

## The Social Realism and Poetic Eloquence in Jared Angira's Poems: She Has Not Dreamt and If

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper probes into Social Realism and Poetic Eloquence in Jare Angira's poetry. In this respect, the selected poems under scrutiny are "She Has Not Dreamt" and "If" as both draw a remarkable image of African tradition. As a Kenyan infant, Jare Angira, on the one hand presents to the public his Luo tradition related to the widowhood, and on the other hand, he depicts Luo beliefs in omens. In this analysis, what matters is the way Jare Angira resorts to achieve his goal in creating his fiction. Therefore, this analysis aims at answering the following fundamental question: How does Jare Angira succeed to create his social realism through poetic eloquence? To meet the goal of this research work, the thematic and linguistic approaches are of great help. As results gained through this analysis, the reader should retain that poetic eloquence can be noticed through what is written or spoken. Themes, being different situations which attract writers, it is revealed that writers resort for example, to rhetorical devices to present their concerns to the public. Indeed, writers or artists should first have the theme on which they express their thoughts and emotions. Then, they create their rhetoric according to the theme of their interest. In this respect, in "She Has Not Dreamt" and "If", Jared Angira does not fail at all. It sorts out that Jared Angira resorts first to the tradition and widowhood and beliefs in omens as different African concerns to present them to readers.

**KEYWORDS:** Social realism, poetic eloquence, tradition, widowhood, beliefs.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Poetry is one of the genres of literature also used by African children to express their thoughts and emotions. African poetry is shaped and colored by various tendencies for its production. In connection with that, Chinweizu and Ihechukwu (1980, P.163) state:

During the period under consideration, there were three major tendencies discernable in African poetry in English, namely: (1) the euromodernists, who have assiduously aped the practices of 20<sup>th</sup>-century European modernist poetry. These include Wole Soyinkka, JP. Clark, and the early Christopher Okigbo; (2) the traditionalists, who have sought to model their English-language poetry on elements from traditional African poetry. These include Mazisi Kunene, Kofi Awoonor, Okot P'Bitek and the later Okigbo; (3) a miscellany of individual voices of the middle ground who, unlike the euromodernists or the traditionalists, share no strongly distinguishing characteristics. These include Gabriel Okara, Lenrie Peters, and Denis Brutus.

Among these three tendencies quoted above, Jared Angira can be considered and categorized in the traditionalist tendency. In fact, "She Has Not Dreamt" and "If". Both draw a remarkable image of African tradition. People can notice on the one hand the presentation of Luo tradition related to the widowhood, and on the other hand, Luo beliefs in omens. In this analysis, what matters is the way Jared Angira resorts to literary devices so as to achieve his goal in creating his poetic eloquence. To achieve this analysis, sociological, thematic and linguistic approaches are of great help. Thus, this analysis is based on themes as social realities and rhetorical figures so as to define Jared Angira's social realism and poetic eloquence.

#### 1-Themes and social realism

It is nonsense to deal with social realism and poetic eloquence without having first a close regard on the thematic aspect. People in general can observe poetic eloquence through what is written or spoken. Themes are the key element for any eloquence to be seen. In other terms, themes are only part of social realities. For example, rhetorical devices do not come in vacuum. Writers or artists should first have the theme as any social

reality on which they express their thoughts and emotions. Then, they create their rhetoric according to the theme of their interest with a psychological dimension without which a work of fiction remains barren. A statement backed up by Blachère et al (1997: 31) when they recognized that “l’acte d’écrire étant une conduit, la création littéraire n’est qu’un cas particulier analysable, decomposable au même titre que les autres...”

Similarly, ‘violence’ is a fact of social realism since it is perpetuated among the actors of society. That is why Festus Lyayi, defining the term violence succeeds to convince readers on when violence can appear. Accordingly, he (1979: 185) writes:

In my understanding, acts of violence are committed when a man denied the opportunity of being educated, of getting a job, of feeding himself and his family properly, of getting medical attention cheaply, quickly and promptly.

In this respect, in “She Has Not Dreamt” and “If”, Jared Angira deals with the tradition and widowhood and beliefs in Omens as social realities in Africa.

### **1-1-Tradition and Widowhood**

When approaching Jared Angira’s poem “She Has Not Dreamt”, people can be attracted and impressed by the issue of tradition on the widowhood. In fact, the title ‘She Has Not Dreamt’, at first supposes that a female represented by the personal pronoun ‘she’ should have dreamt. The present title simply draws the reader’s attention towards a regret. One can imagine about the situation that requires a dream in order to be solve. Here the dream is totally upward.

In connection with that, Soyinka (1975, P.38) writes: “According to the Luo tradition, when a man dies, his widow cannot be married to another man until the widow admits verbally that she has had sexual intercourse with her deceased husband through a dream”.

At the first reading of the title, it can be noticed that the poem is about dream. From She Has Not Dreamt as the title of this poem, people can also sound worrying since they cannot figure out at the very beginning what the author means. Only when going through stanzas, it appears that the text is hard to understand since that the setting is hard to find and the historical context is also far from readers. Beyond, readers can also observe that the discourse is about a tradition. However, that tradition leads to sorrows when the person that should dream, has not dreamt:

#### **She Has Not Dreamt**

She has not dreamt  
my father  
and none can  
to wedlock mat guide her,  
the papyrus mat  
whistles silence  
the cold drives the dagger  
across her breast  
and the archeologists  
wrestle her bones ...

I enter the pier  
where lie some wrecks  
of ships of the past  
uncoated, nude, lone  
teeth protrude  
like carcasses  
the vultures left  
when they left in a hurry.  
Pebbles of broken pots  
after regeneration  
wrap to knees  
what I excavate.

(Poems of Black Africa, PP.38-39)

It is obvious that lines 4,5,6 are hard to understand by the reader, and what can be kept in the reader's mind is the sadness of the speaker in lines 1and 2. The widow was supposed to dream her deceased husband unfortunately she has not dreamt. That is to say that there could not be a new wedding for the widow as far as Luo tradition is concerned.

The remarkable fact through these stanzas above quoted is that, Jared Angira as a Kenyan infant and as a traditionalist writer offers this opportunity to the reader so as to learn about the Luo tradition about the widowhood. The fact is that, the stanzas are about a widow who should have dreamt but had not dreamt. That fact leads to sorrows. Angira as an African child also depicts a common African reality, mysticism and legend around death in connection with the widow and the late. In other words, he presents conditions for a widow to be married again with another man. Furthermore, the discourse is attributed to a person who has lost a father. Surely a son who despairs that the widow of his father has not yet dreamt about his father:

An overseer,  
contrast to science  
whips my bony back-  
I drowse, faint and rise  
to the lash ...  
**SHE DENIES EVER**  
**DREAMING MY FATHER.**

She wears his clothes  
In the mergence of rays  
(...)

In escaping  
crusts of salt  
fall on my ankle wound  
the cause of my suicide  
the twain ... the twain  
what of the orbits  
of those scattered stars  
and satellite moons?  
She stands aloof  
**AND DENIES**  
**EVER DREAMING MY FATHER.**

(Poems of Black Africa, PP.39-40)

It appears that in a certain time the speaker tells the story to whoever who wants to listen; and sometimes to his mother. Also like a conversation with the reader. What happens is the dead of a father and after the despair that the widow has not yet dreamt about the deceased husband. The son feels disappointed and full of sorrows. In the same way, beliefs in omens are illustrative for social realism.

### **1-2-Beliefs in Omens**

This section offers to the reader the opportunity to understand African beliefs in omens in African children's daily life. In Jared Angira's poem "If", beliefs in omens are highly considered. According to the [WWW.Vocabulary.com](http://WWW.Vocabulary.com) (on line) "An omen is an event or happening that you take as sign of something to come. It is believed to be a bad omen if a black cat crosses your path or if it rains on your wedding day". In the same token, [WWW.Collinsdictionary.com-omen](http://WWW.Collinsdictionary.com-omen) (on line) adds:

Omens generally get a bad rap – that is probably because a lot of them predict bad stuff, at least according to superstition. But the interpretation of omens really depends on the country and culture. What is considered an ominous sign in one place might mean a lifetime luck somewhere else.

In this respect, when reading Jared Angira's poem entitled "If", people can also really think of how Angira wants to present reasons related to things or events which can occur or often occur in people's daily life. The poem sounds interesting since that it rises the curiosity of any one only from its title. It can be seen that the

poem will be about the reasons hidden beyond what happens to people. In this regard, the passage below is illustrative:

**If**

a squirrel crosses my way  
while on a trip  
then luck is mine  
but when it's a cheetah  
or wild cat that crosses there  
I turn and go back.

I knock my right foot on stone

While on a trip

I melt in joy

Since I shall be overfed

But when it's the left

I turn and go back.

(Poems of Black Africa, PP.37-38)

The remarkable fact that can be observed through the poem is that, Jared Angira expresses African realities that is to say that he shows how people's future does not come in hazard. Angira confirms that in Africa there are signs people believe in. They are signs that should inform before what will happen in the future. Unfortunately, that knowledge is not shared to everyone but is still the privilege of the African elders. Angira brings the reader into the world of mystery and omens; owing the fact that for an African, the ancestors must be somewhere and communicate with them through signs. For example in stanza one above quoted Jared Angira resorts to animals namely: "a squirrel" to show calm and sign of good luck. However, he resorts to "a cheetah" to show symbol of danger: wild animal. In stanza two, people can notice the use body parts namely: "right foot" and "left foot". The use of them to show simply that signs can be presented in opposite way to show two contrary things. It is believed that only the ancestors are the ones who inform African people through the signs observable in their daily life. The ancestors are very powerful since that they are able to use any means to warn their people about any event or situation which can occur. Again and through the poem 'If', the reader can observe other omens:

I slip in my shirt  
the inside coming out  
I jump in merriment  
for I shall be overfed.

the first being  
I meet in the feeble dawn  
is an old woman  
I turn to my blanket  
it's all ill luck.

Stanza one above quoted shows that it is not common to sleep and have such a thing; there might be something not good at all. In stanza two, an old woman early in the morning symbolizes arguing all along the day.

In short, the poem is beyond the comprehension of non-Africans. The poet attributes his success to the god of luck. Signs of accompaniments enable him to know the outcomes of his visits would be. The use of animal imagery is to show calmness and wildness. "Squirrel" is a calm animal that also typifies good luck, elevation in African cosmology. While the lion like "cheetah" constitutes violence. Angira also thanks to the use of animals succeeds to show how signs can give pre-awareness of time to come. If tradition and widowhood and beliefs in omens constitute the social realism however, rhetorical figures will define Agira's poetic eloquence.

## 2-RHETORICAL FIGURES

It appears clearly that writers or artists also resort to rhetorical figures to create their poetic eloquence. Indeed, rhetorical figures (or figures of speech) are words or phrases that intentionally depart from literal meaning or standard grammar to create a more powerful, persuasive, or artistic effect, making communication more vivid and memorable, as seen in advertising, poetry, and speeches (online). They are so many and play an important role in communication and function also as stylistic tools that employ non-literal language to evoke emotion,

emphasize points, and engage audiences beyond the surface level of the words. In this regard, the present section analyzes euphemism, personification and capitalization.

### **2-1-Euphemism**

This sub-section casts light on shocking images or things that can be considered as unpleasant and taboo presented in good and soft ways by Jared Angira in his poems. According to the [www.grammarly.com](http://www.grammarly.com), the figure of speech euphemism is “derived from the Greek word “euphemismos”, which means “sounding good”. It is also added that euphemism is “a polite word or expression that is used to refer to things which people may find upsetting or embarrassing to talk about, for example sex, the human body, or death”. In connection with that, one can notice this:

A hen crows  
It must be killed  
Bad omen  
A dog howls  
Instead of barking  
The village owner  
Is at death's door  
And if I walk on my head  
Then I am dead.  
(From Jared Angira's poem If)

It sounds that Angira resorts to the figure of speech euphemism through the stanza mentioned above in lines six and seven: “The village owner” and “is at death's door”. Jared Angira uses euphemism to tone down the shocking idea of death. This figure of speech comes to proclaim the fatality of death. Generally speaking it is not easy or simple to communicate sad news or a negative opinion. It is only by using euphemism that people always succeed and avoid making other people uncomfortable when they talk about something unpleasant. In the same token the [www.grammarly.com](http://www.grammarly.com) puts it: “Writers use euphemisms to skirt around subjects that sound “bad”-taboo, embarrassing, sensitive topics –and including things like death, sex, money, and politics”. It is with the same stylistic purpose that readers can read:

She has not dreamt  
my father  
(...)  
the papyrus mat  
whistles silence  
(...)  
(From Jared Angira's She Has Not Dreamt)

The rhetorical figure euphemism can be observed in the line “whistles silence” quoted through the above stanza, line four. The word “silence” is used in this case so as to communicate mourning. In other words, this euphemism is emphasized in this stanza in order to soften the sorrow or the melancholy expressed by the child who lost his father. Thus, personification below, puts emphasis on human qualities or features observable through things or abstract ideas to convey something.

### **2-2-Personification**

When embarking into their writings, poets, novelists and other writers, resort to the representations of objects or qualities as human beings to convey something. It is only for artistic or literary effects that very writers often attribute human characteristics to things or abstract ideas to communicate. This technique in literature is called personification. It is also a figure of speech. In this regard, *Literary devices.net-personification (online)* put this: Personification can be used in a sentence to describe something concisely and also to bring a deeper meaning and connection to the object or virtue being personified. However, it is figurative and so it cannot be used in formal essays, any kind of professional or technical writing or to convey something literal.

In the same way, and according to the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, personification is defined as “the practice of representing objects, qualities, etc. as humans, in art and literature; an object, quality, etc. that is represented in this way”. Thus, when reading between the lines Jared Angira's poems, one can notice the use personification in this:

(...)  
the cold drives the dagger  
across her breast

and the archeologists  
wrestle her bones ...

It sounds that the figure of speech “personification” is visible through the line “the cold drives the dagger”. In fact, cold and drives are attributed special qualities. Readers can allude to human’s reality. According to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary, cold is “an adjective, 1- (of a thing) having a low temperature. 2- (of the weather) causing the air to be cold. 3- (of a person or animal) feeling the sensation of coldness...”. As for drives, readers can allude to direct a vehicle. The dagger is stabbing weapon similar to sword but with a short, double-edged blade. So, how can the cold drive the dagger? It can be done only by a person. The same figure of speech can also be observed in the extract below:

...the venereal that eats  
my salad potency  
a wind whispers good bye  
to the Three Stones  
around my being  
a father in my chapel  
(...)

According to the *Collins English Dictionary*, A wind is a “real or perceived movement of atmospheric air usually caused by convection or differences in air pressure.” Good bye, “interjection, farewell; a formula used to another person or persons when the speaker, writer, or person addressed is departing”. So, good bye as it is illustrated above can be used only by human beings not by a wind as it is presented in the extract quoted above. It is that the human characteristics are simply attributed to a “wind”. However, capitalization in the next sub-section draws readers’ attention to the prominence of specified words.

### **2-3-Capitalization**

It occurs that in grammar a capital letter is used at the beginning of the sentence. This also stipulates that after a full stop, the following sentence begins with a capital letter. Unfortunately, in some literary texts, writers dare use capital letters through the entire word or two or more words composing the sentence of a text. In this respect, Randolph Quirk Sidney (1972, P. 1079) explains that: “capitals are used to indicate spoken prominence for the words so specified”. In connection with that, Jared Angira appears to be fond of the use of capitalization:  
(...)

whips my bony back-  
I drowse, faint and rise  
to the lash ...  
**SHE DENIES EVER**  
**DREAMING MY FATHER.**

of those scattered stars  
and satellite moons?  
She stands aloof  
**AND DENIES**  
**EVER DREAMING MY FATHER.**

As it can be seen both are extracts from Jared Angira’s poem entitled “She Has Not Dreamt”. Capital letters are visible in both stanzas. The close analysis of this poem reveals that the personal pronoun “she” represents a “widow” who should have dreamt as illustrated in the preceded sections.

This analysis also shows “she has not dreamt” is a statement made by the son whose father is dead. This is confirmed by the lines: “dreaming my father” and “ever dreaming my father” Additionally, one can put the following question: what is Jared Agira’s motivation behind the repeated use of capital letters through both stanzas? The results obtained through their analysis reveal that capital letters are used and repeated for insistence. They simply emphasize the “dream” as an expected fact for the widow, the son of her deceased husband and the Luo community. Angira draws the reader’s attention toward the situation linked to the dream. According to the Luo tradition as already mentioned in the preceded sections, a widow cannot be married with another man before the dream of her deceased husband.

Through this dream the widow should have sexual intercourse with her deceased husband. If not the marriage with someone else will be impossible. The marriage cannot be done. Thus, the son of the deceased husband insists by saying “she denies ever dreaming my father”. In connection with that, Soyinka also appears to be fond of the use of capitalization:

*Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.  
“HOW DARK?” I had not misheard ..... “ARE YOU LIGHT  
OR VERY DARK?” Button B. Button A. Stench....*  
(From Wole Soyinka's Telephone conversation)

This demonstrates clearly that the expressions capitalized in lines two and three refer (for effects) to the landlady's racial prejudice towards the African and black colour of the skin, when she uses the words Dark or light. These words or expressions also highlight the landlady's reaction, emotions and shock. She is not really in a good mood to rent her apartment to an African who has a dark and black colour of the skin. It means that black colour does not seem too much familiar to her. Soyinka perfectly tries to present and describe the true atmosphere occurring through the telephone conversation. He appears to vary by the use of capitals to show that the capitalized expressions are said differently.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The social realism and poetic eloquence in Jared Angira's poetry have been the main concern of the present analysis. As for the results gained through its analysis, the reader should retain that, poetic eloquence can be noticed through what is written or spoken. Themes are different situations as social realities which attract writers. It is revealed that they resort for example, to rhetorical devices to present their concerns to the public. Writers or artists should first have the theme on which they express their thoughts and emotions. Then, they create their rhetoric according to the theme of their interest. In this respect, in “She Has Not Dreamt” and “If”, Jared Angira does not fail at all. It results that Jared Angira appears to resort first to the tradition and widowhood and beliefs in omens as different African concerns so as to present them to readers. As for the Tradition and Widownhood, Jared Angira in the poem “She Has Not Dreamt”, forces people to be attracted and impressed by the issue of tradition on the widowhood. In the Luo tradition, when a man dies, his widow cannot be married to another man until the widow admits verbally that she has had sexual intercourse with her deceased husband through a dream.

Additionally Angira succeeds in presenting to readers beliefs in Omens through the poem “If”. As results, Angira presents reasons related to things or events which can occur or often occur in people's daily life. The poem sounds interesting because it rises the curiosity of any one only from its title. Jared Angira expresses African realities that is to say that he shows how people's future does not come in hazard. Angira confirms that in Africa there are signs people believe in. They are signs that should inform before what will happen in the future. The ancestors are very powerful since that they are able to use any means to warn their people about any event or situation which can occur. Thus, to be convincing as a writer, Jared Angira also resorts to rhetorical figures. He succeeds to define poetic eloquence in resorting to rhetorical figures and the social realities in resorting to the tradition of the widowhood and beliefs in omens.

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