute spirit is to be found in "Our Birth Cord". This poem restates the loss of the people's hopes thus:

a piece of meat lost in cabbage stew
it will be found the tongue
will feel it out.

He reflects on the sufferings of the people "Across the memory of a thousand agonies...."

While restating the loss of the people's hopes, the protagonist ends in a resolute attitude of not yielding to death threats from military rulers:

And if we must die at birth, pray
We return with -
But we were not born to be killed
by threats of lunatics

This piece re-echoes Langston Hughes' poem "If We Must Die"

In "Dance of the Hunch-back" the protagonist depicts the poverty and misery of the common man. The common man is here symbolically represented as a "hunchback".

Mine is the dance of the hunchback....
I crawl my way with strain and shame
I leave the paved streets to
Owners of the earth....

"Owners of the earth" here represents the privileged class. Here, the hunchback's brother dies and the doctor makes the following pronouncement:

" he died of innate poverty"

Ironically enough, kinsmen who never offered help while the deceased was alive, now come for the funeral, flaunting all sorts of expensive articles for their own selfish enjoyment; even the deceased is buried in a glass coffin:

Kinsmen came from distant quests
With precious things for parting gifts...
a glass coffin with rims of gold...
each kind kinsman stood tall in our hearts

In spite of this, the hunchback is disgraced because he is too poor to contribute anything towards his brother's funeral. As an outcast, he states dejectedly:

I crawl along quiet sidewalks of life
With the hedge-hog and the crab
I carry a tedious destiny....

With this poem, Anyidoho's identification with the common man is complete.

In another poem entitled "Radio Revolution", Anyidoho depicts the usual "game of musical chairs" or charade of intermittent coups and counter-coups that plague not only Ghana, but almost every country in Africa in the recent past. These coups are normally characterized by dawn broadcasts by the new "saviours", as Anyidoho states:

Again this dawn our Radio
Broke off the vital end of sleep
Revolution ... DevolutionResolution!

This is a satire on all coups. The protagonist parodies this coup announcement by going out into the streets "seeking revolution". The sarcasm is barely concealed, especially in the last three lines, when the protagonist puns on the sounds of the words "leave" and "live".

Long Leave the Revolution!!!

In the poem "Elegy for the Revolution", the poet's attitude of derogatory perception of the military rulers is personified in his warning to them about the imminence of another revolution:

The Revolution violates a devotee
Beware/Beware the wrath of
Thunderbolts/ The agonised thoughts

Of a detainee translate/our new
Blunders into nightmares of blood and sweat:

In “A Dance of Death”, Anyidoho’s poetry becomes not only prophetic of a coup aimed at dethroning the Acheampong/Akuffo regimes, but prophetic of the eventual elimination by firing squad, of all living former Ghanaian military Heads of State.

Besides, the poem re-iterates revolutionary ideals, endorsing violence and bloodshed as necessary means through which reconstruction can be undertaken:

Let us celebrate our
death by firing squads
to beats of martial strains
let us link our arms
on these public fields of blood
teach our feet to do the dance of death

The poet believes that to rebuild and recreate the nation, there must be sacrifice

The birth of a new nation
Calls for sacrifice of souls

and this is underscored with the dialectical paradox of destruction and creation:

The process of reconstruction
is also
A process of demolition

This signifies the cleansing of the society from corruption, by the elimination of corrupt leaders. This poem is prophetic in that when Rawlings came to power a second time, past rulers of Ghana like Afriffa, Acheampong and Akuffo, were eliminated by firing squad.

Techniques of presentation used by kofi anyidoho

What techniques does Anyidoho use? His major techniques include:

The Use of Praise Names, which demonstrates that he has been influenced by his Ewe traditional oral poetry tradition, for example in his “My Last Testament”, he makes use of praise names such as:

Adonu Adokli...
.....
Katakoko Gako

Old mad-one...

The Use of Repetition: Repetition is used for emphasis: an example is in the poem "Radio Revolution":

(a) I/seek Revolution ...

.....

(b) I was out my dear
I was out seeking revolution

Another instance is his repetition, with slight change in emphasis, of the following:

a piece of meat lost in cabbage stew
It will be found...

And, also the phrase:

"If we must die "
in the poem "Our Birth Cord".

The Use of Symbolism is found in the images he creates in his poetry. For example, he depicts the common man as symbolised by the hunchback in "Dance of the hunchback". He also depicts the military class as "leopards", "panthers", or "lunatics"

Use of Puns and Homophones: homophones are used for example, in "Radio Revolution", thus:

Revolution... Devolution... Resolution

This play on words is done to give a different meaning to each word in spite of the similarity in sound environment. Subtle change in meaning which the undiscovering eye cannot see is what is aimed at. And above all, it is done for emphasis.

There is the pun on "live" and "leave" also in the same poem.

The Language of Anyidoho is seemingly simple, full of assonance, therefore, **musical**. For example:

Again and again and again
You may stand on shores of memory...
("On Shores of Memory")

Contributions of the two poets to modern african poetry

Having examined the two poets in their poetic territory, what can we say have been their contributions to modern African poetry?

okot p'bitek

The Song Style: p'Bitek has used the song style to identify his poetry closely with traditional African oral poetry. Therefore, his poetry is a continuity of African traditional oral poetry in written form.

Besides, his use of language is outstanding in that he makes use of traditional African imagery. By this, p'Bitek is recommending Oral tradition as the source of inspiration for future and present African poets (Cook, 55).

The Innovation of the Communal Persona: Before p' Bitek's time, poetry was characterised by a single persona who in most cases represented not the masses and their yearnings, but the yearnings and private concerns of its creator, e.g the poems of Soyinka or Okigbo. But with the advent of p'Bitek, the communal protagonist, who was the voice of the community was born in accordance with the role of the oral performer in traditional African society.

Theme and Subject: In terms of themes and subject, Okot p' Bitek has contributed to the theme of the clash of cultures; a key theme in modern African writings. This is demonstrated in **Song of Lawino** and **Song of Ocol**

Finally, Okot p'Bitek has made contributions to the theme of Negritude. Even though he may not have subscribed to Negritude as a literary philosophy; his achievements in poetry have put him ahead of this class of writers. He has put into practice what the Negritude writers mainly preached. His subject, his images and symbols are drawn from his local African environment.

Kofi Anyidoho Anyidoho has contributed to modern African poetry in the following ways:

As one of the poets of the younger generation, he has contributed in making poetry for public recital popular in Ghana (Apronti 31; cf Anyidoho 45-47)⁴. That is why sound and music are important in his poetry. Both the public recital, and musicality of Anyidoho's poetry underline his masses-oriented vision.

He has a musical frame of poetic composition (Angmor 61).

His poetry is closely modeled after traditional Ewe poetry in which he is well versed. This influence can be seen in his use of praise-names, as well as in his dirge-style. An example is his poems "A Harvest of Our Dreams" and "Fertility Game".

His compositions have a lyrical quality just like p'Bitek's. This is an index of their derivation from the oral poetry of the people, and underscores the over/all musical quality of their poetry.

His unyielding vision of society has contributed to the urgency and sharpness in his poetry, and also explains his pre-occupation with death, sacrifice, revolution, and bloodshed. This vision now characterises many other writers of his generation and is portrayed in their concern for the plight of the masses.

He has contributed to the political theme of military rule in Africa, just as other writers have contributed to the same theme in drama and in the novel.

He is one among few African poets whose poetry has been prophetic to a large extent. In this regard, Nigeria's Okigbo is the first example. Therefore, Anyidoho's poetry stands out in this respect.

CONCLUSION

This article attempted a study of two African poets. After a close study, attempt has been made to outline their contributions to the genre of modern African poetry. In conclusion, this article holds that these two poets – Okot p'Bittek and Kofi Anyidoho – have contributed to modern African poetry, in their use of language, themes, and techniques. Most outstanding has been their use of indigenous African oral poetic techniques to realize their themes and vision.

NOTES

Such Anglophone poets were for example, Frank Parkes, in his collection **Song From the Wilderness** (1965); Kofi Awoonor in his "The Cathedral" and "The Weavers Bird", and Okara in his "Piano and Drums", "You laughed and laughed and laughed", and "The Fisherman's Invocation".

Poets in this tradition included Wole Soyinka, Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, Christopher Okigbo, Michael J. C. Echeruo, and Okogbule, Wonodi, all from Nigeria, for whom the Troika Chinweizu give the derogatory name of "Nsukka-Ibadan Axis".

To underline this notion, Christopher Okigbo is reputed to have snubbed and gloated over African writers assembled at Makerere in 1962, when he declared in words like this:.... I write for poets and not for everybody..."

This was a comment Anyidoho made on Atukwei Okai's poetry. But paradoxically, the same comment applies to him (Anyidoho) as well.

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