

# POETRY AND THE REVOLUTIONARY VISION OF OSSIE ENEKWE

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## Abstract

*This study on “Poetry and the Revolutionary Vision of Ossie Enekwe” explores the facets of psychological and revolutionary appeal on the oppressed masses in an effort to incite them to expropriate the expropriators in the society. The study is based on Enekwe’s Broken Pots (1977) and Marching to Kilimanjaro (2005). The study employs the theories of Psychoanalysis and Marxism to study the selected poems. As poet, Enekwe focuses on the social environment and how its structural composition affects various structural units in the society. For the poet, the structure of the society reflects oppression of the majority by the minority. His poetry consequently portrays various forms of social vices such as oppression, exploitation, corruption, injustice, insincerity, apathy, hypocrisy and betrayal, and presents them as driving forces to help the oppressed masses struggle for equitable distribution of resources. The study further demonstrates that this explicational approach facilitates access to the poet’s thematic foci which realize the immense constraints and marasmic nature of society, and seek to use art as a revolutionary tool to salvage it. Equally, through the treatment of style and language, insights are got on how the consciousness of the masses is shaped towards revolutionary action against precarious social imbroglios. The study discovers that the language of the poet is soused with the motif of driving the masses into revolutionary escapades which further helps to exhume the exquisiteness in the poetry. Ultimately, the research concludes that a study of Enekwe’s poetry as a revolutionary vision could offer a revolutionary understanding and mindset to the poetry of most contemporary Nigerian poets.*

**Keywords:** Revolution, Driving force, Oppression, Suffering, Death, Egocentrism, Corruption.

## 1 Introduction

Enekwe’s poetry champions reflections of the past and expresses the present in its representation and reinterpretation of man’s diverse experiences. The poet uses historical, cultural, socio-political and economic realities of his society as an impulse to his creativity. Set in the context of postcolonial Africa,

Ossie Eneke's poetry mirrors the realities of what egocentrism, injustice, embezzlement, corruption and other social ills could do in society. In the foreword to *Marching to Kilimanjaro* (2005: 5), Niyi Osundare notes that the thrust of Eneke's poetry is "the total liberation of Africa from several centuries of slavery and dehumanization". Eneke does this by apt crafting of inciting words and images which act as driving forces on the reader. Osundare (Ibid) further maintains that Eneke's poetry is a clamorous reminder of "the sin of my people against my people". Eneke's poetry is thus informed by the socio-cultural and political malaise that surrounds his society.

In understanding Eneke's poetry, Stephen Greenblatt (qtd. In Agbor 2008: 130) writes that "history cannot be divorced from textuality". This approach, Agbor reinforces, "is quite relevant to understanding Eneke's texts within the context of the history that produced them and impact they have in re-enacting that history and memory" (Ibid). But Eneke's aim is not to re-enact memorable historic scenes, but to support the masses who are the victims of the oppressive history, to turn their ill-fated destiny. The poetry of Eneke is thus not myopic of its committed alliance with the oppressed. Dasylva and Jegede (2005: 140) shed more light on this. They argue that

Modern Nigerian poetry shows ideological commitment to prevailing socio-political and economic changes ... the poems show open criticism to political leadership and support for the masses. The attitude of the Nigerian poets to their subjects is due to the role of the poet in traditional society which has influenced and defined his conception of himself in modern times. The poet takes on the role of prophet, presenter and social reformer combining foresight and insight.

One particular foresight and insight in Eneke's poetry is the driving force for revolution. Eneke questions the continuous suffering of the masses and the expropriation of national wealth by the leaders. One of the ways he pursues this quest is through the use of strong figurative expressions, juxtapositioning of alternate conditions and his partisan position in line with his Marxist commitment. Ngugi makes this more obvious as he asserts that "a writer's work reflects one or more aspects of the intense economy, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics" (*Writers ...* 1982: XVI). This shows that Eneke is not concerned with simply delineating an essentially dystopian society. He goes beyond mere presentation of society to a questioning of it. Mgbojirikwe Chinaka (2013:1) avers that this type of vision is "relevant because it is focused, specific, clear and suitable to its course or perspective". Mgbojirikwe thus maintains that the vision of poetic revolution in Eneke's poetry is "pivotal to the harmonious survival of any society" (Ibid). This seems to be the basis of the revolutionary vision that is copiously entrenched in Eneke's poetry. The revolutionary vision demands firstly, an analysis of society, laying bare the objects of the writer's objectives. Wole Soyinka (qtd. In Goddard 1986: 18) alludes to this when he states that "part of the essential purpose of an African writer is to write with a very definite vision by exposing the future in a clear and truthful exposition of the present.

The above illuminates the fact that a clear, uncompromised and unequivocal presentation of social reality is the basis for future possible impacts in the society. From another viewpoint, it implies that a positive effort is unavoidably needed to confront the deplorable existence in the society. In his poetry, Eneke adopts the posture of a town crier for his society, crying about it to his people and to the global community. Through revolutionary temper, he aims at moving the masses to action to right the wrongs in the society. The manner in which Eneke conceives his role as a writer seems therefore to cohere with the universal tradition that places great emphasis on the social responsibility of the artist. It is a tradition that sees writers as philosophers who are critics of the status quo. Eneke alludes to this tradition persistently in his quest for truth. He is a writer who makes a critical appraisal of all received ideas, values and conventions

and equally suggests the way forward especially in a context where there is a disjunction between what is and what should be. Emmanuel Obiechina (1998: 8) underscores this when he states that the writer in Africa is “aman, who probes the body and soul of the contemporary scene, discovers the dead or the dying cells, locates the deceased organs and prepares the ground for the surgical operation to restore the body to health and new life”. This is exactly what Enekwe levitates in the poems under dissection. His aesthetic bravura to lay bare the incoherence of the society is best appreciated in the revolutionary content and tone of the poems which further buttresses Mgbojirikwe’s argument that “if the continent is engulfed in visionless leadership, there is no observable dearth of writers and visionaries to drive home its course” (Ibid). His poetry is devoted to the fight against injustice and any form of oppressive system. In a discourse with G.M.T Emezue, Enekwe personally reveals this: “... wherever there is injustice, I will fight against it. That is the way I was brought up. We had no strangers in our house. Everybody was the same. My creativity is highly influenced by this way of life”. (“Aesthetics ...” 2008: 204)Evidently, it is something the poet started long before the same impulse flowed into the content of his poetry. The study will further discuss Enekwe’s revolutionary vision under various sub-headings.

## 2 Shades of Enekwe’s Revolutionary Vision

### 2.1 Suffering and Egocentrism

Enekwe’s “Situation Report” is a testimony of what obtains in the society. It exposes the suffering of the masses and the self-centredness of leaders as driving forces for revolution. The poem observes that “poverty flows like poison / in the blood vessels of toiling people” (*Marching ... 25*). Enekwe holds that the masses, who are the “toiling people”, are not rewarded despite their sweat and sacrifice. Instead, scarcity and lack are the fruits of their toil. It is a vivid picture of a society where societal equality remains a faraway dream. Enekwe, as it seems, writes in the light of Obiechina’s categorization of writers who operate “within the modern world order of human concern, benevolence, compassion and respect for human and individual rights and those who use their media to attack these negative values that undermine the sense of fullness of life and the realization of man’s potentials” (1998:2). In the midst of social degeneration, want and inequality, Enekwe’s “Situation Report” reveals that “fear knocks perpetually / on their bones” (*Marching ... 25*). This is followed by the pessimism of “dawn yields no sunshine” (*Marching ... 25*). In this reality, Enekwe writes that “the ignorant, undernourished poor / blame fate for their misery” (*Marching ... 25*). But fate is not to be blamed. Obviously, it is the selfishness of the leaders that causes misery in the society. Marxism believes that in the ongoing class struggle, values and beliefs are conditioned by social and economic well-being and not scripted by any *deus ex machina*. This is obviously why the persona calls them “ignorant” because they are unaware of the misdeeds of those in power. Because of the rip off, the poor masses experience yellow life as seen in the following lines:

Yellow feelings where injustice reigns.  
 Yellow life of the poor.  
 Yellow light at dusk when drunken bones  
 Shivel. (*Marching ... 25*)

The above lines aptly demonstrate Enekwe’s humanist perception of the state of the poor and his task to incite them into revolutionary action. Enekwe continues to display disgust in the third stanza by vividly portraying the lack of basic necessities for those who live on

... potholes, muddy ponds and battered  
 pavements,  
 through brambles, over rivers of crocodiles  
 that bare their maws at the laughing

whiteness of the sky,  
the lonely, abandoned wretches trudge on. (*Marching ... 25*)

The poet's concern about the dilapidated situation of the roads and homes of the poor is evident in the relationship between the poor, nature and elements. The disillusionment and anger of the people are conveyed in their "breeding and dying, eyes blurred by salty / sweat / hearts burning with inchoate rage" (*Marching ... 25*). The poem conveys acute grief as revolutionary temper with Marxist tenet of optimism in the last two stanzas:

But, through knowledge, intellection and  
work,  
We will give this rage the firmness and  
potency  
of rockets and bazookas, streaking fast  
against  
the assumed permanence of injustice.  
Through love for truth and beauty,  
we will create that world  
where the hawk and the eagle can perch,  
none displacing the other. (*Marching ... 26*)

Enekwe opines that the fate of the masses will trigger revolutionary change through knowledge, intellection and work which must dislodge the powers of the rich and reject their manoeuvres. The rage will equal the firmness and potency of rockets and bazookas.

The use of the image of armoury is to emphasize that the downtrodden have refused to be underdogs and are ready to take the fight against the illusion of the "assumed permanence of injustice" (Ibid). This is exactly the situation of contemporary Nigeria and most African nations where the privileged few are perpetually growing richer and richer while the masses whose labour made them bourgeois suffer and die in abject lack. African poets like Enekwe are consequently preoccupied with adapting what Nelson Fashina terms "Marxist struggle against the agents of neo-colonialism and capitalism" (qtd. in Dasylyva&Jegede 2005: 134). In this regard, Osundare adds that Enekwe's call is "a call to quest, a pilgrimage, a call to arms, to peace" ("Foreword" vii).

"Beggars" is another illumination on Enekwe's revolutionary vision. It is a clear case of how the masses suffer in the society. It shows African leaders as worse than the colonial masters. In *A Man of the People*, Achebe (1996: 37) writes that "African leaders who took over from the colonial masters continued the "eating and sharing formula" even on a larger scale. Having experienced the "rain" and dried themselves in the corridor, these African leaders refused to be beaten by the "rain" again. Worst still, they did not allow other Africans to enter the corridor and dry their clothes". Those left in the "rain" have been forced to eternally remain beggars. Enekwe's "Beggars" brings to fore this condemnable condition. It is a pictorial illustration of the unimaginable distribution of wealth in a society where the citizens are emasculated and have to beg for survival. The title of the poem is a metaphor for the marginalized and starved masses in post-colonial African societies like Nigeria. The corrupt, oppressive and dictatorial leaders amass all the wealth while the masses suffer and die in misery. "Beggars" recreates the experience of post-colonial African societies on the throes of exploitation, embezzlement and penury. In the first stanza, the beggars are imaged as "hollow bowels / beggars' bowls" (*Marching ... 30*) who the politically affluent see "on our way / everyday" (*Marching ... 30*). These lines are repeated in three stanzas of the five-stanza poem. The repetition of these lines strengthens and reinforces Enekwe's argument against the marginalization of the masses. It is obvious that independence has not brought the necessary change in post-colonial African

societies such as Nigeria. Achebe (1979: 82) explains this in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* when he notes that “within six years of independence, Nigeria was a cesspool of corruption and misrule. Public servants helped themselves freely of the nation’s wealth ... the politicians themselves were manipulated and corrupted by foreign business interests”. This unequal distribution of wealth becomes ironical reality in a supposedly democratic state. In the second stanza, the poet writes:

Wind howls  
in infant bellies,  
tender bowels  
laden with slime. (*Marching ... 30*)

The above portrays a grim metaphorical reference to the young beggars. The beggars are thus incapable of enjoying life to the full as captured in the following lines:

Bleeding eyes  
scare our souls,  
flood the shoals  
of the palace of death. (*Marching ... 30*)

The masses are disenchanted as the life they hoped for eludes them. The bleeding eyes of the beggars which scare the souls of those who pity their plight become an emphasis on the demeaning and hopeless condition of the people. Consequently, reading the poem leaves the reader with a sad feeling of man’s inhumanity to man. Enekwe’s “Beggars” is therefore a poem that projects not only the precarious dilemma of the beggars in order to shock the sensitivity of the oppressed masses but to arouse their impulse into revolutionary action.

In “Mass for the Dead”, Enekwe excites the impulse of the masses towards revolution. The poet exposes the beleaguered life of the oppressed in the first stanza of the poem:

From the sky suspended  
the strings of tattered pants  
marched on trembling feet  
under stone heavy-kits,  
marched, on their breasts  
seared monograms of skulls and bones. (*Broken ... 27*)

In the above, Enekwe captures the mangled image of oppressed people bereaved of essence of life. They are neglected and abandoned to no other option than to die by installment. Though still alive, these strings in tattered pants are carrying their skull and bones as mere symbols (monograms). Stanza two of the poem equally shows this existence. In the third stanza, the pain and suffering of the oppressed intensifies when

In the valley,  
the women folk wail  
and battered bells chime  
the daily demise of the youth.  
the concourse of the living stare,  
not sure if to pray for the dead  
or for themselves dying in degrees. (*Broken ... 27*)

“Mass for the Dead” reveals an intensified man’s slavery to fellow man. Thus confused, the masses pray not only both for the dead and for themselves but the future:

May God save our sons!  
AMEN!  
May He preserve them

from the hoarse shouts of officers,  
 from fields of mines and flames of artillery,  
 cannon fire and deadly armoured cars  
 ... save them also from the sneer  
 of the living .... (*Broken ... 27*)

The ellipsis at the end of the poem connotes an unending revolutionary temper enshrined in the poem. The poet leaves an indelible revolutionary zeal on the mind of the reader especially, the oppressed of the society. It is a driving force for revolution that is eternally ready to come against the hoarse shouts of officers, the flames of artillery, the canon fire, the deadly armoured cars and the sneers of oppressors.

## 2.2 Exploitation and Oppression

Enekwe's poetic vision portrays exploitation and oppression as driving forces for revolution. In "Big Fish Eat Small Fish", Enekwe captures the dynamics of power and identity in the society. It is a clear exposition of class schism represented by the gross exploitation of the marginalized. Big Fish represents the leaders while the small fish represents the poor civilians. In the first line of the poem; "Big fish eat small fish" (*Marching ... 35*), Enekwe laments how the small fish have become casualties of the big fish. The second and third lines which state; "Big men, small men, / in the belly of night" (*Marching ... 35*) underscore an implied comparison where the big fish represents the rich and the small fish represent the poor masses. The world of the masses in the society is far from being idyllic and hence, the existence of disillusionment caused by injustice, victimization, oppression and suffering. The small fish is a symbol of man bereft of essence. In the second stanza, Enekwe's anger on the society rises as he laments how

Light and dark clash in the lagoon.  
 malignant weeds sit on the oblongata of the  
 moon  
 king-sized fishes suck up the salt of the sea.  
 tiny ones lie prostrate for fleas. (*Marching ... 35*)

King-sized fishes stand for the rich patented and powerful in the society who oppress the masses and dump them in a position of socio-political and economical otherness. This is the reason why the tiny ones lie prostrate while the "king-sized fishes suck up the salt of the sea". The poet clearly emphasizes the disparity between the rulers and the ruled; the haves and the have-nots which is aggravated by excessive exploitation of the masses. Enekwe's revolutionary gesture is implied in the impulse created in the poem. In the same sense, Amuta (1989: 58) in *The Theory of African Literature* expatiates that

Since independence, the relationship between the ... rulers and their subjects is characterized by a frightening disparity between the scandalous affluences of a few and the abject penury of the majority; a total neglect of public infrastructure and a near breakdown of all recognizable codes of ethical conducts. This situation has initiated a literature that is largely preoccupied with objectifying this reality with an underlying revolutionary aspiration.

The poem exposes the fact that "Contractor-leaders carouse with lovers./ drunken giants snore in granite towers" (*Marching ... 35*). In other words, the country's resources are used by the leaders to pay for their night-outs and to satisfy their orgies. The harsh realities of the masses are also captured in "Hungry workers, shriveling into their pants, /scratch the dust like ants" (*Marching ... 35*). Reference to ants brings out the intense labour of the masses which is compared to the way ants labouriously scratch the ground, yet, they are denied the fruits of their labour by the rich who amass all the wealth. Enekwe continues to address the continued subjection of the masses; hence, some have become scavengers in order to survive:

At the rising of the sun,

the poor escape their hovels.  
 at the edges of city motels,  
 a million fingers tear through refuse cans. (*Marching ... 35-6*)

The poem generally conveys a feeling of loss of hope and disillusionment. The inherent driving force for revolution attest to the fact that the masses, who are subjects of traumatized reality need to rise up and brace arms against the big fishes.

“Dictatorship” is another poem that instigates the masses towards revolutionary change. The poem is an exposure of leadership extortion, exploitation and assault on citizens who become casualties in the hands of oppressive leaders. Osundare notes that “Dictatorship” captures “one of Africa’s running political sores” (“Foreword” 2005: VI). The poem, in the first stanza stamps politicians who indulge in swindling the society through stolen and inflated contracts:

A gross beast  
 hauls itself across the sky  
 casting a heavy night over the land  
 crushing the spirits in sunflowers  
 polluting the air with its stench  
 of rotten tongues between molars. (*Marching ... 9*)

The poet shocks the reader with this vivid language of decay and rot. The references to decay – stench, rotten tongue – are representations of the rich oppressors who indulge in exploitation, thus crushing the spirits in sunflowers. Sunflowers metaphorically represent goodwill. But regretfully, the actions and inactions of oppressive leaders are poised to suppress the urge to do any good in the society. Agbor (2008:138) emphasizes that Enekwe wants the masses “to capture the fiendish ingenuity of the oppressors invoked through the synecdoche of rotten tongues to showcase the effect of their monstrosity on society ....”

This is further captured in the following lines of the second stanza:

A mist of despair  
 hangs over the blood-stained lake.  
 the mourning wind wafts the ashes of the  
 dead. (*Marching ... 9*)

Mourning creates an atmosphere of sadness. The poet implicitly calls on the descendants of the traumatized dead to rise up and bewail the injustices meted out to their dead ones. Enekwe’s “Dictatorship” portrays the realities of the past and presents them as Jungian archetypes. These archetypes are thus the driving force to end the disintegration of society which dictatorship entrenches.

“The Lion Wakes”, dedicated to African liberators is a compendium of ideas resounding with impulse for revolution. The poem is categorized into two parts. The first part, as contained in the first and second stanzas re-creates the oppression and suffering of the masses:

They told him to keep the fire low,  
 not to transcend the extremity of pain,  
 lamentation and obsequious supplication for  
 crumbs. (*Marching ... 43*)

This ideology continues in the second stanza:

He believed it was his lot  
 to till the ground, harvest the crops,  
 starve and die, singing like the swan.  
 they uprooted his hope, burnt his home  
 and submerged him in the miasmatic delta

to crawl for food and shade.  
 when he complained of suffocation,  
 they bade him open his mouth  
 and farted into it,  
 while the crowd reeled with laughter. (*Marching ... 43*)

The above lines show the ignorance of the oppressed. Consequently, they accept to till the ground, harvest the crops, being submerged in the miasmatic delta to crawl for food and shelter, starve as their life portion. The toiling masses have only the faeces of the oppressors to eat. Thus, while their hope has been burnt, the only option left is to die.

On the contrary, Enekwe does not believe that death is the only option left for the oppressed. In line with his Marxist commitment, his poetry is geared to educate the masses towards their rights by exposing defameable conditions that infringe on their well-being. He portrays this in the third and fourth stanzas by arousing the consciousness of the oppressed not only to be witnesses, but active actors in the reversal of their deplorable reality:

Now the African lion has waken (sic)  
 roaring among the hills,  
 the minstrel show is over.  
 elephants limber. (sic)  
 cobras uncoil from withered branches  
 and stand firm by the path  
 oh what a day to live  
 among the sons of the sun!

what a joy to see you again  
 oh brothers, sons of *Amadioha*. (*Marching ... 43-4*)

Enekwe urges the masses to uncoil from the acceptance of suffering as their lot. The masses must, like the true sons of *Amadioha* usher in a revolution not only soused with lightning and laughing thunder, but filled with songs and bullets of angry returning children. The driving force for revolution sequels the dawn of *uhuru*. It is a fight resulting not only from European/African confrontation but from the tyranny of the local collaborator. “The Lion Wakes” invariably appeals to the masses to proclaim victory over oppression – political and economic slavery and thunder chants of liberty to herald an egalitarian vacuum filled with perfume of fresh roses. “Big Fish Eat Small Fish”, “Dictatorship” and “The Lion Wakes” reveal that Enekwe’s poetry, through in depth exposition of exploitation, oppression and leadership ineptitude does not only make prominent Enekwe’s revolutionary vision but serves as driving force for revolution that will help the masses throw off the yoke of oppression.

### 2.3 Corruption and Loss of Vision

Instances of corruption and loss of vision are further used by Enekwe as a force to drive the masses into revolutionary transformation of society. In “What do you do with all your power?” the poet awakes the inquisitiveness and impulse of the masses towards revolution. The poem encapsulates an incongruous use of power and a gross disenchantment in the rule of the elected:

What do you do  
 with all your power,  
 oh Emperor,  
 dizzy in your bower? (*Marching ... 33*)

Osundare notes that the poem shows “Enekwe’s denunciation of excess, his constant recourse to moderation” (“Foreword” 2005: VI). Enekwe seems to be obvious that the poem is for emperors; for dictators who are giddy because they are drunk with power and cannot control themselves. Christopher O’Reilly (2001: 6) observes that “in some countries, corruption has come to characterize much post independent politics”. Enekwe critiques this continuous misappropriation of the nation’s coffers as the next lines reveal:

What joy do you get  
from stolen wealth,  
snatched jewels  
and seduced belles? (*Marching ... 33*)

The poet goes further to state his disappointment in the sexual immorality that the likes of the emperor indulge: “What do you do / at dawn when it rains?” (*Marching ... 33*). The use of rhetorical question emphasizes and reveals the deceptive and indecent nature of the rulers who plunder the nation’s resources to satisfy their (sexual) desires. The poet-persona, in the following lines, thus not only intends to reveal his disgust for the rulers but to instigate the oppressed masses to rise up against the decadent attitude of the rulers:

Tickle the nipples  
of tipsy ladies?  
spray your anus  
with *eau de cologne*? (*Marching ... 33*)

Next, the poet introduces the fate that awaits them:

As you gloat over  
murdered prophets  
do you worry  
about harvest time  
when the sun will darken  
and grow cold? (*Marching ... 33-4*)

Images of harvest time, dark sun that grows cold are metaphors of the revolution envisioned by the poet. In addition, the images are deployed to awaken the masses on the onerous need to liberate themselves from the burden of oppression placed on them.

“Pot of unity” captures the revolutionary fate of the potpourri of Nigeria. Because of the rift created by the ruling class, the person who has the job of carrying the pot of unity and by metaphorical extension, the pot of equality, is struck by the terror of what emanates from a heated polity:

He who bore it first faltered by the cliff  
perplexed by the song of a groping populace.  
another carried it through the quick river of delay,  
across the seven hills where smoke and vapour boil.  
forward and backward was war.  
standing like an iroko  
terror hit him in the face. (*Broken ... 35*)

In the above lines, Enekwe portrays the fear and confusion of visionless and selfish leaders. Corruption, exploitation, injustice and insincerity have blinded their sense of selfless leadership. The poet crafts them as mystified by the impending revolution because smoke and vapour are boiling. Thus, he stumbles and falls. The driving force for revolution is inevitable. This is obvious in the following lines:

In the rain mixture of horror and despair

he stumbled and fell.  
 the pot broke and the blood-thirsty snakes  
 trailed off to the four corners,  
 boiling with venom. (*Broken ... 35*)

The blood-thirsty snakes represent the accumulated revolutionary temper and anger of the masses. Enekwe is of the view that these blood-thirsty snakes are eternal symbol of revolutionary impulse of the people of which the venoms are ready to boil out against any effort to dehumanize their rights in the society.

The title poem, "Broken Pots" pictures the tragic breaking of water pots from a village stream. In the first, second and third stanzas of the poem, the poet-persona describes the topography and nocturnal scene of the country side that heralds the noise of the broken pots. In stanza four, the poet-persona states:

We always hear, soft and clear,  
 like the wail of a lost lamb,  
 the voice of a virgin  
 whose pot of water  
 has slipped and crumbled  
 while its little fountain  
 lingers into our farm. (*Broken ... 13*)

The wailing voice of a virgin whose pot is broken makes obvious that the pots broken are not merely clay pots. The choice of a fragile earthenware pot as a symbol of virginity is not only very fitting and inciting but provokingly revolutionary. This is because the pot represents equality and unity of the nation. The harsh condition and subsequent deaths of the oppressed masses caused by the loss of vision and oppressive tendencies of selfish leaders sequels the breaking of pots and loss of virginity. Think of the deaths of loved ones, bills and all sorts of problems, lack of basic amenities even food, in the midst of abundant natural resources to mention but a few. Mothers thus end up lacking motherhood. And this has become a vicious cycle in the lives of the masses. From the foregoing, it seems obvious that Enekwe does not just recreate these oppressive historical archetypes but presents them as driving forces for inevitable revolution.

#### **2.4 Unfair Treatment and Untimely Death**

In "No way for Heroes to Die", "The Defiant One", "To a Friend made and Lost in war" and "Husbandman", Enekwe laments what unfair treatment and untimely death occasioned by loss of vision could do in the society. It is a situation whereby some privileged persons see themselves as super humans and more equal than others in a supposedly egalitarian existence. The poems are devoted to heroes who died in their attempt to stop the consequences of misrule. In "No way for Heroes to Die", Enekwe states clearly that he does not sing for heroes who are carved in stone for the blind to see, rather:

I sing to the memory of those who died to be  
 forgotten ...  
 I sing of Nzeogwu, Archibong and Atuegwu.  
 in the field, their scattered bones jeer  
 at the azure sky, and sneer at the masked  
 terrors of rainbows.  
 raindrops endow them with their colours  
 until they all dissolve in the perpetual  
 moulding of the earth  
 where the worms that groan endlessly in the  
 mud

tumble them through their guts  
 making a clamour within the crusts of eternity. (*Broken ... 21*)

Enekwe laments the tragic death of these heroes and how they were not accorded a befitting burial. Thus, their corpses are left for worms to feed on. There is nothing done to immortalize them but other “heroes” are carved to the extent that even the blind notice them. In the next stanza, Enekwe recounts how these heroes died:

... Nzeogwu died like a lamb ripped apart  
 by invisible  
 claws,  
 Archibong’s head dropped when a coward found  
 heroism ...  
 Atuegwu died in a dark cell while he waited for  
 prosecution. (*Broken ... 21*)

Enekwe continues that “Their resolve turned into folly/ by hungry historians and starveling professors” (*Broken ... 21*). The poet thus concludes in the last line that “this is no way for heroes to die” (*Ibid*). Enekwe did not just recount the inhuman treatment meted out to these heroes even unto death. But these lines are meant to evoke feelings of revolution in the reader. These are heroes who met a terrible fate in their quest for equitable distribution of material resources and treatment of individuals.

“The Defiant One”, devoted to Christopher Okigbo, “To a Friend made and Lost in war”, written in memory of Martin Utsu and “Husbandman”, equally written in memory of Pol Ndu are poems encapsulating the idea of no way for heroes to die. In stanza two of “The Defiant One”, the poet re-images the death of Okigbo:

So like the beheaded *iroko*  
 you stood till blasted  
 to the roots:  
 at the end of the carnage,  
 your generation walk,  
 poker-faced, unmindful  
 of your shadow. (*Broken ... 22*)

The image of *Iroko* evokes a feeling of importance. Among the Igbo, the *Iroko* tree is associated with greatness. This is why the death of a great man is euphemistically reported as “an *Iroko* has fallen”. The driving force for revolution in the above lines is implied in the ironical usage and appeal of the word “unmindful”. Realistically, Enekwe wants the generation of the fallen *Iroko* to rise up in defence of a just cause. They should be alive to always protest for their rights until it is achieved. Enekwe equally recounts the tragic death of Martin Utsu in “To a friend made and lost in war”:

Two days later,  
 Soviet bomber rockets  
 burst your belly  
 and tore your intestine  
 on the white sheet  
 of the hospital bed.  
 slowly your life spread  
 purple about you.  
 they bore you weeping  
 to another place

and tried to stitch you,  
to keep your soul  
from escaping in the purple flow.  
but you had too many holes. (*Broken ... 23*)

The above lines reflect oppression, suffering and death occasioned by avoidable war. The masses bear the brunt of such leadership excesses and recklessness. Furthermore, Enekwe likens the death of Pol Ndu in “Husbandman” to the violent end of the bird, *nza*:

He died with a song in his throat  
like a bird struck in mid air ...  
the cry of *nza* is lost in the violence of its end  
nothing is heard but claws  
and silences wet with blood.  
nothing is seen but battered steel,  
shattered glass, a pool of blood on a violent seat  
a blood-stained mangled car on a lonely road. (*Broken ... 32*)

In his introductory notes to the collection, *Broken Pots*, Chika Nwankwo (1977: x) holds that the above poems “reveal the best in Enekwe’s poetry. He feels deeply what he writes and his treatment of the pains of war and death is personal, running deep into his heart. This quality of sincerity of tone is a special mark of his poetry which lifts his works from mere sentimental pieces to profound explorations of the theme of human suffering”. The simile of a bird struck in midair and the deadly silences wet with blood parallels the car collision that killed Pol Ndu. Nwankwo further asserts that the image of the bird, *nza*, “is one of the most effective uses of traditional imagery in African poetry”(1977: xi). Invariably, these images from the death of these heroes who untimely died for their just cause are driving forces on the oppressed masses to continue in the struggle to change their ill-fated destiny.

From the fore going, Enekwe’s poetry is inevitably and profusely radical in the criticism of social malpractices and vices which undermine the well-being of the masses and consequently hinder the development of society. The intensity and concentration of revolutionary temper in the selected poems sequel facets of social malaise that cripple society. The poems further depict a new set of masters who mistreat their kinsmen. In this sense, Enekwe seems thus to have realized the role of the artist as enunciated by Ambanason (1996: 242): “to educate the masses especially the oppressed masses in such a way that they become imbued with a heightened sense of critical consciousness”. The aim and reality of Enekwe’s poetry could best be understood in the above. Enekwe’s Marxist commitment should thus be aptly deduced in his conviction that social change could come by massive psychic appeal and awareness to fight economic and political slavery and decadence.

### 3 Style and Language

The concept of style in literature is idiosyncratic. This emanates from the fact that every poet possesses a distinct style. Poets use style to satisfy various necessities. Leech and Short (1981: 11) explain that “style itself like many semi-technical terms has suffered from over definition and the history and linguistic thought is littered with unsuccessful attempts to attach a precise meaning to it ... style is a way in which language is used: that is, it belongs to ‘parole’ rather than ‘langue’”. Oha (2006: 343) holds that style is “a manner of discourse or tone of speaking, adapted in addressing others or in ordinary form of conversation, particularly of skilled construction in which the work of art is executed by individual artists of his time or place ....” Enekwe’s apt delineation of style to present the realities of oppression in the society, known and easily recognizable within the spectrum of a particular time and space is an obvious

substantiation of the above suppositions. For the poet, style is basic in considering the relationship between content and form on the one hand, and the effects the poet wants to achieve on the reader. He adopts his own type of language and aesthetic complexion which helps him to create significant ideas, images and metaphors aimed at stirring the oppressed masses into revolutionary struggle.

The importance of language in the study of style cannot be overemphasized. Language is the domain of style in literary discourse. Again, Leech and Short (1981: 3) aver that "... examining the language of a literary text can be a means to a further understanding and appreciation of the writer's artistic achievement". Brook (1973: 12) equally explains that the "primary function of language is to convey ideas from one person to another, but these ideas may be information, command or entreaty. Language is used to make it clear whether we are well or ill disposed towards the person addressed or it may simply be a way of calling attention to ourselves, the equivalent of a mild, depreciating cough, which may itself be a form of language". From the foregoing, language becomes an issue of choice depending on the encoding situation. It invariably represents the image of the writer at any given time. In the poetry of Enekwe, varied expressions are presented through various languages that appeal to the impulse of the masses to take revolutionary action against any form of social ill. Employing the language of persuasion, the poet invites the masses to unite and form a common stage to fight the structures that create and sustain their oppression.

The poet's use of language is outstanding. The motif of driving force for revolution is craftily soused with the language. Consequently, it allows the poet the freedom to engage in a revolutionary *tete a tete* and alliance with the masses. He makes use of conscious narrative and descriptive personae that narrate events and describe things with the minutest details. This narrative and descriptive vigour is portrayed in the following lines of the title poem, "Broken Pots":

we always hear, soft and clear,  
like the wail of a lost lamb,  
the voice of a virgin  
whose pot of water  
has slipped and crumbled  
while its little fountain  
lingers into our farm. (*Broken ...* 13)

The above is a detailed narration of the breaking of the pot of unity likened to the loss of virginity of a virgin. The breaking of the water pot which represents the unity and equality of the nation sequels the corruption and selfishness of oppressive leaders which made them blind from the welfare of the people. The effect of the tragic breaking of the pot is the revolutionary struggle evident in class schisms. The simple diction of the above lines does not make them non-poetic. The poet uses such epithets as would appeal to and mobilize the masses against the lack of vision and hypocrisy of the leaders. In this sense, Widdowson (1975: 42) reinforces that "at the heart of literary creation is the struggle to device patterns of language which will bestow upon the linguistic items concerned just those values which will convey the individual writer's personal vision".

Furthermore, there is seething anger, outrage and militancy in the language of Enekwe. The poet expresses a strong aversion to the cruelty of oppression on the masses. He employs open confrontation as a panacea to the existing oppressive system. Enekwe's confrontational and militant language is aptly captured in the rhetorical content of the poem, "What Do You Do with All Your Power?" The title suggests an incongruous use of power and a disappointment in the rule of the elected. The following lines equally suggest same: "what joy do you get/ from stolen wealth,/ snatched jewels/ and seduced belles?" (*Marching ...* 33). Evaluating Enekwe's use of language, Osundare (2005: vi) notes that "prominent ... is Enekwe's

denunciation of excess, his constant recourse to moderation". The above rigid language form expressed by Enekwe seems therefore like a keg of gun powder waiting to explode in the face oppression and brutality.

At other times, the persona employed by the poet draws the emotion of the masses through the use of narrative details as we see in "No Way For Heroes to Die". The poem captures the hopelessness that pervades the oppressive experiences as seen in the death of Nzeogwu, Archibong and Atuegwu. Enekwe thus writes:

I sing to the memory of those who died to be  
forgotten ...  
Nzeogwu died like a lamb ripped apart by invisible  
claws ...  
Archibong's head dropped when a coward found  
heroism ...  
Atuegwu died in a dark cell while he waited for  
prosecution  
Now, many years after, they are forgotten,  
their bones lost in the desert of their fall,  
their resolve turned into folly  
by hungry historians and starveling professors  
This is no way for heroes to die. (*Broken...* 21)

The allusive metaphors and descriptive epithets in the above lines are apt dictions in imaging the death of these people. The language further demonstrates a revolutionary gesture on the masses to perpetually continue in the resolve of these heroes. The use of language by Enekwe will not pose any problem to an average reader not just because it is simple and straightforward but because the circumstances of the deaths of the three heroes are familiar to both the poet and the Nigerian audience. The poet's use of language thus serves as a redemptive force that helps the masses to overcome the paucity, poverty and obnoxious circumstances that prevail in the society.

The poetic style of Enekwe thus reflects the gory realities of deprivation, dispossession and oppression that prompt the oppressed masses into revolt. The greatest achievement of the poet under study appears to be the deployment of appropriate language aimed at arresting societal ills and disequilibrium. Against this backdrop, Booker-Prize-winning author, Arundhati Roy, speaking at the 2005 World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, on the function of literature for our times avers that "our strategy should be not only to confront the empire, but to lay siege to it ... with our art, our music, our literature ... and our ability to tell our own stories" (qtd. in Emezue "Dialogism..." 2006: 224). In using style, this is obviously the objective of Enekwe. Fanon (1967: 177) further avers that

This is sufficient explanation of the style of those ... intellectuals who decide to give expression to this ... consciousness which is in process of being liberated. It is a harsh style, full of images, for the image is the drawbridge which allows unconscious energies to be scattered on the surrounding meadows. It is a vigorous style, alive with rhythms, struck through and through with bursting life; it is full of colour ... sunbaked and violent .... It reveals the need that man has to liberate himself from a part of his being which already contained the seeds of decay.

Being conscious, the poet realizes the immense problems of society and seek to use art as a tool to re-shape, re-direct and re-interpret the ideas and values of the society immersed in seeds of decay. Finally, the style of Enekwe is a pragmatic one which simultaneously realizes its respective goals of prodding the oppressed to be conscious of their deprived condition and to work hard to throw off the yoke.

#### 4 Conclusion

The poetry of Ossie Eneke is a direct, radical and violent response and reaction to the seeds of disequilibrium and decay in the society. It is a conscious move to revolutionize the consciousness of society. Eneke demonstrates that oppression suffered by the masses because of false ideas and ideologies can be eliminated if the people are willing to take the inevitable revolutionary steps to do so. Poetry from this study can thus be seen as a powerful weapon in moving people to dismantle oligarchies in the society, for in poetry, Eneke has shown how this can be done. The most affective observation however appears to be the implication of adapting the Psycho-Marxist approach in reading Nigerian poetry. From the research viewpoint, it seems that this approach helps to underscore the awareness on the part of the poet that his art serves a revolutionary transformative function in the society. The collections of poems, despite various headings, possess the dominant theme of revolution. This interpretational approach gives rise to a situation of mutual expectation and mutual fulfillment based on awareness of the functional abilities of the artist, his art and style. This, as it appears is one of the achievements of Psycho-Marxist reading of poetry. The effects of these achievements have been discussed in the study as can be seen in the appropriate deployment of inciting epithets, images and symbols. In conclusion, the poet has unequivocally used revolution as a driving force to awaken in the masses, the perpetual urge to throw off the burden of oppression placed on them by oppressive leaders.

For such collections of poems such as Eneke's *Broken Pots* and *Marching to Kilimanjaro*, each reading becomes an exercise in multiplicity of meaning and purpose. As conscious poet, these volumes attest to the idea that he was composing for fair and better co-existence in the society. This further underscores his authenticity of intention. Thus, the Psycho-Marxist approach to the reading of the poetry of Eneke offers a revolutionary understanding and mindset to contemporary Nigerian poetry.

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