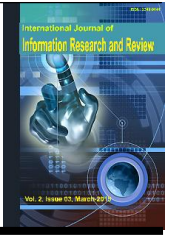




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## Review Article

# THE TRENDS AND SHIFTING PARADIGMS IN LITERARY RESEARCH AND THE TEACHING OF POETRY: THE EXAMPLE OF ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON

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### ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to examine the trends and shifting paradigms in the teaching of poetry in Anglophone Cameroon. The main thrust of the argument of this paper is built around the hypothetical contention that the three phases that characterized the evolution and development of Anglophone Cameroonian poetry have facilitated the teaching of this genre. The three phases which are adopt, adapt and the adept have constituted the framework for this pedagogic methodology. Using the New historicist critical theory and the precepts enunciated by Erwin R. Goodenough, G. Van der Peet, M. Afr. and Walter Lippmann, for the evaluation of the poetry of Bernard Fonlon, Bongasu-Tanla Kishani, *Konglanjo!*(1988) and John Ngong Kum Ngong's *Snatched from the Grave*, (2010) this paper proposes a thorough consideration of these three phases in the teaching of poetry.

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## INTRODUCTION

The teaching of poetry in Anglophone Cameroon is a herculean task. Most students of African literature get scarred at the mention of poetry. One of the concerns of this article is to demystify the mystery that surrounds the teaching of poetry in Anglophone Cameroon and even Africa because the trend and shifts in paradigms in the development of African poetry is the same. The paper recommends new strategies in the teaching of this genre. The early Anglophone Cameroonian poets like most early African poets started by imitating western poets. In their style they follow European models and in their content they adopt the ideology and social forms of colonialism without argument or reflections. Everything European from the outset was considered to be superior and progressive. This is the adopt phase. In the second phase the poets continued with European style of writing, but the content of their works addressed African concerns. The greatness of most African poetry in the early 50s and late 60s was due to the mythological echoes and allusions to African culture. Early African poetry of the 60s can be conceived from mythological symbols in the form of patterns or themes which are drawn from African cultural aesthetics. As such, the use of mythological archetypes would contribute to the understanding of the style and meaning of this poetry.

The reliance upon these mythological images, the intensity, depth and suggestiveness of their relevance accounts for the very foundation of the African existence. This is the adapt stage. In the final stage, it is a sort of cultural declaration where the poets in both form and content are adept. In the early 1950s and 1960s, Judo-Christian mythology which was an anathema and an impediment to social and cultural progress in Africa is today considered as a fundamental element in poetic composition. However, in early 2000, there is a shift from African mythological references to Judo-Christian mythology as seen in John Ngong Kum Ngong's poetry. Here, literary and mythical references are to the Bible in this poetry, the meanings of which may be suggestive of total archetypal situation, serve as devices for achieving many-leveled meanings, social, political and moral depths. These trends and shift in paradigms should be underscored in the pedagogic methodology in the teaching of poetry.

### Objectives of the Study

Basically the objectives of this paper are two-fold. The first objective is to examine the ideological posture and the linguistic and expressive mode of Anglophone Cameroonian poets from the early 50s to the early 2000. Fonlon will be used as the frame of reference for the category of poets who emerged in the early 50s, and Bongasu Tanla-Kishani and John Ngong Kum Ngong will be used as poets who emerged in the 80s, and 2000 respectively.

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From the early 1950s to early 2000, Anglophone Cameroonian poetry has witnessed three trends in its evolution and development. This shift in paradigms takes three phases: the 'adopt' phase, 'adapt' and 'adept' phases. Secondly, this paper proposes the methodology that can be adopted in analyzing and teaching of poetry by considering the various stages in the evolution of this genre. This paper, therefore, sets out to examine the shifting paradigms in Anglophone Cameroonian poetry against the backdrop of these three phases. This trajectory in this shift is worth investigating because one of the fundamental concerns addressed in this paper is that each historical epoch dictates and determines the mode, tone, ideas and the expression of thoughts. Thus, the study shows that to an extent there has been a shifting in aesthetic and ideological positions from the dense texture, sophistication and cultural reflective features of early poetry to a less dense, less sophisticated and more socially, politically and committed poetry of the 1990s and after.

### Statement of the Problem

The fundamental problem addressed in this paper is the parochial views of teachers of poetry who tend to ignore the three phases that characterized the development and evolution of Anglophone Cameroonian poetry. This study argues that for this poetry to be successfully taught these three trends are crucial. For example, while Bernard Fonlon is influenced by the western models of writing, John Ngong Kum Ngong uses the Judo-Christian myth to address the socio-political concerns of the Cameroonian society.

Based on the statement of the problem as stated above, the following questions are crucial in the understanding and appreciation of this paper:

- What trend does the teaching and research in poetry assume in Anglophone Cameroon?
- Can the Judo-Christian mythology effectively interpret African socio-political and cultural realities?
- Is such a work aesthetically appealing and ideologically fulfilling?
- What is the relationship between African mythology and Judo-Christian mythology?
- What is the impact of this shift paradigm in teaching poetry and literary research on the Cameroonian society?

In view of the problem as stated and the research questions as posed, this paper sets out to examine the trends, methodological implications and shifting paradigms in the teaching of poetry in Anglophone Cameroon. The main thrust of the argument of this paper is built around the hypothetical contention that the three phases that characterized the evolution and development of Anglophone Cameroonian poetry have pedagogic and methodological implications on this genre. The three phases are adopt, adapt and the adept.

### Theoretical framework

The evaluation and analyses of the poetry of these three poets will be done against the backdrop of the new historicist critical theory and the Judaea-Christian critical paradigm. These two critical paradigms are relevant because they help in the contextualization of the various historical epochs in which each poetic piece was produced.

Since poetry relies on the manipulation of language for its success, it becomes complex, oblique and elliptical. This complex, oblique and elliptical nature of poetry requires a particular methodology to analyze it. In order to realize the work, I have adopted a simple methodology which consists in the main of a broad reading of the selected poems in which their content, aesthetics and social contexts are taken into consideration. Here, what is of paramount importance is the perception of poetic signs, language and symbols. And to achieve these, new historicism and the Judea-Christian precepts as articulated by Erwin R. Goodenough, G. Van der Peet, M. Afr. and Walter Lippmann would be utilized. The new historicist critical theory gained currency in the literary academia in the 1980s as a counter discourse to the American text-based approach known as New Criticism. Critics of New Criticism gave an intrinsic analysis of literature, thereby, treating a literary text as an autonomous self-sufficient entity quite separate from society, history or any external causal agent. The new historicists, however, take the contrary view and contend that literature is the product of a particular socio-historical and cultural context and should therefore be interpreted against the background of its context. Hence, its interpretation can only be meaningful and relevant when the historical circumstances under which the text was created are taken into consideration. Proponents of this approach to criticism include Laurence Lerner, Jerome McGann, Irving Howe, Paul Ricoeur, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher.

The Judea-Christian mythology constitutes the views enunciated by Erwin R. Goodenough, G. Van der Peet, M. Afr. and Walter Lippmann. Erwin R. Goodenough in *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* has articulated concepts and precepts that are fundamentally relevant in the evaluation of Ngong's poetry. Goodenough was a religious historian. He pursued a contemplative life with interest in Scripture on the one hand and philosophy on the other. The fundamental contention in the book is the move toward the Almighty and the rejection of the worshipping of cult objects. He argues "Christianity continued the Jewish slanders against pagan religious life, to the point that still one who sees any good in pagan religious is accused of anti-Christian bias." (85) Goodenough frowns at the type of argument advanced by Walter Lippmann in *A Preface to Morals*, when he submits: By the dissolution of their ancestral ways, men have been deprived of their sense of certainty as to why they were born, why they must work, whom they must love, what they must honor, where they may turn in sorrow and defeat. They have left to them the ancient codes and the modern criticism of these codes, guesses, intuitions, inconclusive experiments, possibilities, hypotheses. Below the level of reason, they may have unconscious prejudice, they may speak with a loud cocksureness, they may act with fanaticism. But there is gone that ineffable certainty which once made God and His Plan seem as real as the lamp-post. (20) But Goodenough's position concurs with Lippmann where the latter contends that "The place where man vitally finds God...is within the experience of goodness, truth and beauty, and the truest images of God are therefore to be found in man's spiritual life". (21) From these views backed and reinforced by Scriptural references, it can be argued, from the appreciation of Ngong's poetry that his poetic discourse is informed by the teachings of the Bible.

By proposing an explanation to the Biblical symbology in his poetry, Ngong is forcing the scholarly African world to reconsider its consensus and to come to a thoughtfully reappraisal of its existence for the betterment of mankind.

### The Adopt Phase: The Case of Bernard Fonlon

This is the very first phase of writing in Africa. These early writers started their career by imitating European models of writing. Janheinz Jahn in *A History of Neo-African Literature* contends:

Anyone who writes begins as an apprentice. His school supplies him with the tools: literacy and the models for him to follow. Many writers remain imitators all their lives, while others sooner or later achieve an individual style. Since the African civilizations had no written alphabet of their own until they came into contact with Islamic and Western civilizations, the African apprentice, learning to write, is also an apprentice to foreign cultural influences. (89)

From the above citation, it could be argued that all postcolonial literatures seem to make this transition. They begin with an unquestioning acceptance of the authority of European models with the ambition of writing works that will be masterpieces in this tradition. This is what is referred to in this paper as the adopt phase of colonial literature since the writer's ambition is to adopt the form as it stands, the assumption being that it has universal validity.

Bernard Fonlon wrote following Western methods of poetic composition. His poetic language is couched in dense images such that its meaning at time poses the problem of comprehension. In most of his interviews, Fonlon admitted that he was tremendously influenced by Western writers like Virgil, Scott, Burns and Tennyson. Fonlon, like his predecessors, believed that writing was painstaking craftsmanship. Consequently such writers had a deep respect for the rules of the art. These rules could best be learnt from close study of the classical authors (Horace was a favorite) and by careful (if not sedulous) imitation of their works. Their approach was thoroughly professional, and that decorum was essential. Poetry was something written with a particular meter, rhyme scheme and a stanzaic form. Fonlon affirms this in an interview he granted to the editors of *Balafon: An Anthology of Cameroon literature in English*: "When I was in my seminary I was serious about the required studies. But I also stumbled on certain poets' books on my own and read them. I was especially touched by Scott's poetic skills. By reading such poets I got to know how to use very simple expressions very clearly and understandably". (Taille and Tarkang, 1986:158).

Fonlon further confirms that, 'I wouldn't say that I am a poet, only that I love poetry – Scott, Tennyson, Burns and so on. I wanted to be a poet, so I bought books to study style. After studying, I began to write not for the public but for friends' (Taille and Tarkang, 1986:159). Finally, although Fonlon wants to write like his Western mentors, this does not prevent him from drawing from his own cultural landscapes to enrich his poetry. The following poems will be used for the analysis and illustration: "The fear of future years" (1963) and "Gem

of the Highlands" (1978) Fonlon's 'The Fear of Future Years' is a tale of frustration, fears, uncertainty and emptiness.

This poem is reminiscent of the poet's abortive stay in the seminary. The poet/persona had a premonition of an impending doom: his dismissal from the seminary. The poem begins in a cheerless manner as the speaker expresses the sadness in his soul due to the disappointment he feels about the outcome of his youthful strife. However, what is crucial here is the stress on the manipulation of language; the use of contraction, rhyme scheme and rhythm. Fonlon's poetry like the poetry of his counterparts in the 1950s and 1960s is dominated by the imagist concept which perceives poetry as image-making, a pure intellectual exercise:

- Oft, in my cheerless hour
- When, in my soul, 'tis stormy
- For, then, it seems
- The cherished dreams
- That urged my youthful strife,
- And make me strain
- In sun and rain
- Must end a wasted life (Fonlon, 1963:140)

There is some degree of disillusionment. The predicament of the poet/protagonist stands not only for himself, but for his own generation as well. Life is seen here as a waste. Life is perceived as a changing flow in which the relationship between the past, present and future is improbable, although logically necessary in terms of causality and continuity. The poem, with its precise, tightly articulated economical presentation of images is reminiscent of the Euromodernist style. The iambic pattern of the poem, the stressed and unstressed pattern, coupled with the alternate rhyme scheme of [a b a b] emphasize the process of change in the poem as analogy to an ever-changing reality. In trying to understand reality, there is a tension between the series of images which can take varied significances and meanings; for instance, the poet/protagonist's soul is 'stormy'. Metaphorically, the poet's heart is heavy and burdened with the trials and travails of this world.

'The Fear of Future Years' is self-reflective. For example, the poet talks about the stormy nature of his soul and concludes that 'In sun and rain', he wasted his life. The sun and rain are powerful images in this poem. The sun stands for good days and rain symbolizes difficulties in life.

The setting or the environment in which the speaker/poet operates is a symbol of frustration, disillusionment, emptiness and disgust. The poem is suffused with images of death, decay and sterility. Hear the poet persona:

- I see my dying bed
- The futile years behind it
- A life all fruitless led
- With scarce a soul to mind it
- Those hopes absurd
- In youth that spurred
- All shrunk like fountains dried
- One thing alone
- Allays my moan

The thought I had dried. (Fonlon, 1963:14)

The speaker in making such negative confessions and declarations about the futility of his life is making use of the central concern of oppression and discrimination in the place that is supposed to be preaching against such vices. This particular poem was published in 1951 when the poet was receiving his training in the seminary in Enugu (Nigeria) as a priest under the tutelage of the white priests. However, the richness of this poem lies not in the originality of these negative and obnoxious declarations about his life, but in the various images and allusions which deepen the thought and feeling of this poem. For example, the simile "Those hopes absurd/In youth that spurred/All shrunk like fountains dried". (1963) The speaker/poet compares his abortive stay in the Seminary to "dried fountains". The diction in this stanza brings out the disillusionment of the poet: 'dying bed', 'futile years', 'fruitless led', 'scarce a soul to mind', 'hopes absurd', 'my moan' and 'fountain dried'. All art builds on previous art and is a form of imitation, modification or revolution. Often, someone else's poem gives Fonlon an idea of the form in which to work and his own poem is a modern revision and reinterpretation. He confirms this in the interview he granted to *Balafon* when he admits that he was inspired by the poetic writings of Burns, Tennyson Scott etc. (158) Commenting on this particular poem, Andrew T. Ngeh contends, "The darkness of the title, 'The Fear of Future Years' obviously has a literal sense as referring to Fonlon's dark days in the seminary before he was dismissed; but it also has several other significances. The first is the darkness of the fallen spirit, morals in contrast to those who live by spiritual illumination. There is, however, a second or contrasting meaning of darkness. It can be the negative way Africans were treated in such places. The Divine can be unknowable darkness as well as the light". (108) In "The Fear of Future Years" it is clear that the poet is preoccupied with his personal predicament. No one can afford to fossilize at the stage of mere possibilities. We must embrace the reality of commitment both at the personal and public levels. For, only the concept of commitment to ourselves, our social problems, our political oscillations, and our universal dilemma can enable us move on. Thus, Fonlon's private worries have a bearing on his socio-political and cultural environment.

The second poem treated in this article is 'Gem of the Highlands'. This poem paints a picture of disunity in an African community caused by neo-colonial politics with its attendant ills of materialism, exploitation, individualism and capitalism. The beauty of this landscape becomes a victim of the nefarious activities of neo-colonialists:

- Gone, the wild scapes of yestreen
- Gone, the once roaring linn!
- With tillage ever spreading
- The streamlet is thin (Fonlon, 1978:277)

The poet explores the destructive tendencies of foreigners who do not value the landscape which is metaphorically described as a 'gem'. He further harps on the division brought by these strangers or strange politics. The Fon, the traditional administrator is no longer respected. The poet regrettably states:

- Where the clansman was ready
- To die for the Fon
- A new husting liar

- Puts peace on the run. (Fonlon, 1978:277)

The poet bemoans and laments that this 'new husting liar' has divided the hitherto united community. The poet ends up making a passionate appeal for a reversal of the situation:

- May the fierce deadly Levin
- Wipe out his domain
- May the ties that bound fondly
- Bind us once again;
- Let the ashes of discord
- Be buried in urn;
- May thy clansmen as yestreen
- Rove free ov'r bank and burn (Fonlon, 1978:277)

In terms of the poet's diction, it is evident that he has been influenced by the Irish dialect. Indeed early poets like Fonlon saw poetry writing as a serious profession and wrote like their Euromodernist mentors, but their modernism is that which does not inhibit but that which provides a liberating poetic force, allowing the poets to draw from the western, Ancient and their own cultural landscapes to enrich their poetry, thereby making it available to a larger public with different but tenable interpretations. It is this multifariousness of tenable interpretations that gives this poetry its sophistication and grandeur. Words like 'fen', 'glen', 'yestreen', 'bonnie', 'braces' are not contemporary English words, but the poet has used them to provide the poem with a certain rhythmic quality which heightens the emotional impact on the reader. Though Fonlon's language is English, he has chosen English out of historical and cultural necessity. The poet's use of the Irish dialect and the English language has helped him to break loose and fashion his own poetic expression. The blending and reconciliation of language and ideology is a strong recommendation of the new historicist critical theorists. To conclude the first section of this paper, it is important to underscore the fact that the "adopt phase" in Anglophone Cameroonian poetry follows European models, and in its content adopts the ideology and social forms of colonialism or approves them without argument or reflection. Any European form from the outset was assumed to be superior. That explains Fonlon's conformity to European's poetic models in the two poems studied above. After the adopt stage, there was a shift in both aesthetics and ideology. This has been described in this paper as the "adapt" phase

### The Adapt Phase: Bongasu's Poetic Vision

Commenting on this second phase, Janheinz Jahn argues that, "...the writer becomes uncertain and decides to go back into his past...But as he is not integrated with his people, as his relations with them are from outside, he confines himself to remembering. Old episodes of childhood will be brought up from deep down in his memory, old legends will be reinterpreted according to "borrowed" aesthetics and a conception of the world discovered beneath different skies. Sometimes this pre-struggle literature will be dominated by humor and by allegory. A period of anguish, of uneasiness, experience of death and also disgust. He is sickened with himself; but already, from below, laughter is breaking through. (277) The adapt stage aims to adapt the European form to African subject matter, thus assuming partial rights of intervention in this genre. Although the poets who wrote during this time concentrated on African cultural concerns, the form is modeled on European methods.

Bongasu is one of the early Anglophone Cameroonian poets who adapted the European form to African cultural concerns. Two of his poems will be used for illustrations: "Konglanjo" and "Our Way" Bongasu's "Konglanjo" which is the title poem in his collection entitled *Konglanjo* is a demonstration of the authenticity and credibility of the African way of life before the coming of the white man to the African continent. This particular poem debunks the views held by some Eurocentric writers/critics like Charles Larson, Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary who had misrepresented the African people in their works by insinuating that they did not have a culture. The western view that the Africans did not have a culture, a civilisation and a way of life is contested because the African people, as Achebe has argued, "did not hear of the word culture for the first time from the Europeans". Bongasu was therefore influenced by the cultural realities of his society. He tries to reconstruct one of the African societies before the coming of the colonial rulers. Chinua Achebe argues in "The Role of a Writer in a Nation" "... African people did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity (10).

This poem is therefore a celebration of African cultural values with all their positivity. The poet/ persona in "Konglanjo" for instance appeals to Nga'a-Mbom for good harvest, peace, fertility and unity amongst his people. He makes his passionate appeal:

- Within the rhythms of the season!
- May the evildoer and the warrior miss their way!
- May we build on the epitaphs of ancestral feats!
- May the realms of our households never dwindle
- Under our feet
- May our offspring hunt for game of therapeutic inspiration. (15)

The poet looks at the past with some nostalgia. He highlights the communal spirit that reigned in Africa before the colonial master came and introduced individualism. That is colonialism and neo-colonialism replaced the social collectivism that prevailed in Africa with individualism. "Konglanjo" expresses the political, religious, psychological and philosophical aspects of the African communal existence. For example, while calling on "Nga'a'-Mbom" to unite and purify the land, the high priest pleads for more harvest among other things. The speaker, however, thinks his people have to watch out against the influence of alien cultures because they can be insidious and devastating to the African way of life.

- Here
- Heralds – emerge
- Struggling and nagging like hunting dogs
- With the unposted omens of their incoming;
- On the one hand they displayed a new coin of faith
- On the other a new arm-quiver of knowledge. (27)

The "new coin of faith" stands for the alien culture, which threatens the African culture. The poet seeks to recreate dignity in a people's past but he cautions the people to be on guard because of the hurricane of western culture and even globalisation.

He concludes the poem by saying that even if the Africans have been taken in by the western culture and values, they should not forget the ways of their forefathers: If now we must march on like rivers ...on the bigamous banks of ancestors and youth, with the footholds of new clothing and monetary units of new carvings and names ... Heralds!

- Those who inspire the way,
- Those who inquire a way
- Walk within the wisdom steps of their inquiry. (30)

The poet insinuates that even if the Africans do not know where they are going to, at least, they should know where they came from. And it is only their culture that can give them these directives. He uses the past to evaluate the present situation and anticipate the future. The writer, should therefore, not only dwell in the past because the past is only a transitional stage in which he must prepare the ground for the present and the future. It is only a stage for comprehension of the values with which he must judge and recommend the choices for the present and the future. This poem is a recreation of the dignity of a people without any romanticization and idealisation although it is nostalgic in tone. The poet/persona makes this very clear:

Re-echo our feats and failures up and down/ Time's sun and rain within the planets. (30). The poet/persona admits that the African culture had/has its strong and weak points; that is the African culture had/has its good and bad aspects. This therefore means that early poets proffered an objective presentation of African culture. The alliteration, 'feats' and 'failures' (f, f,) reinforces the objective perception of African cultural reality. African civilisation and culture had and still has its strong and weak points, which the poet has metaphorically described as "Feats and failure". This shows that as glorious and as good as African culture was, and is, it had/has its own weaknesses. The sun stands for those positive aspects of African culture and the rain symbolizes the negative aspects. The objective presentation of African social/cultural reality was one of the preoccupations of early Anglophone Cameroonian poets. Besides the quest for cultural roots, the poet also demonstrates the impact of the coming of two cultures together.

Bongasu in this particular poem gives an exhaustive account of the use of the oral traditions in modern African poetry. However, what this paper preoccupies itself with is the ideological and aesthetic shifts motivated by the use of the oral forms, and the effectiveness with which these are integrated into English. Bongasu tends to highlight the cultural aesthetics and underplay the economic so that the dominant feature of his authorial ideology can be characterized as cultural nationalism, expressed with feeling and conviction.

In another poem entitled "Our Way", Bongasu has demonstrated that the meeting of African and western cultures had a devastating effect on the Africans. But he seems to be saying that in spite of this contact, African culture is still viable as it is important. "Our Way", for example, is a lyrical poem which exalts the characteristics of the speaker/poet's culture in song form. It is an overt and open acceptance of what his culture stands for.

This is seen in the juxtaposition of the characteristics of African and western cultures in the poem. The title of the poem "Our Way" is suggestive as opposed to their way. (Western way of life) The poet appeals to the contemporary audience to conserve and preserve the positive aspects of their time-honoured cultural heritage.

- Fend it eagerly
- then poke it duly
- distilling the issuing flames
- for
- it's your grace
- before your face
- it's our gold
- within our fold. (40)

Africans must jealously "fend" and protect their culture eagerly. The poet compares the African culture with gold because his culture is too precious to him. He tries to discard the negative views of Europeans vis a vis African culture. The western scholars have always looked for means to justify the fact that Africa did not have a history and civilisation. These European scholars saw African history as an appendage of European history. All these were calculated attempts to refuse the existence of an African civilization and culture. Seen from this perspective, Bongasu in one of his poems titled "Emancipation" seems to be advising and cautioning Africans in general and Cameroonians in particular (who have been held captive by European cultural values) to emancipate themselves from the malicious and dangerous myth that Africa does not have a culture and a civilisation.

Africans and Cameroonians will continue this onslaught against western values until they win. The poem, "Emancipation" is an expression of the poet's conviction that in the face of western influence, the African must preserve and conserve his cultural heritage and even fight to regain what has been lost. This is more of a psychological fight, which involves a realisation of who he is. In this poem, the poet uses the image of the fireplace to represent the core and the centre of tradition to which he is tied and to which he must return to find fulfilment and solace.

In the village, the fireplace occupies the central position in the hut around which the family gathers. Here it symbolizes the tradition around which everyone must gather; and it is during such gatherings that the elderly ones narrate the legends and myths of their community to the young ones. This is another way of cultural resuscitation. Yes, around the fire place/ Where our youths rebuild guitar-bridges/ With the broken calabashes. (31) However, the first stanza of the poem indicates a breakdown in tradition and culture conveyed in the image of 'broken calabashes'. When the calabash, which symbolises the cultural repertoire of this community, was intact, traditional rural life was also intact considering that this calabash stores fresh water. Fresh water here stands for the traditional and cultural values and virtues, which have been adulterated by western values. In those days, they were "free and fair" and their values in life well-guarded in "sacredness and lore". The poet states;

- with the broken calabashes,
- wherein, intact, we had fetched

- and stored the fresh water
- from the streams of our free days;
- around the sacred spring-forest
- where militant snakes with silent tread
- dwell and guard and muse
- in the silence of sacredness and lore. (31)

In the second stanza, the poet points out the fact that traditional values have become echoes from which he cannot flee though he is surrounded by the cultural paraphernalia of the West. This is found in the foreign names Africans have adopted and the foreign languages they speak:

- So
- amorously human
- our anointed memories of echoes
- endure in stamina
- around our fireplaces and whetstones,
- Yet, still fleeing away
- from their savage deeds
- with murmurs of defiance,
- aching but never ticking away
- with those taximeters of market-days
- and crops of slavery, linking us
- to lost names, lost tongues (31)

The poet in the following stanza seems to hold that the core of tradition remains even in the face of the encroachment of western values. He concludes by adopting a militant tone in which he seems to suggest that the African has to recapture the past in order to be whole again:

- I believe
- The hub remained behind
- In the slave-songs of shrivelled liberties
- We never recapture to scan and sing
- Until we win. (31)

The poem is also an attack on slavery and cultural imperialism, which have led to the disappearance of African names and African indigenous languages:

- and crops of slavery, linking us
- to lost names, lost tongues (31)

The poem is poetically rich. The poet could not have expressed his views the way he has done without using language that best conveys his feelings and thoughts. His peculiar use of language is seen in his choice of words, figures of speech and sound devices. The title of the poem, "Emancipation" for instance is very apt. It is a dense symbol with metaphorical possibilities. This word is usually used to refer to a wish to be free from political, judicial or social restrictions. In everyday usage, it is a wish to be free from some derogatory or detrimental situations to one that is more rewarding. An obvious example is the emancipation of women. A modern use of the word connotes a move towards western values. But in the context of this poem, the poet is propounding the reverse. He seems to be proposing a move away from western values towards African values, that is, African culture and tradition.

The militant tone of the poet is reinforced by a series of alliterations; for instance, “slave songs of shrivelled” (s, s, s). Again, we have “scan and sing”. (s, s,) Furthermore, there is “until we win”. (w, w,). It is this militant tone that urges the poet to also celebrate his culture in another poem entitled “Our Way”. Finally, the structure of the poem, “Emancipation” lends it unity that makes the poet’s message fluent and lucid. In the first stanza, the poet creates a setting based on tradition. At this early stage he presents a crack in the whole set-up: ‘broken calabashes’. In the second stanza, the crack widens in the use of the words ‘lost names’ and ‘lost tongues’. The last stanza seems to show the poet’s stand. His use of the words ‘our’, ‘I’, shows how involved he is in the fight against cultural imperialism. It is evident that what he writes about touches his very essence. The use of “I” and “our” shows both the individual and collective efforts in restoring African culture. The poet thinks that the fight for cultural resuscitation and restoration should be waged at two levels: the individual and the collective.

In conclusion, it could be said that Anglophone Cameroonian poetry that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1980s changed in accordance with the new realities in the country/continent, defined its province and focusing graphically on the Cameroonian/African scene both in form and content. Its images are primal and highly localised. It is this change of poetic temperament that is here referred to as the adept phase, showing clearly that there has been a shift in content and aesthetics in modern Anglophone Cameroonian poetry as the society evolves. The final phase is the adept stage.

### **The Adept Phase: Towards a Judea-Christian Aesthetics: Ngong’s Poetic Vision**

In the third phase there is, so to speak a declaration of cultural independence whereby Anglophone Cameroonian poets remake the form to their own specification, without reference to European norms. This might be called the adept phase, since its characteristic is the assumption that the colonial writer is an independent adept in the form, not a humble apprentice as in the first phase. (Peter Barry, 195) This phase is also called the struggle stage, where the colonised writer, after trying to lose himself in the people and with the people, sets out on the contrary, to shake out their lethargy. Here is protest, revolutionary and national literature. This last section of this study preoccupies itself with the revolutionary aesthetics of these poets. Ngong’s poetry will be used here as frame of reference.

Anglophone Cameroonian poetic discourse is beginning to gain renewed life in Christianity, a concept that was perceived in the early 1960s as an impediment to the independence of the Continent since Christianity was synonymous with colonialism. That notwithstanding, Ngong goes back and does a re-evaluation and re-appraisal of this and thinks that the message of Christianity was good but the messenger was malicious. Ngong’s collection exemplifies the situation of the contemporary Anglophone Cameroonian who thinks in English and yet draws on the spiritual resources of the Judaic writings to embellish his poetic work. This shift in aesthetic and ideology is a watershed in Anglophone Cameroonian poetry.

In the Introduction of this collection of sixty-one poems entitled *Snatched from the Grave*, Ngassa Leno Kan argues, *Snatched from the Grave*, the fourth of Ngong Kum Ngong’s poetry collections is an exigent clarion call for a re-examination of self in a society bereft of morals, a society heading for destruction and the grave. It is a skillful rendition in arresting and provocative verse of the redemption story; that Man (Christ) laid down His life for mankind. (v) By proposing an alternative reading of Anglophone Cameroonian poetry, Ngong has forced the scholarly world in Cameroon and beyond to reconsider its consensus and to come to a thoughtful reappraisal of its earlier positions regarding Christian beliefs. Since the Bible is basically a document and a treatise on morality, the poet seems to be prescribing it to everyone to read especially the politicians who administer without any conscience. In the following poems, the poet pursues a contemplative life with interest in Scriptures: “Life Long Satisfaction” “You Can Call Me Names”, “Hungry Graveyard” and “Walk the Path”. The analyses will be done in the following thematic cluster: Morality and leadership

### **Morality and Political Leadership**

Ngong in most of his poems in this collection portrays the moral responsibility of a writer in a contemporary dispensation. He demonstrates that any good leader should be God-fearing. Any leader who does not have the fear of God in him is bound to commit political blunders. In “Life Long Satisfaction” and “Look Beyond Your Noses”, the poet makes a passionate appeal to politicians and it would be politicians to watch out and embrace God. He calls on the rulers to emulate his example before it is too late:

- I have laid down my sick Ego
- Like some sacrificial goat
- On the altar stone of faith
- Having no doubt that someday
- My new life in Jesus Christ
- Will affect not only poets
- But political beasts as well. (61)

The poet uses his own personal transformation from a worldly way of life to a Christian and God fearing existence. It is apparent that in Ngong’s poetic discourse, the death of Jesus Christ had appropriated the ideals that salvation is freedom from the world or from the bondage of the flesh, freedom from oppression and corruption. The poet thinks that if the “political beasts” who have styled themselves as leaders can embrace the teachings of Jesus Christ, the ruled will live a more fulfilled and happier life. The poet thinks that Christ’s way is lifelong satisfaction:

- I have found lifelong satisfaction
- and the stillness only water knows.
- If you want to enter life alive
- and blossom before darkness draws curtain.
- If you desire comrades to be snatched
- from the voracious grave behind your yard. (61)

Ngong attempts to reconstruct the Christian creeds which have been negatively treated in the discourse of African literature. The poet wishes to confront the negative image of



Christian beliefs as portrayed in the record of the past as an on-going encounter with an enduring condition and an on-going human reality. It is in this regard that the poet in "Look Beyond Your Nose" makes a passionate appeal to the ruling class to look beyond their noses because administration is about opportunities and not reducing human beings to animals. He sees this as lack of knowledge and vision:

- ...you and ignorance
- have crushed the balls of Truth
- and hold thousands captives.
- Do not think you are powerful
- having rendered many hopeless
- and established your reputation
- at the expense of bereaved comrades
- for you refuse to look beyond your nose. (58)

Ngong is a compassionate poet who will stop at nothing in the amelioration of the human condition. The second person pronoun, "you" symbolically represents the rulers who administer without consciences and compassion. As a writer/poet, it is his responsibility to lay bare this misrule:

- from a world worn out by distress
- and crowds that evil has blinded
- I will not fold my hands and watch
- even from my summit of joy
- the destruction of hearts so dear
- I cannot keep my stitched mouth shut
- even when the fire of youth. (58)

Though the poet has been gagged as part of the dictatorial rule, he refuses to keep his "stitched mouth shut" The poet calls on the leaders in the continent to emulate his example and embrace light for the good of the people they pretend to rule: The light around me now/ more than ever before/ longs to light your path too. (59)

In a rhetorical question, the poet wonders "Why labour in obscurity/and perish embracing darkness?" (59) The poet concludes that if the leaders do not take his advice he has already taken his position: My heart will rest upon the Rock/ I have chosen for foundation. (59) The "Rock" symbolically represents Jesus Christ. In another poem entitled "Walk the Path Too", the poet uses a plethora of animal images to describe the leaders in his society. They are more of political vampires that humans with consciences. He perceives them as parasites in paradise but makes an appeal to them to reconsider their ways because death comes when life is sweetest: Beware the bugs out there/, the voluptuous termites/ and the fleas in their eyes./ Stiff-necked minds will regret/ when the time to live comes. (16) Reading this particular poem, it is evident that while continuing to affirm the importance of the actual, immediate and physical, the spiritual is given particular emphasis. Ngong appears increasingly concerned with the chaos of modern life and his poetry often emphasizes a move toward Christian way of life. He thinks that a return to instinctual world of the senses would lead to failure and childish rages. Ngong rejects the contemplative worldliness of the contemporary Cameroonian/African society and calls for a renewal of heart, vision and attitude because of the impending doom that awaits self-centered and egocentric leaders and their generation. Hear the poet:

- Beware death in pleasure
- plus the lies of the foe
- when he grows your greatness
- and parades you around
- like an unusual species.
- The dish he offers you now
- the fame he promises
- will in the end impair you,
- giving him a free hand to rule
- and drown your offspring in faeces. (17)

The poet/speaker is free from this impending doom because he is covered by the "Blood of Jesus Christ", and he thinks that if the leaders walk the path of righteousness too, they will be saved from this calamity:

- Foul tongues quarter my faith
- in the heart of the town
- and dogs scramble for my navel
- but without notice they grow faint
- and worms banquet on their livers
- not because I have any powers
- but because I now walk the path. (17)

The bulk of the poems in this collection uses allusions, themes, symbols and phrases from the Bible. The poet emphasizes righteousness and holiness as vital ingredients in both private and public affairs.

- Scout for the right way through
- while the sun in love smiles,
- walk the path traced for you
- while you in the womb
- to suck the sweets of life.
- I trudge on thanks to them
- since the Light lit my heart
- and made a man of me. (17)

The poet explores two important poetic devices to enhance his thematic preoccupation: symbolism and alliteration. "Light lit" is both symbolic and alliterative. "Light" capitalized refers to Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He came so that we can have light and life. The poet intimates that he became whole with the coming of Jesus Christ into his life. Finally, the use of the alliteration "to suck the sweet of life" is effective because Christ is the sweetness of life. From the appreciation of Ngong's poetry, it is clear that his poetry is informed by the teaching of Jesus Christ as evident in the Bible. This is another shift in aesthetic and ideological paradigms since Christianity for the first time in African literary discourse is perceived in a positive light.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to restate the hypothetical contention of this study. This paper set out to examine the trends and shift in paradigms in the teaching of poetry in Anglophone Cameroon. It was discovered that Anglophone Cameroonian poetry like all African poetry has experienced three main shifts: the adopt, adapt and adept phases. Though Ngong's poetic imagination is embellished with the Judea-Christian aesthetics, his poetry is classed under the adept



phase. This paper, therefore, concluded that in the teaching of Anglophone Cameroonian poetry, which is part of African poetry, the teacher should take into consideration the various phases that characterized the evolution and development of this poetry.

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