

3008/=

KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE

SEMANTIC ABSURDITIES AND SOCIAL VISION FOR
AFRICA IN JARED ANGIRA'S POETRY

BWOCHA NYAGEMI, B.Ed.

**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS OF KENYATTA UNIVERSITY**

AUGUST 2008

Nyagemi, Bwocha
*Semantic absurdities
and social vision*



2008/330602

DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other University.

Signature  Date: AUG 28, 2008

Bwocha Nyagemi, B.ED (Arts)
C50 /CE / 12507 /04

This project has been submitted to the University with our approval as University supervisors.

Signature 1.  Date 11th September, 2008

Dr. Waveney H. Olemba
Department of Literature

Signature 2.  Date 11th September, 2008

Dr. John Mugubi
Department of Literature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank you for my supervisor Dr. Wambui...
I also thank you for the...
I would like to thank you for the...
I would like to thank you for the...
I would like to thank you for the...

DEDICATION

To my daughter Nyabokey for whom I have a reason to
struggle and 'be the change that I would like to see'.

I would like to thank you for the...
I would like to thank you for the...

I would like to thank you for the...
I would like to thank you for the...
I would like to thank you for the...
I would like to thank you for the...
I would like to thank you for the...

I would like to thank you for the...
I would like to thank you for the...
I would like to thank you for the...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to say thank you to my supervisors Dr. Waveney Olembo and Dr. John Mugubi for their readiness for consistent constructive engagement, guidance and personal sacrifice to ensure this project has become a reality.

I also want to say thank you to Dr Amateshe for his insightful ideas that resulted in my decision to study the poetry of Angira instead of that of Ntiru. And also for his encouragement when my social life was in a crisis.

I also thank my mother Truphena Nyaboke and my siblings for their persistent prayers that made the difference in the world.

I cannot forget Mr. Beautah Rasi who sacrificed his time to help type part of the project while I was busy at school.

Special thanks to my colleagues at Misambi Secondary School (Mr. Mogere Richard, Mr. Ochieng Robert, Ms Saeta Joan & Ms Miseda Betty) and my friends both in Kenya (Mr. Masinga Walter, Mr. Kennedy Mong'are & his wife Joyce Gechemba, and Mr. Boniface Misiani) and abroad (Mr. Obino Josephat) for their unwavering love and support.

Finally, I am greatly indebted to my sister Agnes, her husband Abner and their daughter Elvina for their unfailing love and selfless support both as family and good neighbours.

Abstract

This is a study of the semantic absurdities in Jared Angira's poetry and the social vision for Africa as espoused in his poetry. The study explores *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* (1996) and *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* (2004). It identifies and analyzes the use of paradox, oxymoron, irony, contrast and juxtaposition which are collectively referred to as semantic absurdities. This is the craft within the poetry that helps unveil the message Angira has about the poor and other downtrodden groups of people in society, and unearth his social vision. Although Angira's poetry has been anthologized by a number of writers from Africa, it is important to note that most of this poetry goes uncritiqued. As far as we have established, no one has studied our proposed topic in the few studies conducted on the poetry of Jared Angira. This has provided us with a wide gap on which we have based our study. We seek to establish what Angira is saying about the poor masses that populate our society, the underlying factors for such a grim situation and the probable way out as suggested by the artist.

The study has employed Practical Stylistics and Marxist Literary Critical approaches whereby the poems that are rich in the selected semantically absurd words and/or expressions have been analyzed in a bid to decode the message encoded therein, and also the espoused social vision. The work is to be structurally divided as follows: The first section will be

made up of conceptual *Chapter 1* that maps out the way forward for the study. *Chapter 2* deals with the semantic absurdities in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems*, the message for the poor and downtrodden in the society and social vision borne in the poetry. *Chapter 3* focuses on the semantic absurdities in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*, the message for the poor and downtrodden in the society and social vision borne in the poetry. *Chapter 4* which is the conclusion highlights the point of convergence of the two anthologies and discusses the relation of the findings to our objectives. It recommends the aspects that could be studied by lovers of Angira's poetry. The study has tackled some of the aspects of both form and content in Angira's poetry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Item	Page
Title Page.....	i
Declaration.....	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgement.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
Definition of Terms.....	ix

1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	7
1.3 Objectives of the study.....	7
1.4 Research Questions.....	8
1.5 Research Assumptions.....	8
1.6 Justification of the Study.....	8
1.7 Scope and Limitations.....	11
1.8 Literature Review.....	12
1.9 Conceptual/Theoretical Framework.....	20
1.10 Research Methodology.....	25

2.0 CHAPTER TWO

Semantic Absurdities and social vision

in Tides of Time: Selected Poems.....27**3.0 CHAPTER THREE**

Semantic Absurdities and social vision in

Lament of the Silent & Other Poems.....74**4.0 CHAPTER FOUR**

Conclusion and Recommendation.....103

Bibliography.....108

Definition of Terms

Social Vision: The ideal society that Angira seems to yearn for in his poetry.

Contemporary African Society: The post independence Africa, especially from the early 1960s onwards. Kenya epitomizes such a society since it is the pedestal of Angira's expression.

Voices: A word used by Angira in an interview to refer to the downtrodden in society. He says his poetry represents these voices. Specifically mentioned examples of such crude voices are 'slum dwellers' and 'children thrown by their mothers into latrine pits'.

Semantic Absurdities: A phrase to be employed in this study to refer to words which embody certain complex meanings that are at first self-contradictory because what they actually convey is much deeper than what appears on the surface. Paradox, contrast, irony, oxymoron and juxtaposition pose such a scenario. The title *Lament of the Silent* is, for instance, semantically absurd.

The Silent: A term used by Angira himself, in an interview, just like his use of 'voices', to refer to the working class people in society who are perceived not to have a voice to express their difficulties/ plight/condition. He talks of a 'strange silent quietness.'

The Vocal: A word used by Angira in an interview to refer to the well-to-do, highly educated and influential members of the society who are able to clearly articulate their concerns.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

Angira, possibly Kenya's most prolific poet, was born in Nyandarua County in 1947. He received a BA in English and African Studies from the University of Nairobi in 1971 and an MA in African Studies from the University of Nairobi in 1973. He worked for the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) for several years before moving to the United States in 1975. He has since published several books of poetry, including *Angira's Poetry* (1980), *Angira's Poetry II* (1985), *Angira's Poetry III* (1990), and *Angira's Poetry IV* (1995). His work has been widely anthologized and translated into other languages. Angira is also a prominent literary critic and has written extensively on the state of Kenyan literature and the role of the poet in society.

Angira's literary career spans over four decades, with his first poetry collection, *Angira's Poetry*, published in 1980. He has since published several other books of poetry, including *Angira's Poetry II* (1985), *Angira's Poetry III* (1990), and *Angira's Poetry IV* (1995). His work has been widely anthologized and translated into other languages. Angira is also a prominent literary critic and has written extensively on the state of Kenyan literature and the role of the poet in society. He has been a member of the Kenya Writers' Guild and the Kenya Association of Writers. His poetry is known for its social and political commentary, and its focus on the lives of the poor and marginalized in Kenya. Angira's work has been widely praised for its depth, insight, and originality. He is considered one of the most important poets in Kenya today.

SEMANTIC ABSURDITIES AND SOCIAL VISION IN JARED ANGIRA'S POETRY

1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Jared Angira, arguably Kenya's most prolific poet, was born in Nyanza, Kenya in 1947. He may be referred to as a distinguished academician. He studied Bachelor of Commerce between 1968-1971 at the University of Nairobi, a time when the first wave of Kenya's renowned scholars were either students or on their nascent stage of a writing mission. After this he did a postgraduate course in Economics at the London School of Economics before coming back to Kenya to pursue his career in economics, while at the same time writing mostly verse.

Angira ranks among Kenya's pioneer poets. His literary prowess dates back to the 1960s when his poetry started appearing in journals both in English and Kiswahili. He was editor of *Busara*, the students' journal at the University of Nairobi then. His first collection of poems, *Juices*, was published in 1970. Thus Angira's literary life began in earnest. He addresses himself to social issues in this first publication, namely: socio-economic realities, political questions and cultural issues as they affect the common folk. These themes have consistently recurred in his poetry over time. He talks of 'the silent', 'the downtrodden', 'the hopeless', and 'the voiceless', evidently considering himself their advocate.

His versatility in verse has made him known more in the African literary world and most prominently Kenya where he hails from than in the world of economics where he professionally belongs. Angira writes with a keen sense of exuberance, vigor and gusto touching mostly on the plight of the less fortunate in society. He exudes a lot of pessimism for instance in *Juices* (1970), *Silent Voices* (1972) and *Soft Corals* (1973). His extensive use of images in *Silent Voices* and symbolic language in *Soft Corals* makes his poems hugely abstract. Our study seeks to uncover part of this abstractness in a bid to understand what Angira is communicating. He seems to come out with an overwhelming sense of disillusionment about reality as evidenced by the disjointedness of the poems in *Soft Corals*.

Angira writes with passion and flamboyance in language, which sometimes brings him out as an elusive poet whose import is hard to make out. He exhibits a rich flavour of both idiomatic expressions from oral poetry and African song on the one hand and a simultaneous blending of the traditional Victorian and Romantic English mode on the other.

This prolific Kenyan poet has a number of anthologies to his name. However, there are two anthologies: *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* and *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* which together may be said to encapsulate his oeuvre.

Tides of Time has one hundred and nine poems which have been extracted from his first publications: *Juices*, *Silent Voices*, and *Cascades* (1979), and also contains three sections: 'A Pattern of Riddles', 'Elements in Space' and 'Tailors of Hope'. These three sections have first appeared in this anthology, which means they have not been published separately as individual texts. *Tides of Time* is a vintage assembly of Angira at his most ambitious and successful moment. Angira perceives his poetry as playing the role of representing the

voices of the generally disadvantaged class in society. His works therefore seemingly emerge as an incisive commentary on the plight of the downtrodden. It is this apparent place of the downtrodden in Angira's poetry in the two texts that we aspired to establish in our study.

Lament of the Silent & Other Poems on the other hand has fifty poems divided into eight sub-titles including "Rhythms For Those Who Cannot Sing", "Lament of the Silent" and "When the Hyacinth Begins to Flower and Other Poems". Nicholas Asego in his review of *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* published in an *East African Standard* editorial (Sunday May 15, 2005) notes that throughout the discourse, there is a display of a unique verbal exuberance, word play, wit and humour that will indulge any reader. The poems are written in free verse, a style that is becoming increasingly common and typical of African poetry. The title itself points back to what Angira himself has called 'strange silent quietness' in reference to the 'voices' represented in his poetry. This means there is an evident connect between his earlier poetry and this latest publication which made our study of semantic absurdities in the two texts more interesting.

Angira has adopted a continuous trend in his poetry as he did from his student days when he wrote *Juices*. He says of himself as quoted in *Silent Voices* that his poetry consists of 'crude voices gasping in the dark' (Angira, 1972, Cover Page). This appears to be an admission on his part that his poetry consciously speaks on behalf of those who are clearly unable to articulately voice their concerns. The word 'crude' qualifies this assertion for it points to a lack of finesse which is a huge handicap. Their 'gasping in the dark' equally suggests their struggle to find their rightful place in the society, to attain knowledge and freedom for the word 'dark' suggests a lack of knowledge. We therefore seek to find out if these voices have

been sensitized so the 'dark' they are in can pave way for light which they desperately yearn for.

Similarly, Angira talks of 'voices trapped in between despair and existence' (ibid.). This obviously suggests the dilemma these 'voices' are confronted with. They are at the crossroads between despair and existence which is similar to being at the conjunction between death and life. This is in itself an absurdity because mutually exclusive elements have been made to dwell together therefore presenting a strong case for our study.

Equally interesting is Angira's assertion that his poetry talks of voices 'caught up in a maze but always seeking to get through' (ibid.). These voices appear to be in a rather difficult situation but the interesting thing is that they have not been made to give up. They are not persuaded that they have come to a dark dungeon that cannot lead to a way out. Rather, they are fighting to get through. Certainly there emerges a strong anti-desperation message here. Perhaps Angira is saying that his poetry aims at reinforcing the resilience of these evidently unrelenting voices for art influences political/social action. This forms the core of our study.

The observation that these voices are 'voices from rusty tincans of the slums, seeking an outlet into the gay city' (ibid.) underscores Angira's seriousness in tackling the question of the correlation that exists between biting penury and the mushrooming of hovels in our urban centres. He says they are 'seeking an outlet into the gay city' to point to the yearning of the slum dwellers to lead dignified lives deficient of the humiliating conditions characteristic of slums. Our study therefore has a rich field in which the poet's attempt to deal with the problems the poverty stricken slum dwellers are confronted with is unveiled.

Angira also sees these voices as ‘corked up in empty gourds’ (ibid.) to suggest they are trapped in situations similar to those where there appears a huge potential that goes unexploited. ‘Empty gourds’ points to unrealized potential for gourds full of say, milk, are the expected result of realized potentiality. Want appears the prevailing condition here. We have therefore sought to realize how Angira has represented these apparently needy voices portrayed in his quote.

The struggle that these voices are involved in can barely go unnoticed in Angira’s own words. He says that they are ‘the searching voices that much achieve their goals in a strange silent quietness, quietness that defeats the drums’ (ibid.). The ‘searching’ here that makes these voices achieve their goals in an undecipherable way makes Angira tautologically refer to it as a ‘strange silent quietness’. Coincidentally this silent quietness ‘defeats the drums’ which in itself is semantically absurd. The noteworthy point Angira is making at this juncture is that we need to study his poetry and discover what he means by portraying silence as being louder in communicating than the loudest of drums.

Finally, of these voices, he highlights the converse by saying:

Yet in themselves the voices are drumbeats, pulsations, heartbeats. They are the yodelling of the slum drums, they are the bugles from ancient limbos, they are the bridge from the past into the present and then into that transparent layer of the future. Some of the voices are everyday voices, even of children thrown by their mothers into latrine pits; some are of progressives caught up in competition and self-promotion. Here is a conglomeration of voices. (ibid.)

Angira has personified the cries of his representative society by making their voices sound like ‘drums, pulsations, heartbeats’ that are likely to send their message far and wide just the way music does. These three words sound rhythmical as does a well thought out musical

composition that soothes one's sense of hearing. The chord (voices) that joins the past to the present and the present to the future implies timelessness. The lingering human spirit that struggles for emancipation no matter how rugged the terrain might appear, no matter how protracted the war might seem. He says these voices are slum dwellers, neglected children cast away in rejection by their seemingly despondent mothers, and also voices of those who want to bring change (progressives) to society. 'The children thrown into latrine pits by their mothers' represent the weakest in society who might not survive without being rescued or supported. We have therefore seen how Angira has worked towards 'rescuing' these children, and the 'several other voices' he mentions in this interview. Thus his poetry persuasively presents a strong case requiring our study for although these multiple voices underscored here abound in his poetry, scholars of his poetry had not yet studied such voices.

Finally, Nicholas Asego says that thematically the poems in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* deal majorly with nature and environment, city life, time and seasons, vanity and politics. There are also riddles under the title "A pattern of riddles", which tease one into thinking, and wise sayings that enhance wisdom. The poems are fused with grim reflections of relations between the governed and the governors. However, he cautions, "This is definitely not a book to be galloped over like the daily news. Reading it in a hurry won't do either; it needs to be read slowly, carefully and attentively" (op.cit.p.2). It is this attentive and careful reading that we have employed in unraveling the evidently semantically absurd situations that the books present in our study. Angira's poetry therefore explores all aspects of culture: social-economic, political, historical, environmental, philosophical, religious and psychological. Our study has unfolded the form and content in the texts under this study which have helped us unveil Angira's poetry to the general reading public that might have

been daunted by assertions such as Asego's that *Lament of the Silent* 'is not a book to be galloped over like daily news.' Both *Tides of Time* and *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* therefore capture the lives of the African peoples: their fears, frustrations, aspirations, aborted dreams, ambitions and ultimately what hope they have beyond what appears on the surface of the poems.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

From the above background information, it is evident that Angira's poetry generally paints a picture of obscurity. His use of subtle devices like the multiple 'voices', elusive literary allusions, complex symbols, sharp contrasts, paradox, irony, oxymoron, juxtaposition, to mention but a few, make him emerge as an overly complex poet as far as literary analysis is concerned. This study has therefore unfolded how Angira has used semantic absurdities to present the plight of the downtrodden in society and how he maps a way out for such groups through his poetry: How has Angira used semantic absurdities (paradox, oxymoron, contrast, irony and juxtaposition) to bring out his message and social vision for his representative society?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This research aimed at:

1. Establishing what the poems in Angira's two anthologies of poetry: *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* and *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* say about the poor and other downtrodden groups in society.
2. Establishing how Angira uses the selected semantic absurdities in his poetry anthologies: *Tides of Time* and *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* to present his social vision.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What do the poems in Angira's two selected anthologies say about the downtrodden groups in society?
2. How has Angira used selected semantic absurdities to bring out his message and social vision in the two anthologies?

1.5 Research Assumptions

1. Angira extensively writes about hope and despair, capitalist injustices, the environment, time and seasons, and politics, and the resultant effect these have on the plight of the poor in the two anthologies under this study.
2. The poet under this study tends to use semantic absurdities to bring out his message for society's downtrodden while at the same time making it possible for the reader of his poems to derive the social vision as projected in the poetry in the two anthologies, *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* and *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*.

1.6 Justification of the Study

Since Angira has consistently written poetry from the 1960s to the present day, his poetry has been anthologized in several editions of poetry from Africa. With this in mind, an attempt at unveiling the poet's message about the condition of the downtrodden, the 'crude voices' and the underlying causative factors that have made them wallow in penury, pestilence and sometimes ignorance and / or illiteracy will significantly be handy to readers, including those who have not been privileged to study literature at higher levels of learning.

The identification of the various instances of use of paradox, contrast, irony, oxymoron and juxtaposition in Angira's poetry will help readers of his poetry readily perceive it as an intelligible work of art, which will be a contribution to knowledge about Angira's works. Not only that, this study will enable readers see the many possibilities at hand that a poet can skillfully manipulate to the benefit of creativity. It is thus through the beauty of creativity that an artist, just like a scientist, boasts of originality. It is instructive to note that Angira's poetry has not been critiqued in the numerous anthologies in which it has appeared and that Angira's poetry is more anthologized than critiqued is a safe statement of fact. This is a self-evident gap that we seek to bridge in our critique of this prodigious poet, thus a significant contribution to the literary sphere of knowledge.

Jared Angira has been an interesting writer and /or poet in the East African literary world from the 1960s. He studied commerce at the University of Nairobi while his contemporaries such as Richard Nturu, Okello Oculi, and Timothy Wangusa read English at Makerere. Angira is indeed better known to the world as a writer, not as an economist. It is interesting that someone like Angira who did not major in English during his undergraduate days could write so prodigiously both in subject and style thereby becoming an icon to young people who might want to pursue a writing career in spite of what they read in college. Our research will therefore invariably induct those interested in Angira's poetry to a lot of insight on the poet, what he writes about, for whom and to whom he writes and how he presents his message. This research is equally unique since *Tides of Time* is an anthology of selected poems from his past anthologies of poetry written in the 1970s through 1990s while *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* is Angira's latest and arguably his most inspiring collection of poetry. The two texts are therefore representative enough in this study of

semantic absurdities and the social vision in Angira's poetry. This clearly suggests how important Angira is as an African writer, therefore a case for a serious study.

Numerous poems by Angira appear in anthologies without commentaries by leading poets throughout Africa and beyond in books read both in high schools and colleges in East Africa, and Africa as a whole. The following have anthologized Angira's poetry: Howard Sergeant in *African Voices* (1973), Arthur Kemoli in *Pulsations: an East African Anthology of Poetry* (1973), Jonathan Kariara and Jane Kitonga in *An Introduction to East African Poetry* (1982), Wole Soyinka in *Poems of Black Africa* (1985), David Cook and David Rubadiri in *Poems From East Africa* (1971), A.D. Amateshe in *An Anthology of East African Poetry* (1988) and R. Johnson et al in *New Poetry From Africa* (1996). Our study shall be handy to the readers of this anthologized poetry that lacks the critical guide to the message and style the poet has employed. This calls for an urgent need for this study.

Some of Angira's critics at his nascent stage of writing (such as Adrian Roscoe, Bahadur Tejani and Angus Calder, in the early 1970s to early 1980s) see him as being inexperienced and impatient to the point of being militant. We have however dealt with a seasoned Angira who has been in the battlefield using poetry as his deadly weapon for almost four decades now. We have arguably produced a more incisive and deeper analysis of Angira's copious poetry as opposed to what critics of the 1970s like Angus Calder did when they first identified Angira as a potentially pervasive poet.

Our topic, the semantic absurdities and social vision in Angira's two selected anthologies, is one gap that needed to be filled since it has not been discussed by any of the known critics

of Angira's poetry as far as we established from the search we conducted in books, journals and the Internet. This study therefore adds to the available studies on Angira's poetry.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

The study confines itself to two of Jared Angira's anthologies of poetry: *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* and *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*. *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* is representative of Angira's poetry published in the 1970s through 1990s. This is so because the poems in this text are derived from his earlier publications: *Juices*, *Silent Voices*, *Soft Corals*, *Cascades* and the parts that were previously unpublished but nonetheless form part of *Tides of Time: Selected Poems*: 'A Pattern of Riddles', 'Elements in Space' and 'Tailors of Hope'. *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* consists of Angira's poetry published in 2004. So, the two texts may be said to be representative of Angira's poetry since they span the duration of his creative activity. We chose the two titles since, as far as we established, our topic of study in line with the two texts had not been studied in the past.

In exploring the semantic absurdities in this poetry, the study unveils the paradox, contrast, oxymoron, irony and juxtaposition employed by Angira, to make out his message. The study has deliberately omitted verbal irony as part of semantic absurdities in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* to avoid clashing with Ezenwa-Ohaeto's 1996 study by the title "Conscious Craft: Verbal Irony in the Poetry of Jared Angira." This is so because the anthology contains all the texts that Ezenwa studied. Irony is however part of the semantic absurdities in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* which has not been studied by Ezenwa-Ohaeto.

1.8 Literature Review

Since there are not many published articles on Angira's poetry, we have reviewed all the available criticism. In this section, we have examined the responses to Angira's poetry by Adrian Roscoe, Angus Calder, A.R. Yusufu and Maritim Cheserem, A.D. Amateshe, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Bahadur Tejani, and Nicholus Asego. Each of these critics has made comments relevant to this study. We have therefore probed and analyzed the correlatedness of the comments these critics have made on Angira's use of semantic absurdities and the social vision ingrained in his poetry.

One of the earliest critics of Angira, Adrian Roscoe, describes Angira as a poet with a flare for combining rich sensuous description with discreet moral statement. He says of Angira's strengths:

Good clear imagery, a gift for compression, lyrical delicacy, anaphoric echoes of tradition, moral concern, and verbal innovation combine to produce highly effective verse. (Roscoe 1977:94)

This observation indicates that Roscoe has noted with keenness the dexterity with which Angira manipulates linguistic resources at his disposal to both communicate his message and refresh the imagination of his readers. This observation that dates back to the 1970s supports our initial statement that Angira's poetry exudes complex language characteristics like the ones we have unveiled. Since Roscoe has not specifically tackled these aspects of imagery, compression of language and moral concern, our study goes much deeper to bring out the specific aspects of language compression as seen in Angira's use of semantic absurdities. It is important to note that Angira's unrivalled concern with the plight of the disadvantaged masses in society is a moral question. We aspired to bring these out for there

is a one–one correlation between what we have studied and the numerous symbols and images in the texts that have been used to bring out the semantic absurdities in the poetry.

Roscoe further observes:

The title of Angira's second collection, *Silent Voices* (1972), suggests a concern still with the inarticulate masses for whom the poet sees himself as spokesman. Developments in *Soft Corals* (1973), Angira's third collection, are both technical and thematic. More often now the short tight line gives way to something longer, resulting in a noticeable slowing of the poet's characteristic tempo as youthful impatience yields to mature reflection. Thematically, along with a self-critical attack on academic poets and desk revolutionaries, there is now a concern with universal problems: man's basic idiocies rather than local African villainy. (ibid: 99-100)

The concern for the masses that Roscoe notices in Angira's poetry in the above quotation is closely related to the social vision in Angira's poetry that we have studied in this research. The masses that Roscoe refers to as inarticulate constitute the greater percentage of the members of the Kenyan society, the members of the African society that are subjected to oppression and exploitation by the powerful elites. We notice here that Roscoe does not go further to say how these inarticulate masses are given a voice, nor does he explore how Angira has dealt with the universal problems quoted above. We therefore ventured further to say how Angira is working towards giving these inarticulate masses a voice besides unveiling the solutions he describes to the above-quoted universal problems affecting the masses.

Angus Calder (1979) calls him "an alert witty writer" (Calder: 37) while Abdul Yusufu (1984) sees Angira's poetry as "an acutely ideologized body of works" (Yusufu: 327). Both observations are relevant to our study because they first confirm that Angira is consciously

writing as we have observed earlier and that he is an ideologue in his view of the world that he writes for and about. We have therefore seen this poet as someone who is not so much writing for pleasure but as a serious social observer and critic who has chosen poetry as a vehicle for the realization of his goals. We have uncovered his ideology as related to Marxist ideas. The wittiness is what the semantic absurdity is all about, while the ideology, his social vision. Without unveiling the semantic absurdities here, and also attempting to incorporate a historical Marxist perspective to it, the message could have remained as elusive as ever.

Roscoe further argues that Angira seems “able to come fresh to each poem as a new technical problem to be solved in a new way” (op.cit: 96). Roscoe seems to have noted that Angira comes fresh in each of his poems just the way a doctor treats each individual case in concordance with its uniqueness. The question we have however ventured to answer is whether Angira’s suggested remedies to the social problems of his people are real or ideal. Whether his prescriptions are a permanent solution to the seemingly consistent upheavals bedeviling his “masses” or a flash in the pan is what we have investigated in this study. The three scholars (Roscoe, Yusufu and Calder) have critiqued Angira’s first three texts: *Juices* (1970), *Silent Voices* (1972), and *Soft Corals* (1973). Yusufu on the other hand includes *Cascades* (1979) and *The Years Go By* (1980) for his study was done in 1984 unlike Calder who did his study on the poetry by Angira in the 1970s.

Another critic of Angira’s poetry is Maritim Cheserem who says:

The larger bulk of the poetry in *Juices* addresses itself to the social issues, which could be categorized into three interrelated fields: the social-economic realities, the political issues, and the cultural issues. Angira uses description in *Juices* while one notices extensive use of images in *Silent Voices* and symbolic

language in *Soft Corals*, which are largely absent in *Juices*. There is pessimism in Angira's three anthologies: *Juices*, *Silent Voices* and *Soft Corals*. (Cheserem 1979: 30)

We concur with Cheserem's observation about Angira's use of language and also the subjects of his concern. We have however attempted to establish whether Angira has undergone a significant metamorphosis by interplaying pessimism with optimism unlike in the past where he overly paints pictures full of pessimism in his poetry. We have also studied whether the poet has at the same time assumed the patience of a seasoned craftsman as opposed to his initial seemingly militant and revolutionary approach to art that exuded diminished patience, and whether he at other instances appears to run out of optimism completely. However, he strikingly seems to resort to humour for anaesthesia instead of expressing the bitterness of a defeated warrior. His versatility also extends in that he touches on the emerging social issues of our day with journalistic accuracy; thus a true social philosopher. These questions have not been tackled as separate problems at variance with our topic of study. Instead, they have been incorporated into the main topic and handled as subordinate aspects of the main topic.

On his part, A.D. Amateshe laments that one hardly distinguishes between Angira and Ntiru's private and public standpoints. He observes:

The complexity of expression does not allow for the reader's easy analysis of Angira's intention in most of *Silent Voices*, a state that leaves Taban living dissatisfied with Angira's creative efforts. The essence of committed poetry is to speak to and for the common man, which is evident, to some degree, in *Juices*. (Amateshe 1979: 59)

Amateshe's comparative study looks at Taban Lo Liyong, Okello Oculi, Richard Ntiru and Jared Angira. His description of Angira's expression as being complex forms the basis of this study. It is this complexity that we have ventured to decode in order to make Angira's poetry more accessible to the reading public. This is so because Angira appears to conform to the school of thought that does not subscribe to the view that there can be art for art's sake. It is for this reason that Amateshe describes Angira's poetry as being committed. We have therefore sought to establish whether there is such commitment in the works under this study.

David Cook and David Rubadiri in *Poems from East Africa* (1971) have also quoted Angira as saying:

Karl Marx is my teacher; Pablo Neruda my class prefect (when I am in the classroom) and my captain (when I am on the battlefield). Although I am no longer at ease here, I have been cautioned to contain my malady without bitterness. I have to confront the world without end and see how to endure all in the spirit of forgetting all past and present bad things. (Cook & Rubadiri: 187)

Through this self-appraisal, Angira emerges as an advocate of persistent non-violent resistance against oppressive and repressive social and political pillars. This is unlike the Argentine born physician Ernesto Che Guevara de la Serna who is best known for his role in the Cuban revolution of the 1950^s and his further attempts to spread Marxist revolution around the world. Guevara literally took up arms and fought for a classless society in his Latin America, Asia and Africa till he was captured and executed by a joint operation of CIA and Bolivian forces in 1967.

Angira mentions social revolutionaries Communist Karl Marx and Chilean poet Pablo Neruda both of whom have expressed, through their writings, concern for society's oppressed masses. These two are popular for their revolutionary ideals which have made them attract both massive following world-over and also resentment and apprehension especially from those viewed as reactionaries fighting to maintain the status quo.

Marx's economic theories have been put to practice by socialist leaders world-over including Chairman Mao Tse Tung in China who founded The People's Republic of China in 1948, Fidel Castro in Cuba and his Cuban revolution of 1956-1959 (that has lived the test of time to this day) to the latter day Hugo Chavez in Venezuela who has taken Castro's route in the 21st Century. Neruda on the other hand, through his unique style in writing, was recognized in 1971 when he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. His poems are often passionate odes to love and nature, and he was once noted by the *New York Times* as 'the most influential, and inventive poet of the Spanish language'. The fire that is characteristic of both Marx and Neruda is evident in Angira's words. It is this fire that has transformed his inner inspiration to reality through his prolific writing that is now four decades old. The Marxist critical literary theory that has been employed in this study has invariably helped us find out how closely related Marx's concern for the poor workers is with Angira's concern for the downtrodden in society .

Perhaps Ezenwa-Ohaeto could be said to have done a more specific study on the poetry of Angira. He asserts in Jones and Jones:

It is in the conscious use of irony that Angira is distinct from other East African poets. While Okot p'Bitek uses a single persona in each of his poetry collections, Angira uses varied ironic characters in his poems. Richard Ntiru also uses irony in some of his poems but not as pervasively or effectively as Angira.

Compared with Okello Oculi, Angira's scope is wider and deeper. Verbal irony features as his artistic epitome for it contributes immensely towards the enhancement of his vision in the portrayal of social realities. (Jones & Jones 1996: 87)

Ezenwa-Ohaeto explores verbal irony in *Juices* (1970), *Silent Voices* (1972), *Soft Corals* (1973), *Cascades* (1979) and *The Years Go By* (1980). Inasmuch as Angira uses verbal irony in his work, which is part of his manipulation of linguistic resources at his disposal, one still observes extensive use of other related aspects of poetic style such as paradox, contrast, juxtaposition and oxymoron. This study sought to see how Angira has employed these poetic devices to communicate more artistically. We have also looked at the use of irony in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* which had not been studied by Ezenwa-Ohaeto.

Finally, Bahadur Tejani and Nicholas Asego have reviewed Angira's poetry. Tejani has reviewed *Juices* in Eldred Durosimi Jones and Marjorie Jones' *New Trends and Generations in African Literature* where he says:

Juices is an uneven exciting collection. On the jacket we are informed that Mr. Angira is a B.Com. from Nairobi. I mention this because for a poet so young, he speaks with a strikingly old voice. Hence the unevenness. The collection includes verse with traditional themes, situations and character; straightforward narratives or descriptions which are poetically uncomplex; unsensuous or thought provoking, though with a pastoral nostalgia interwoven successfully . . . Social irony plays part in "Mtwapa Ferry" and "The Palmwine Tapper" where an experiment with Marxian economics is conducted to present the poet's view of exploitation - especially in "Port Jesus" where reinterpretation of history is achieved. Concern for social ills is felt in "The Prostitute", "a nestless bird that enters any nest" and in "The Model", though the latter is rather sentimental. (Jones and Jones 1970: 158-159)

This critic exalts Angira for his narrative prowess and traditional wisdom. He also expresses his admiration for Angira's effort at art even though he is a B.Com. from Nairobi. The critic too mentions Angira's bordering on the Marxist aesthetic. We do agree that Angira tends to celebrate his traditional Luo culture. We however see Angira's language as being a preoccupation of a widely read artist out to experiment on a wider scale. He starts from home but does not stop there. He borrows from Greek, Latin, Roman and European aesthetics. One might be tempted to be of the view that Angira is an élitist poet. The plight of the downtrodden vis-à-vis their *modus operandi* begs to be investigated here: whether they deliberately act the way they do or whether this can be seen as an involuntary response to the market forces of demand and supply. That formed part of our critical gaps.

Asego on his part has reviewed *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* in an article appearing on a web page of *The East African Standard's* release of May 2, 2005 entitled "Silence Given a Loud Voice" where he observes in part:

Using precise description, meticulous diction, imagery, and vivid portrayal of activities, the poet captures and depicts many societal issues. Strong imagery is for example, evident in "Art and Multiparty", where references are made to the constitution and the multiparty politics aptly referred to as "multiparty confusiocracy". The politicians are "the liar of the multiparty wagon" and "the kangaroos". In the more than one incident the reader is made privy to the poet's fury, tenderness and struggles . . . Angira has been credited as a poet who is able to communicate sensitivity, warmth and nostalgia with ease, just as he did in his earlier publication, *Tides of Time: Selected Poems*. *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* is a lamentation that embraces social issues by dealing with the pressures and anxieties of everyday life.

(<http://www.eastandard.net/archives/cl/mags/society/articles.>)

Asego has provided a good insight into what one expects to encounter in the text. He supplies the reader with an important roadmap to the close explication of the poetry in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*. Most of the problems dealt with in the text affect the

21st Century Kenya, Africa, and the world. This can be ascribed to the way he tackles the current/present day issues such as the confusion that is the so called multiparty democracy in Kenya which is a mockery of the term itself. This is so because opportunists have infiltrated the system and are busy exploiting the masses in the pretext of democracy. He emerges here as a satirist out to expose the folly that is the politics of sycophancy, cronyism and dishonesty which has characterized Kenya from the very founding of this nation. Our unveiling of the poet's message will boost his effort at sensitizing his audience about salient societal issues and what they can do to realize a meaningful change. This constitutes his vision.

This study therefore works with a view to tackling that which remains to be done as indicated above as far as Angira's poetry is concerned aside from attempting to fill the critical gaps mentioned above in what has initially been studied.

1.9 Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Since there are two distinct aspects of this study namely, Angira's use of semantic absurdities as aspects of poetic language, and his social vision, we have been guided by two bodies of theories that relate to these aspects: Stylistics and Marxist Criticism as they relate to literature. Marxist Criticism is also relevant because Angira himself has said as quoted earlier, "Karl Marx is my teacher."

Stylistics as a literary and critical theory concentrates on the style of a work (how an author chooses to express oneself) and also with what is being said. Stylistics is therefore concerned with both form and content. It leans quite heavily on 'linguistics'. One aim of stylistics is to define a work of literature in terms of its patterns of speech, diction, metre

and syntax; its grammar and grammatical structure, and its use of rhetorical figures of speech, imagery and so on. All this, it will be noted, does not need any awareness of the author, or the cultural and historical norms of a given period. The stylistic interpretation of a work is therefore first established, and can thereafter be related to author or sociological, historical and biographical features. Stylistics has been a strong influence to literary artists since the 1950s.

The one most important theory applicable in this study is H.G. Widdowson's stylistics, which we have extracted from the title of his book *Practical Stylistics* (2000) - a critique on practical criticism. Widdowson observes that practical criticism uses the text as evidence of writer intention: what is significant is what the writer means by the text. Alternatively, one might take the view that the text signals its own intrinsic meaning. What is significant is what a text means to the reader, whatever the writer might have intended, or whatever the text itself may objectively appear to mean. Stylistics aims at providing a critic with ways of justifying their own judgment by making as precise reference to the text as possible. This is like explicating a poem line by line or word by word in order to justify what one reads into it, "This is precision of reference to the text in support of a particular interpretation," Widdowson asserts. "What I am emphatically not talking about is the precision of interpretation itself." This is a distinction which is crucial to our argument in this study, and central to the purpose of practical stylistics.

Widdowson looks at this precision vis-à-vis practical criticism by saying:

In the introduction to the Cox and Dyson textbook on the practical criticism of poetry, reference is made (as I have already noted) to the 'precise effects' of a poem. 'This precision', the authors say, 'is what practical criticism exists to achieve'. But the effects of poetry are never precise: they are evocative, suggestive, allusive -

elusive indeed. If they were made precise, they would become referential. The poem would then simply conform to the normal conditions of conventional statement and lose its point. We can, however, be precise about what it is in the poetic text which induces us to read a particular meaning into it. In other words precision is appropriate in identifying cause in the text, but not in describing the effect on the reader. And it is this, I would suggest, that is distinctive about the practical stylistic approach that I propose in this book. (Widdowson 2000: xiii)

The stylistics approach therefore seeks to stimulate an engagement with primary texts to encourage individual interpretation, while requiring that this should be referred back to features of the text. What is important here is not the interpretation itself, but the process of exploration of meaning; not the assertion of effects but the investigation into the linguistic features which seem to give warrant to these effects. This is the procedure this research has employed in its attempt to unravel the semantic absurdities in *Tides of Time* and *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*. Textual analysis has therefore been the preferable way through which the meaning has been unraveled for evidence has been extracted from the texts themselves. This has ensured that any critique made on our work is to be accompanied with substantial contextual support for it to be convincing.

The second theory employed in this study is Marxist Literary Criticism. This is an offshoot of the 'Marxist Criticism' which is a wide area that encompasses politics, economics and history. Marxist literary theory bases its outlook on the philosophy and principles of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Other major proponents of this critical approach include Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Raymond Williams, Louis Althusser, Walter Benjamin, Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukacs, Theodor Adorno, Edward Ahern, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

According to Martin Stephen :

Marxists believe that literature can only be understood by being viewed in context with history and society, both which are and have been dominated by the class struggle and by the ownership of the means of production. In any age humans work to an “ideology”, a “superstructure” of ideas which they erect themselves to explain how society works. In our present age every possible aspect of society is riddled with “bourgeois” mentality, the bourgeoisie being the class which owns the means of production. The bourgeoisie are distinct from the “proletariat”, the wage-earning and working class (Stephen 1991: 344).

The class struggle cited above between the two classes in society, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, has been extensively felt in Angira’s writing where he explores the despair of the weak majority and the dominance of the rich minority. Angira’s earlier critics have viewed him as the mouthpiece of the inarticulate masses in his society. This implies that he decries the exploitation of the working class just the way Marx and Neruda do. We have perused the actual poetry in the texts in order to reveal or discount this assumption.

The best known Marxist critics according to Martin Stephen (quoted above) is the Hungarian Georg Lukács, whilst in England the leading contemporary figures have been Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton. Their research has concentrated on “literary modes of production”, namely the social and material factors affecting the production of literature. Marxism generally focuses on the clash between the dominant and repressed classes in any given age. It also encourages art to imitate what is often termed as “objective” reality. It is this objective reality that makes writers mirror society without antagonizing their highlighted characters in real life. The masks they use in veiling the actual identity of the main actors, who are indeed everyday members of the society, make this literature objective in the Marxist critical approaches to literature. This supports the well known reality that

literature is a product of society and cannot indeed exist in a vacuum. It also supports the fact that literature has a one to one correlation with truth which makes it mock the boundaries of time and space.

Ngara argues that it is a major weakness of Marxist literary criticism that it does not pay sufficient attention to the “how” of particular works of art. “This weakness,” he says, “has its source in Marxist-Leninist philosophy because of its emphasis on the primacy of the economic base over the superstructure and labour over language” (Ngara 1985: 4). This means that in a work of art, content corresponds to the economic base and form to the superstructure. He posits for instance, as a result of this subordination of form to content in

Marxist Criticism:

Is it only **what** Shakespeare says that makes him such a great writer, or **how** he says what he says? If it is a combination of ‘what’ and ‘how’ that makes great art, then the “how” should receive due attention in any theory of criticism that has a claim to comprehensiveness and adequacy (ibid.).

In-as-much as Ngara’s claim is valid, it must also be remembered that in the face of injustice and oppression as Marx had seen it, especially when the major part of the society feels cheated by a minority, emotions are highly likely to be ignited. This, in turn, will make the artist overlook the aesthetic part of art and instead give more emphasis to content and/or meaning. This is so because the writer feels more obligated to render immediate service to society instead of concentrating on the part of style which might appear subordinate, yet unessential. The strength of Angira’s message has nonetheless been viewed vis-à-vis the style he has employed, which in this case we have designated ‘semantic absurdities’. For without full attention to style, the message itself might not be forthcoming as far as this

poetry is concerned. In this case therefore, both style and meaning assume equal importance.

Marxist literary theory has been handy in dealing with the social vision in Angira's poetry since as an ideologue, he preoccupies himself with the condition of the underdog, the masses. This theory is most appropriate in unearthing the social vision in Angira's poetry since the theory borders on content. It is in content that the social vision shall be established. The content presents the writer's themes that deal with society's condition in entirety: socio-economic, political, historical, environmental, philosophical, religious and psychological.

Both theories (Stylistics and Marxist Critical Literary Theory) are therefore vital as far as our analysis of the semantic absurdities and the unveiling of social vision in the poetry of Jared Angira in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* and *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* are concerned.

1.10 Research Methodology

The study was limited mainly to library work, which is reading and collecting data from primary and secondary sources since it is a conceptual study that adopted a consistent critical methodology throughout the research in order to unravel the import in the poetry. This is in other words, textual analysis.

The anthologies have one hundred and fifty nine poems collectively. *Tides of Time: Selected Poems*, has one hundred and nine poems while *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* has fifty poems. The study analyzed the poems we deemed rich in semantic absurdities while at the

same time unveiling Angira's social vision as best as we deciphered it in the poetry. The selection of the poems to be dealt with was therefore dependent upon their richness in the aforementioned semantic absurdities, and also how easily, according to us, the same poems help reveal Angira's social vision for the 'silent' in his poetry. Our analysis encompasses both short and long poems in terms of lines and stanzas. It also touches on various themes (political manipulation, the plight of the downtrodden, religion, hope and despair, the place of a mother in society, to mention but a few) and various aspects of semantic absurdities (juxtaposition, oxymoron, paradox, irony and contrast). We have collectively analyzed forty-four poems in both *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* and *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*. These are fairly representative of the whole text because most of them are very long and diverse in outlook – both thematically and stylistically (for example, 'KNOTS IN VISIONS', in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems*, runs from page ninety-five through page one hundred and thirteen, while 'LAMENT OF THE SILENT AND OTHER POEMS', a section of *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*, runs from page seventeen through page thirty-seven).

We therefore initially read the poems, identified those in which we recognized the employment of semantic absurdities as used to present the case for the downtrodden, and also those in which we could recognize what we consider Angira's social vision, and then ventured to analyze them appropriately.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO
SEMANTIC ABSURDITIES AND SOCIAL VISION IN
TIDES OF TIME: SELECTED POEMS

This chapter explores the semantic absurdities and the social vision in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems*. It is a chapter that incorporates the two aspects through a consistent analysis of the poems in an explication-like manner. The relation between the language used in the poems which we have referred to as semantic absurdities and the themes it touches on is clearly brought out. It is this relation between the themes – these themes touch on the daily lives of the downtrodden - and what kind of future the poet envisions for the downtrodden that is called Angira's social vision. We mention this directly or imply it throughout the chapter. The purpose of this chapter therefore is to discuss the use of semantic absurdities as a poetic device in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* and illustrate how Angira uses this poetic device to bring out his social vision for his society. The chapter starts with a brief comment on what Adrian Roscoe, Angus Calder and Ezenwa-Ohaeto have said about Angira's use of language. This is relevant to what we have encountered in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* – a clever manipulation of language. We have then looked closely into what we consider Angira's inspiration as far as his enthusiasm with poetry is concerned: What he has written in 'A Letter to My Wife' in *Busara* attests to his admiration of both Karl Marx and Pablo Neruda. After this, we have analyzed twenty five poems that are of diverse length, theme and style in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* starting from the first part to the last.

Jared Angira's unique quality as a poet is his thought-provoking use of language. His love for semantic resonance and subtle allusions has been received both with endearment and revulsion, reverence and fear. His use of subtle images, lyricism, wit and verbal irony has been dealt with by his earlier critics such as Adrian Roscoe, Angus Calder and Ezenwa-Ohaeto. Angira employs semantic absurdities both in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* and *Lament of Silent & Other Poems* to put the problems in his society into sharp focus. Angira is what Nturu calls in *Tensions*, "The prying rays of the sun/That put our actions into question marks" (p.25). Roscoe speaks of 'those qualities of firm sensuousness and moral bite which had announced Angira's emergence' (Roscoe, 93). His poetry indeed resonates with both flamboyance in style and beauty in meaning.

The mention of semantic absurdities points to self-defeatism or contradiction with respect to the message being unveiled by reader. It is this self-defeatist presentation of meaning that has made Angira cut a niche for himself in the world of poetry. This style has not just been embraced in Angira's latter days. Angira has been employing semantic absurdities right from his undergraduate days at the University of Nairobi when his poetry and prose appeared in the University literature journal, *Busara* back in (1969-1971). In Angira's own epistolary short story 'A Letter To My Wife', he employs semantic absurdity when he says:

But I want to make no mistake like our clever men who swear to plan the poor man's economy and end up planning how the rich should grow richer. This is precisely because they often start in the middle, with few incredulous ones who had sliced a pie when the elephant fell. (Busara, 1971: 18)

Angira calls these dishonest politicians 'clever' which is more paradoxical than ironic, for they not only do exactly the opposite of what they undertake to do, but that society holds

them with awe and admiration. The poor are made poorer while the rich are made richer but still they (the rich who become richer) appear to attract profound reverence on the ground (from the poor who aspire to rise in status). These 'clever men' denote shrewd politicians, lawmakers, just like the bourgeoisie in Marxist economics who own the means of production. The 'clever' enrich themselves or their own class while the poor or the proletariat become poorer. 'Clever' by its utmost affectation is socially acceptable. Nonetheless, the so-called 'clever men' - which also implies 'clever women' - do what is socially abhorrent - they exploit the downtrodden without the remotest compunction. The rivalry between the exploitative class and the exploited class in Marxist literary critical theory is undeniably evident here. Angira identifies with the exploited class which strongly tempts his readers to brand him a communist apologist. 'A Letter To My Wife' strongly supports this assertion that Angira is a communist sympathizer. He tells his wife in this 'letter':

I pity you so much especially as you have never experienced the joy of pain and suffering. The joy of misery. To me pain is so familiar because it has become a part of my life. I know that my sons and grandsons will never suffer unless they turn to the rejected religion of bishop Capitalis. I hear you folks there still worship him. Let them go ahead, only take care of yourself. I know when I return, I will have companions who will go to church with me and listen to Father Socialis preach (*ibid.* p.22).

'The joy of pain and suffering' is paradoxical. Angira earlier on talks of his involvement in this war for revolution to his wife. He says that his camp is the largest in the entire force with Major General Naturalis Descamisados as the chief. This points to Angira's association with the majority oppressed class in society, a class whose life-line is their sweat ('Descamisados as later-on seen in Chapter Three alludes to sweat from excess heat', *Lament of the Silent*, p.79). However, communism, like religion, elicits profound determination and

total commitment from its apologists. That is the reason Angira says he has experienced the joy of pain and suffering: it is worth dying for in the Communist followers' eyes. He castigates 'Bishop Capitalis' while paying profound homage to 'Father Socialis' whose message deserves the narrator's listenership. Further, he alludes to the assumed opinion that both Christianity and Islam are anti-communist and therefore exploitative and oppressive, when he uses the 'English Channel' (read Christianity) and 'Medina Sidonia' (read Islam) to register his frustration at what appears like the two have deliberately undertaken to shun the message of a classless society:

They would not listen. They had lost the power to understand. This was my thought. Unknown to me was the fact that they were all disciples of Bishop Capitalis. (I did not know this until the night when I had a long conversation with Brother Pablo Neruda.) I must now register my indebtedness to Brigadier Neruda for without his encouragement, I would not have joined the armed forces (ibid. p.73).

From this quotation, it is evident that Pablo Neruda could have been a huge inspiration to Angira. Angira's uniqueness of expression tends to take after that of Neruda. He for instance calls Neruda "Brigadier Neruda" which literally creates an atmosphere of war. This is however contradictory because Neruda was an ardent pacifist. In 'Keeping Quiet' for example, Neruda urges silence, inaction, slowness and laziness. He decries war locomotives, wars of gas, and wars of fire whose victory is without survivors – Pyrrhic-victory indeed. Neruda could have been protesting against the use of nerve gas, for example, what Hitler used in World War II in the Nazi concentration camps in Germany. Angira's steady stand against war (just like Neruda) is a confirmation of his anti-capitalist stand. It is instructive to note at this juncture that most wars that have pitted humanity over the ages are basically due to the struggle for resources between those who want to enjoy monopoly and

those fighting for equality. It is self-defeatist when Angira says that he had joined the armed forces. He probably means he had joined the Peace Corps. His persistent fight for peace therefore highlights the future he envisions for the world – a future deficient of war.

Angira has also persistently advocated for equity, indeed equality in humanity. His consistency in identifying with Karl Marx is not just empty rhetoric. He has demonstrated his desire for a classless society from his undergraduate days to the present day. He writes in ‘A Letter To My Wife’:

At first we had great problems. A soldier like me who is to remain forever non-commissioned faces the danger of dying without rank. We raised hell about this especially as those in my category had suffered and incurred permanent injuries. That is how Karl Marx came into the picture. He volunteered to be our spokesman cum defender. And now rather than give everyone big, loud sounding ranks, Karl Marx has suggested on our behalf that no one be awarded such ranks. You don't reward someone for having looted well! That is precisely why Marx is a saint among us. We shall possess no rank and we do not hope to. Such ranks are not essentials of life. In fact, they only serve to create enmity among the soldiers. Suppose the criteria for being ranked was, say the ability to murder, plunder, rob with or without violence, there could be the danger of one soldier murdering his fellow soldier to earn an upgrade. (ibid. p.24)

This is a fairly long quotation but it depicts what might be dismissed as rabble-rousing or populist agitation especially now that most of the world has formally adopted capitalism. Nonetheless, looking at the cut-throat competition for resources, jobs and power, whether at the family level or at global stage, it is imperative to note that Angira's words as quoted above, or more still, Marx's theory as conceived almost two hundred years ago, will most likely come to pass some day. History is replete with innumerable records of untold cruelty, greed and selfishness that have driven the peoples of the world to senseless wars.

Of the poems in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems*, 'THE YEARS GO BY' presents a situation pregnant with contrast and paradox:

The cock crows upon
 Perforated cake
 the owl-tremulous
 with bulging
 eyes
 wails
 and
 we shout in the wilderness

galvanized
 variegation
 wagging tails
 before Attwood
 AND
 we shout in the wilderness

Somersaulting
 Politicians-toddling
 Drowsy
 in constipation
 AND
 meticulous success!

Eye-opening
 students
 agile
 cocooned
 AND
 the batons fall

Ballot
 the only warm rod
 to bring down the balloon
 -on vac
 AND
 the years seep

Dowry lost in maze
 phrases of oath
 -archaic in
 parlous web
 Wananchi tails withdrawn
 AND

The start of each new day (which may also be a new season, a time for renewal/change) in this poem is signalled by the cock crow. The cake (read national resources) is however perforated. This likely plunder on the ex-chequer is followed by the ominous cry of the owl. The dent that has been made on the cake signals a plunder of public resources which in turn portends instability. The result is an emphatic cry by the citizens ('we') in utter powerlessness. What follows in the second stanza is the coming together of various groups ('galvanized/variegation') beginning with those in power 'wagging tails/before Attwood'. The rest remain restlessly powerless ('AND/we shout in the wilderness'). Next we see politicians who have since been absolutely transformed 'Somersaulting/politicians toddling/drowsy/in constipation.' This is the drunkenness that is typical of political power. The laziness and sleepiness here in constipation mourns the extreme self indulgence of the political élite. This is a profound departure from what the society expects of politicians and the net result is 'meticulous success!' The situation here appears ludicrous to the ordinary citizen in that elected politicians have completely abdicated the duties and obligations bestowed upon them. The paradox however is that these politicians see this carnivalesque-like lifestyle as a huge success on their part.

We further see students who are the epitome of intellectual arousal surrounded by the police, - 'AND/the batons fall' - and subjected to police brutality. The paradox here is that while politicians have resorted to the use of force to silence the protesters, a denigration of the electorate, the police themselves who are also of the majority poor or underpaid, have joined hands with politicians to silence the people. An absurdity indeed. The poet further reveals that elections are outlawed, thus killing the only way for regime change. The

wananchi have no option but to silently submit to the whims of those in power. This is the paradoxical situation where the oppressor takes all and the passing of time for the oppressed is expressed in an image of sickness: 'the years ooze'. The meaning of this poem therefore presents an absurd relationship that makes the reader pity the irredeemable situation in which the citizens have found themselves. This is as a result of the absurd reality that while initially power belonged to them (citizens), the power-bloated politicians now use State elements of violence like the police to silence them. The citizens have now been denied the right to protest and even vote. Thus the paradoxical semantic absurdity in this poem.

The oxymoronic title 'The Silent Voice' underscores Angira's intention of employing semantic absurdities in his poetry. Angira is magnanimous in his appreciation of the fact that 'silence' has power however absurd this might literally appear. The persona in the poem wishes to understand the voice of silence, the beauty and the seat of that 'fathomless power':

how I long to measure the volume
of that variable music
of your giant power
that shakes houses apart
and cripples trees
scraps vessels on blues. (p.8)

Angira appears to outrightly glorify the immense potential typical of the majority members of the society who significantly sustain society's livelihood ('shakes houses apart/and cripples trees/scraps vessels on blues') yet remain 'silent'. The silence here can be interpreted in the Marxist literary scale to mean the inability of the masses to control society's wealth which they themselves produce. Their power therefore remains 'silent'. Roscoe asserts that *Silent Voices* 'suggests a concern still with the inarticulate masses for

whom the poet sees himself as spokesman.’(Roscoe, 99). The situation is perfectly captured here. The glaring contrast between the indomitable spirit of the silent and the incredible fate characteristic of their present situation is evident:

You who bring rains
and yet so slim
were I able to site your dwelling
I’d falsify God and create a world anew. (p.13)

It can be argued that the rain that the ‘you’ in the poem brings is suggestive of the immense wealth made by the masses, the workers, the people, as opposed to their biting poverty, ‘and they are yet so slim’, which is a cruel absurdity. The second last line ‘were I able to site your dwelling’ probably means the poet has acknowledged his failure to make out how exactly it happens that the masses can remain powerless yet they are society’s economic base and moulders of the economy. The ultimate wish of falsifying God to ‘create a world anew’ confirms this. Humans, when defeated, call upon God, or in surrender say what they would do were they God for that is the supposed seat of the supernatural. Angira appears at a loss here and deliberately avoids suggesting a remedy to the situation. This could be said to be a conscious silence on his part as a gesture of solidarity with the masses, ‘the silent voice’. This poem therefore exposes the kind of injustice meted upon the apparently powerless class in society who though potentially powerful seem unable to establish a way out of the quagmire they are in.

In ‘EXPECTATION’, the situation is even more absurd for a people’s dream always aborts.

The first stanza opens with overtones of paradox:

Such a great expectation it was
that all edibles had no room
desires sank to the bottom
all

remained nonexistent (p.21)

The first three lines present a situation where the people's collective mood borders on hysteria. Their stomachs have no room for food. This ecstatic mood mirrors what usually follows an election where the subjugated majority expect a change in the crop of leadership that is blind to the needs of the majority. The third, fourth and the fifth lines nonetheless negate this expectation: 'desires sank to the bottom/all/remained nonexistent.' The persona's tone is so final that one can sense an emphatic absence of an appeal or any other way to deal with what has taken place. This is a strong suggestion that no resistance on the part of the people can be tolerated which is indeed paradoxical. Where then is the so-called power in the people, the majority voters, in the letter and spirit of democracy? The second stanza is even more elaborate in describing how profound hope transforms into wanton hopelessness:

clouds form
 and nearer the hope comes
 only to be marred
 by the rainbow
 the wind
 in heavily moisted overcoat
 blows a whistle
 but the coconut palms
 grab the water
 before the fall (p.21)

The forming clouds on the first line of this stanza herald blessings, a huge harvest which is evident on the second line when the poet says 'and nearer the hope comes'. The third line is however a sharp contrast of the former. The next lines give an elaborate illustration of the forces that make the dream so excitedly waited for abort: 'the rainbow/the wind...the coconut palms/grab the water/before the fall.' The water in this case is symbolic of the dividends, the rewards that the people have worked very hard for and therefore expect to

earn as a result. The rainbow here paints a rather peculiar combination of the sunshine and the rain, the result of which is a poor harvest of rain. 'The wind/in heavily moisted overcoat/blows a whistle' meaning a potentially powerful force that shall drive the expected 'water' away. This could be said to symbolize a few powerful individuals in the higher hierarchy of power that siphon off a people's wealth abroad. Its velocity makes it blow a whistle in which case some of the water might reach the ground. This however is not the case because 'the coconut palms/grab the water/before the fall'. The ground here has been deprived of the remotest probability of tapping the water. Angira beautifully uses images to paint this picture that appears absurd in its literal sense. Metaphorically, however, Angira's text communicates a paradoxical reality in that, before it could benefit the downtrodden, what is intended for them is grabbed by the well to do corrupt individuals bent on quenching their blind greed.

The next stanza is a lamentation on the volatility of the nation whose very core of survival 'float in the air':

the soul
is suspended high
on a tree
whose roots
float in the air
hunting for a socket
to push themselves (p.21)

The soul being a person's inner character, spirit and conscience, constitutes the pillar of humanity. Its suspension on an uprooted tree here depicts instability, while 'hunting for a socket/to push themselves' means that the restless populace is struggling to found a footing in the system with determination. The word 'push' indicates this determination which basically points to the determination inherent in the poor to lead a better life.

The final stanza underscores the undying expectation introduced in the first stanza:

every train arrival
 and craft landing
 each ship's anchor
 womb a child
 long expectation
 yet on each delivery
 it is a girl and not a son (pp.21-22)

The atmosphere here is of heightened anxiety. The usage of 'train arrival/craft landing/ship's anchor' could be said to signal various crops of 'leaders' that succeed one another, say, in the event of change of office. Angira likens the people's excitement to the excitement that accompanies a woman's pregnancy in a patriarchy. The excitement however is dashed when delivery after another brings forth 'a girl and not a son'. Like in patriarchy where the birth of a son elicits a carnival mood accompanied with hearty celebration, Angira paints a gloomy picture of a society whose dream of a brilliant future is like the opposite of the typical birth of a son in patriarchy. The political scene in most of Africa typically resembles what Angira paints here. Disappointment and betrayal characterize the political climate in the continent time after time. The poet is condemning such barbaric absurdities here - a culture similar to a rootless tree.

Another absurd and semantically elusive example of Angira's poems in *Tides of Time* is 'ENTRY'. The poet juxtaposes God and Satan in a way that can literally be termed bizarre:

God howls in his hell
 just as I shiver
 in the cold forest
 where the barbed wire
 is fallen

Limbs of trees
 move like tongues

of noisy women
 I gnaw my yellow teeth
 below the surface

Mine is a rolling tongue
 does Satan not
 jump in jubilation
 at his paradise?
 let the juke-box play
 against the black wall. (pp. 25-26)

The first line 'God howls in his hell' appears self-defeatist on the face of it. God is normally not associated with hell nor is He associated with howling. However, carefully evaluated, the lines state that God, like humans who believe in him, also experiences untold pain and suffering when humans suffer. The human here, 'I', is shivering in the cold forest where the barbed wire is fallen. This makes the reader imagine a place where insecurity is rife, for barbed wire signals insecurity. It is however said to be fallen here. This second stanza paints the image of a visibly silenced persona while tree-branches brushing one another are vocalized/personified by comparing their movement with the movement of 'tongues/of noisy women'. The persona 'I' can only 'gnaw my yellow teeth/below the surface.' The yellow teeth are a clear sign of despair unlike what white teeth symbolize: health and brilliance. The yellow teeth below the surface here denote a subdued voice. This is evidenced by 'Mine is a rolling tongue' on line one, stanza three. A relaxed tongue is a mockery of speech. To this point the poet portrays 'God' and 'I' as being silent observers and partakers of pain and suffering. This can be an allusion to Christianity where Jesus shares persecution with the poor who decide to wind up their businesses and follow him thus becoming fishers of men. Satan on the other hand is 'in jubilation/at his paradise' which again is self contradictory. It is believed that Satan and devils are residents in hell NOT paradise the same way God and angels are associated with paradise NOT hell. The

picture of God in pain, anger, grief here contrasts sharply with that of Satan in jubilation. What does this mean? The answer to this question can be seen if we can observe the society Angira observes before writing his poetry. While those who strive for social justice (read God) suffer in agony, those who bring about injustice (read Satan) celebrate in all manner of orgies. The devil appears, as now, to have won the battle. No wonder Satan jubilates, what is typically associated with paradise in the Christian mythology, a peaceful abode. The sinner, criminal, and wrongdoer therefore appear to be sitting pretty. The final stanza consists of lines that suggest encouragement on society to voice their grievances ('let the juke-box play'). The music here is selective. This means that the poet does not encourage the continuation of the previous path of silence. He is instead calling upon his audience to sound their protest 'against the Black wall'. The black wall in this case denotes the evil of injustice, immorality, rot that blocks the road of justice, righteousness and transparency. Thus the poem is punctuated with a lot of semantic absurdity whose unraveling usually calls on consistent reference to the poem itself. The usage of the title 'ENTRY' suggests the poet's involvement in the duel. The poet calls upon the people to soldier on with the cry of justice - 'let the juke box play' (p.26) - which supports Roscoe's earlier observation that Angira sees himself as the representative of the silent in *Silent Voices*.

A similarly paradoxical state of affairs emerges in 'MIRAGE' where a people's dream has been trashed. The people's existence is 'fibrous':

For all the salt
it's fibrous existence here
they swore
the sun would never sink
and now it's dusk

It has rained
and what difference
has it made to the ocean?

I try to catch
the footsteps of past

I fail
and I ask,
didn't the auditors
check the accounts?

Peasants
in cocoons of livelihood
heave in cinders of hope
and yet
the end of the road
is at the water's edge

Behind the wall
classic shout in dusty shelves
and cockroaches examine them
with no symptoms of insanity
so the owner empties
bottles at the bar. (p.27)

The title 'mirage' presents a situation which, literally perceived, means a hope or a wish that is unrealistic. The first stanza for instance talks of an honest people's wish (read salt) that the sun would never sink. Literally, the sun must surely rise and set day by day. Metaphorically, the sun in this poem symbolizes cheerfulness and absence of worry. This (paradoxical) state of affairs (an absurdity) is what everybody thought had come with the new dawn (read independence or change of regime). Paradoxically however, the opposite happens; and now it's dusk.

The second stanza illustrates the situation further: 'it has rained' (read economic prosperity) yet 'to the ocean' (read the common people, who happen to be the majority) it has made no difference. This is typical of what has happened in most third world countries where good starts end up being fiascos as a result of misrule.

The third stanza has lines in which the persona talks of an attempt to derive an explanation to the situation on the basis of past history. This also fails as we see in the next stanza which prompts the persona to wonder: 'didn't the auditors/check the accounts?' The poet here comes closest to revealing the poem's subject matter to the reader - plunder of public resources. This can be said to be allusive to the African context which beams with an aura of theft of public wealth by a few well-connected political power barons and/or brokers. This is further evidenced by Angira's mention of peasants in stanza five. He says the peasants (read the majority poor) have not completely despaired. The same stanza puts this little hope to question marks however when the poet contrasts the situation by saying 'and yet/the end of the road/is at the water's edge'. This might appear self-contradictory to the eye but it can also be argued that a poverty-stricken people can only find their way out of penury by obtaining what Angira is alluding to by his use of water in this poem - liquid. Liquid in business terms refers to what can easily be changed to cash. That is the reality. It is this 'liquid' that has been pillaged by uncanny people keen on making a quick fortune. And as usual, the 'peasants' suffer since they are the victims that ultimately bear the public debt on their shoulders. Such are the absurdities of life as painted in this poem. The final stanza talks of heaps of books ('classics in dusty shelves') suggesting that the populace has no means of accessing knowledge. That even the book store owner 'empties/bottles at the bar' is indicative of diminished activity. No one has a worthwhile venture here. Despair therefore becomes the best tag in such a situation. The persona in the poem seems to have lost hope and sees no way out of the present absurdity. Angira seemingly speaks for such people by exposing their plight.

Finally, from the section of *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* called "Silent Voices", Angira paints a picture of parliament using the images of birds - cockrobin, weaverbird, owls, and hawk - in 'A NIGHTMARE'. These birds stand for both the members of parliament and the represented populace:

I am a cockrobin
though not as neat
on a tall tree

Below is a parliament
Building. Other giant birds
noisy weaverbird
dressed deep yellow
are shouting
constantly chorusing
'...for the nation...'
the nation is still prostrate

A few watch birds
the owls who...who...
The Parliament Building
now becomes boat
with a red sail
being wetted by bring water
all rowers
sit on one side
the boat is capsizing
the boat is sinking

Now I am a hawk
dwelling on the beach
near the corpses
of the drowned boatmen
The navy came to the same boat
the navymen had little knowledge
of the carnal area of the sea
with fiery pots whirling sea
they lived few seconds before dawn
and passed... (pp.29-30)

The title is descriptive of the goings-on in the poem. The persona is introduced as a small adult male bird, cockrobin, who seems unable to measure up to the huge task ahead, ('not as

neat/on a tall tree'). The birds in Parliament (read MPs) are gigantic and hypocritical (read giant birds . . . chorusing). The nation they purport to sing for is 'still prostrate/under the heavy blanket' (read a people unable to stand up to anything). That some ('A few watch-birds') try to challenge the status quo is later negated when 'all rowers/sit on one side/the boat is capsizing/the boat is sinking,' resulting in a failed state. The drowned boatmen are the government officials while the boat they are rowing is government business. From the image of a cockrobin, the persona assumes the image of a hawk signalling a shift from pacifism to militancy. This is a sharp contrast. The boatmen have been drowned (read regime overthrow) by the navy (read military coup) who take over the running of public affairs. That 'The navy/came to the same boat with little knowledge/of the carnal area of the sea' shows that military rule is not the way forward for any civilized society for they evidently lack the necessary skills and experience to lead the citizenry. That the 'navymen' only 'lived few seconds before dawn/and passed...' is Angira's evident suggestion that when one crop of politicians with similar views ('sit on one side') run down the government, military rule is not the way out. This could be his stand against singular politics and military rule. The opposite could be true: that plural politics, if properly constituted, ensures transparency and development. Therefore the little hope that there was of the navy rescuing the sinking boat - which becomes a fiasco - makes the situation desperate. Hope and despair come face to face. This is what juxtaposition is all about. The resultant confusion makes the poem semantically absurd.

The above poem seems to end with the downfall of an oppressive regime which provides an opportunity to the ordinary citizen for regime change. This heralds a better future that Angira illuminates in 'AT THIS TIME' which reads:

At this time

may be tomorrow
 I'll come a cross
 brave men
 Among them
 Mbella Sonne Dipoko
 Telling this world
 Little 'insane' things
 Preaching to ears
 that have been told not to hear
 Filming pictures
 to eyes that have been goggled dark
 For this time
 most likely tomorrow
 There will be
 a referendum
 And the voters
 will be bullets
 In a wild exchange
 there will be elections
 And voters will be batons
 And then
 out of blood silence
 Will be victory.
 for 'modern democracy' (pp.41-43)

Angira juxtaposes 'today' and 'tomorrow' in a bid to reveal what he envisions in the struggle for the self determination of a people. He mentions Mbella Sonne Dipoko, the revolutionary Cameroonian poet from the late nineteen sixties, who was forced to go into exile for his life was threatened by the political conservatives of the status quo in his country. As a good example of the children of Africa who are keen on bringing about sociopolitical change, Angira uses a satirical tone when he ironically refers to what Mbella says as 'insane' little things. This probably implies that reactionaries and their functionaries have labelled the likes of Mbella 'insane'. The paradox of the situation is that Mbella is 'Preaching to ears/that have been told not to hear/Filming pictures/to eyes that have been goggled out'. One wonders how this could possibly be true. The simple answer to this is that retrogressive regimes use the ordinary citizens as canon fodder for cheap propaganda, thus

ensuring the ordinary citizens are deaf and blind to their own needs. This helps reactionaries remain in power.

Angira further expresses pessimism when he alludes to despotic regime perpetuation by means of the ballot. He paradoxically says: "And the voters/will be bullet/In a wild exchange/there will be elections/And voters will be batons/And then/out of blood silence/Will be victory//for 'modern democracy'." The paradox that emerges here is that the evil regime that ironically boasts of being a modern democracy by use of elections sadly uses the people to legitimize its stay in office. This is a parody of democracy for a poorly sensitized populace is only used as a stamp to legitimize such regimes. Further down, he says that Mbella will be 'A paid agent of Communism/He'll be declared/dangerous element/For asking//for a classless family' (p.42). The above lines show that Mbella is fighting for social justice because of his fight for a classless society where all men enjoy the pride of human dignity for there is neither master nor servant in a full democracy. Paradoxically, however, everybody else seems to celebrate a class society. Little wonder then that in most societies, the people regarded to be lavishly affluent are idolized and celebrated. The poet uses the oxymoronic line 'There will be a hushed sound' to register the international community's complacency and compliance with, say, African dictatorships. A 'hushed sound' reminds one of the lack of involvement or intervention by the so-called 'Developed World' when the people of the so called 'third world' are silenced. He uses the Biblical allusions of the first and second Passovers to show that the masses had been sidelined more than once. This is a sharp contrast to the biblical Passover itself where the Angel of God spared the first born sons of the Lord's chosen people and smote those of the enemies of Israel. Angira however signs off optimistically by introducing a contrast to the above mind-boggling pictures: 'Yet, /for every act there is an end/And the sleepers/will

eventually wake' (p.42). That the silenced population will erupt one day like a dormant volcano gives the message of hope. All this constitutes part of the semantic absurdities in Angira's poetry.

The exploration of the powerlessness of the human being in the face of tragedy using the images 'god' and 'lightning' is portrayed in 'IT COMES WHEN MOST UNEXPECTED'. The title itself is paradoxical in that with the advancement in human knowledge the world now boasts of ample technological advancement. Natural and man made disasters are predictable - Tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, volcanic eruptions, diseases and wars. Nonetheless, disaster preparedness and detection ability have not made the world immune to occasional unprecedented devastation such as the one registered here:

O god
 there it goes again
 Lightning
 blowing up
 The mountains
 into little sharp
 stones

Rolling
 onto the
 sea

It always
 comes
 even after
 centuries

Of quietness
 and when it comes
 God
 solitude
 Boils
 and mingles
 With all
 the confusion

And those who
 laugh
 Are not exactly
 the happy
 For laughter
 may be
 ill-timed

But God
 this coming
 Does come
 when most
 unexpected! (pp.44-45)

This poem is about nature and environment. Thus we are able to see the ugliness of a natural phenomenon whose destructiveness leaves us with a mouths-open horror. Apart from the destructiveness that the poem describes which is ascribed to lightning, the style of the poet in bringing this out is a combination of contrast and paradox. The 'blowing up' of mountains 'into little sharp/stones 'even after/centuries/of quietness' is a sharp contrast. 'Solitude mingling with confusion' is another. This is like a solitary person becoming gregarious overnight. The paradox comes in when the poet says: 'And those who/laugh/are not exactly/the happy' (p.44). This is paradoxical in that laughter has a direct connection with happiness or amusement. Laughing in the face of disaster therefore is self-defeatist. It should however be denoted that when one is confronted with a humbling experience where neither anger nor bitterness will suffice, they simply laugh as a sign of their impotence. That 'this coming/Does come/when most/unexpected!' is an acknowledgement of the limitedness of the human capacity to manage disaster. This is semantically absurd.

Human actions are put to close scrutiny in 'THE MARROW' where Angira seems to assert that the evil bedevilling humanity cannot be attributed to one's looks (the rough surface). Instead the real problem (crux), he says, is the 'marrow' (Stanza 2). It is actually the inside.

The poem says in stanza five:

It is in the anthem and not the piano
It is in the painter and not the brush paint
It is in the poet and not the pen
It is in the harpist and not the harp (p.54)

The persona seems to blame the instrumentalist, the instigator of action (the doer), NOT the tools used to present the message here. However, the poet contrasts stanza five with stanza six to introduce a different perspective:

But when you think further
As I suggest you do
The poet is the poem
The painter the painting
The composer the song
The fornicator fornication
The robber robbery
The raper rape (pp.54-55)

This then suggests that Angira reads little or no difference at all between the perpetrator of a crime and the crime itself, the instigator of action and the action itself. Indeed there is cognitive consonance in these lines. The last two lines of the poem come with a tone of finality: 'It is not the black coals whitewashed/It is the marrow, O, the red marrow' (p.55). That it is not the colour on one's skin (cover) - 'It is not the black coals whitewashed' - that determines one's actions, but the human nature ('It is the marrow, O, the red marrow"). It can rightly be pointed out that the red marrow emphasized here, which echoes the colour of human blood, is what makes us the same. Angira has consciously resorted to use the most rudimentary quality that makes humans equal, to erase any doubts here. Shakespeare equally does this in *The Merchant of Venice* where Shylock delivers a touching speech

focusing on the base human characteristics that define us - ‘. . . Hath not a Jew eyes, hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions . . . ?’ (p.45). Therefore, in precise terms, it is not easy to divorce evil from the evil-doer and say it is the evil that is being punished and not the evil-doer. This unravels the paradox here. Form and content are therefore indispensable ingredients of art.

Both ‘SPHINX SYMPHONY’ and ‘CANTATA FOR NOCTURNE’ are presented with interplay of despair and hope. The former presents, as mankind’s greatest challenge, the squeezing of his soul into the world beyond (‘The rocky clouds of discouragement’) (p. 65). The description of clouds as being rocky is paradoxical. Literally, clouds are a passing wind or a sign of precipitation, not more. Metaphorically however, ‘The rocky clouds of discouragement’ refer to a solid-barrier-like situation that one must struggle to surmount. That one has to ‘tunnel through/The rings of smoke’, reveals the hardship involved. The many selves denote the varying chances in mankind’s life: in season and out of season, in health and in sickness, for better for worse. The last two lines however spell the hope that sustains mankind: ‘At least the greatest challenge/Is the making of tomorrow’ (p 65).

‘CANTATA FOR NOCTURNE’, in the same breath, unlike the ‘SPHINX SYMPHONY’, is introduced with a beam of brilliantly glaring hope. It goes further to describe what should be done to realize this burning ambition to achieve the greatest heights of success. Powerful defenses and political rhetoric are hinted when in stanza five, the poet says:

The polemics,
 Pedantry
 Clichés (p. 66)

The absurd thing with this is that while the persona seeks to defend what they stand for by presenting very strong arguments (polemics) involving the finest details (pedantry), the speech shall lose meaning due to use of clichés. Hence, what the persona is wondering here is:

Do we then
 Like all passing men
 Succumb
 To the cheap idea
 Of giving up today
 Cashing in on tomorrow? (p.66)

This stanza is also self-contradictory. Passing men cannot cash in on tomorrow for they shall have passed. A dead person has no hope for tomorrow. Similarly it could be true in that people can be duped to receive goodies (read bribes in exchange for votes or voters' cards) especially in the political climate of tokenism, thus selling the present ('... giving up today') after having been made to believe that they will try their luck some other time ('... tomorrow'). Angira's ability to manipulate words this way proves that he is the master of this craft. The meaning thus becomes semantically absurd.

So, what does Angira prescribe for those who seem to be lacking in understanding themselves and the world? The philosophical approach to life in 'CANTO FOR TEMPUS' suggests his stance:

History stands solid
 Like the mountain range
 That man's faith
 Cannot move____
 Not one inch____

For we too
 Cast under the moonshadow
 Without having been

In the gist of all

We cannot judge
 What does not exist
 For that is in the cosmic mystic (pp.67-68)

These first three stanzas present a strongly worded message. It is generally assumed that a person's faith (mostly associated with determinism and religion) is purely personal. This is in concord with the first stanza 'That man's faith/cannot move-/Not one inch'. Next Angira asserts that 'We cannot judge/What does not exist/For that is in the cosmic'. This means that one needs to meditate in order to get a gist of the fathomless heights of the universe. This is an affront to those who rely on rumours and conjecture to obtain an understanding of their environment. To say that Angira's objective view boasts of universal acclaim will be an overstatement. The world is predominantly religious. And since religion is guided by faith, it is imperative to note that faith is subjective and unverifiable. This means that, contrary to Angira's view, 'We judge/What does not exist'. This too is a paradox that constitutes Angira's uncanny ability to describe contradictions. To add more flesh to this, the next stanzas are both satirical and stimulating:

In a semblance of life
 We live our lives out
 Wielding our clubs
 The quick sweet tongue
 In public

Yet in the silent moment
 We don't know ourselves,
 We live in doubt
 And in the desperation
 Where a heart seeks
 Inner meaning
 Into you
 Seeking to understand,

What bio-mechanics
 Do you need
 Beyond a skeletal observatory
 Saying in the chorus
 'For every honest search

There is an honest answer'? (p.68)

The first line in stanza four above 'In a semblance of life' makes life a sham, a drama which is ludicrous. 'Tongues' here appear potentially harmful because the poet refers to them as clubs. Stanza five is a sharp contrast for unlike the noisy atmosphere in stanza four, there is biting silence here coupled with confusion ('We don't know ourselves/We live in doubt'). The poet further says that despair is the prevailing atmosphere prompting the heart to seek inner meaning of the situation. The persona all along has been a plural first person 'we' speaking about/to themselves. This finally changes towards the end where the persona's soul and body are separated, and the soul, perpetuating the first person persona, addresses the body which is now in the second person (you). The rhetorical question at the close of the poem is a challenge to humanity to earnestly and sincerely search for answers to questions and solutions to the problems they are confronted with: 'For every honest search/There is an honest answer?' The answer to the question that runs through the whole of the last stanza invariably aims at bringing about keen understanding of the human mind and soul, NOT body ('Beyond skeletal observatory') for the body is easily scientifically understood. This mirrors a huge contrast between the human body and soul. The poet is saying that it is only a closer understanding of the two (body and soul) that will ensure inner peace in humanity.

A similar phenomenon is described in 'SONATA FOR SAPPHO' where human love is the focal point. The first stanza is particularly interesting:

The love we draw
 From this earth
 When realized
 Resides in ourselves
 At maturity
 We want to pass it on (pp.68-69)

Angira seems to say that love genuinely realized is infectious. Martin Luther King Jr asserts in his 'Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech' of 1954 and I quote, 'I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality' (p.9). This truth is distant from what Angira seeks in his search for an honest answer in the preceding poem while the unconditional love here is similar to the 'love we draw/From this earth' in 'SONATA FOR SAPPHO'. The opposite of this is highlighted in stanza two:

When rejected
 By distant soul
 This love
 Returns to the sea
 Enriching the deeps
 With a treasure of poetry
 Floating
 Distant lands
 Searching
 For a new soul. (p. 69)

This stanza talks of unreciprocated love. That it returns to the sea upon rejection by someone else who is aloof ('distant soul'). The abundance of the human touch - 'With a treasure of poetry' - is an appropriate line here for it suggests heightened emotion and passion because poetry is emotive. It is the best language of love. It is beauty itself.

The final stanza is full of hope unlike the first two stanzas that contradict each other. This stanza alludes to the beauty of love and its ability to bring about and perpetuate life:

The springs
 Of life
 Also draw
 From those deposits
 But somewhere
 Beneath the lagoons
 The poetry lies, quiet, in the store of Time. (p.69)

While in the second stanza love appears adulterated (read the salty sea water), the third (final) stanza describes pure love for it is deposited 'Beneath the lagoons' (symbolizing fresh water) awaiting the right moment for its unending full expression ('The poetry lies, quiet, in the store of Time'). It can be seen therefore that a spurned lover is not necessarily a sufferer of tremendous loss. Instead, this is an enormous opportunity to find a new and better love, thus becoming paradoxical.

Juxtaposition is prominently employed in 'OLD WHARF CANTO' where hope and despair are interplayed throughout the poem:

In moments of anguish
I have even built hopes
On the glowing moon

Only, the glimmer sinks down the troubled ocean.

In moments of despair
I have incubated my eggs
In the warmth of the after-rain evaporation

Only, the warmth oozes down the troubled waters.

In moments of hope
I have visited the abandoned ship
Daring the cold solitude of the cold wharves

Only, courage falls deep down the troubled waters.

What moments, shall
Idiotic diver, submerge the whirlpools
To hold up the winds for my sail?

And the troubled waters
Consume the whirlpools. (p. 71)

The first two stanzas directly present a juxtaposition of despair versus hope while the third presents hope versus despair. The single-line stanzas separating these three three-line stanzas talk of the 'glimmer', 'warmth', 'courage' disappearing down the troubled waters.

Troubled waters symbolize violence, discouragement and war, thus negating the little hope prevalent in each of the first three three-line stanzas. The seventh stanza talks of an ‘idiotic diver’ trying to hold up the winds for the persona’s sail by diving into the whirlpools. The persona signs off in the eighth stanza by giving prominence to the troubled waters for they ‘consume the whirlpools’. The ‘whirlpools’ here suggest heightened tension. This tension however is not as strong as the ‘troubled waters’, for they still consume it. What the poet is presumably saying here is that there is an unsolved problem whose intensity outdoes every other thing. The problem here however seems emotional NOT physical. The words (anguish, hopes, despair, solitude and courage) are a pointer to an emotional imbalance to which the persona seems to echo the words of the preacher in Ecclesiastes: ‘Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, Vanity of vanities! All is vanity’ (*The Bible, RSV, 587*). The poem above in the overall concept, stresses the limitedness of human ability, human power. Hope and despair are also juxtaposed in ‘LIGHTHOUSE LIBRETTO’ where Angira paradoxically asserts:

Why should we die
Searching for what
We can never have,

Die
Loving the distant? (p.77)

These lines are self-contradictory. Literally, it is absurd that one can die searching for what they understand they are incapable of obtaining. However, day by day, humans strive for that elusive top-of-the-world image. Little wonder then that artificiality rules the world: perfect physique, superior sporting prowess and superior performance in art. These have seen millions of people resort to substance abuse in a ‘search for what/We can never have’. The situation thus becomes absurd, yet humorous.

This vanity is further captured in 'THE STAGE' where Angira seems to satirize the impotence of those who profess Christianity, and political rabble rousers (deceptive agitators) who employ flowery rhetoric to confuse the masses. Whether Angira is talking out of first-hand experience or informed imagination is the question here:

We have left the stage
 For men of the age,
 The loud-talking Christians,
 The sweet-tongued politicians.

The new moon comes and goes
 Illuminating our shadows on the seas,
 The noonday sun burns and woes
 Drying the little we have on our knees.

Over the platform roar the politicians
 A new arrival, packet of lies;
 Over the pulpit shout the Christians
 A new revival, new vision of rites.

And in their race to excel
 At loud talking at the park
 They lose the battle
 Into a new religion:
 Fighters at the frontline,
 Soldiers at the helm,
 Arguments abandoned! (pp.88-89)

The poet starts with the straight-faced confession on the part of 'we' (most probably society as constituted) on their failure to manage the stage/to be actors in the drama (read the day to day running of the society). Sadly this has been left to hypocrites (loud-talking Christians/sweet-tongued politicians) whose main drive is self-indulgence. That day by day, people suffer 'sun burns and woes'. Nevertheless, politicians and Christians perpetuate the ritual 'packets of lies'. Here the poet is exposing the cunning and egocentric nature of politicians and Christians. It is paradoxical that though politicians and Christians are expected to offer dynamic leadership, they indeed offer empty rhetoric. Where is their

service to the people? Angira says that their competition is 'At loud talking at the park'.

Being a race in futility, a new religion is born:

Fighters at the front line,
 Soldiers at the helm,
 Argument abandoned! (p.89)

This raises a serious credibility test on the part of the African Christians and politicians: why is it that they cannot measure up to the expected leadership credibility? Why does military rule and dictatorship abound? Why has brutality replaced dialogue? All these portray a sharp contrast between what is and what ought to be. The poet clearly seems to blame the people, the Christians and politicians here for the woes that betide Africa. Therefore, the absurd eventuality in this poem is that 'we' suffer, not under anybody else's duress but our own free will. Perhaps the contradiction observed in life could not have been better captured in *Tides of Time* than what we see in 'DIALOGUE'. The poem epitomizes the height of Angira's artistry, his rare ability to combine words, his mastery of diction. He offers a philosophical approach here:

She asked me why I did such things:
 I looked at the sun, it shone at will.
 She asked me when I'll do all that I should have done?
 I thought of the rains that fall at will.
 She asked me why I failed to fulfill my words:
 The balance of payments rocked in a whirling mess.
 She asked me why like the dumb I sat:
 I thought of the stub of words, the blood they leave.
 She asked me why I never laughed:
 I thought of men who laugh in tears.
 She asked me why no tango I danced:
 And I recalled the cripples who'd never stood upright.
 She asked me why I'd suddenly stopped to sprint like the hart:
 I looked down the west and saw the sky sink slowly down.
 She asked me why I was happy no more:
 Across the sky I saw the rainbow arc
 Across the road a mirage shone and quickly fled.
 And I recalled the dreams of the previous night.

She demanded the best the world could give.
 And I recalled the rabble who had no vote.
 She asked me why my life had rolled down the slopes
 And I recalled the many tombs in the deserted vale (p.90)

The first two answers in the poem point to the fact that everyone has the freedom to act the way they do 'at will'. Next, he cites financial difficulties (the balance of payment) as reason for his failure to honour his word. Then the interesting paradox follows: 'She asked me why like the dumb I sat/I thought of the stub of words, the blood they leave' (ibid.). Naturally the dumb cannot speak. The persona's silence here however appears intentional. By thinking about the stub of words, Angira could perhaps be alluding to his Christian upbringing which teaches that the tongue is a tiny organ but dangerously destructive. The tongue is capable of inciting people to violence - 'the blood they leave'. Silence therefore becomes golden in that it should be preferable to words, for words are potentially destructive. It is also paradoxical when the poem says, 'I thought of men who laugh in tears'. This is because laughter is not necessarily a pointer to happiness. When one is in the horns of a dilemma and does not know what to say or do, they simply laugh as a defense mechanism to disrupt their desperation. Alternatively, hearty outbursts of laughter also result in tears. The persona's present indifference excludes him from these two extreme emotional dispositions. Further down, we see the plight of the downtrodden: 'She demanded the best the world could give/And I recalled the rabble who had no vote.' (ibid.)

While 'she' here has the ability and latitude to choose what she wants, the rabble does not even have the ability to make independent decisions: 'had no vote'. This is paradoxical in that while some humans 'demand' to be given the best in the world, others just cannot say 'we want this or that' which makes us take a look at Mother Nature with our eyes wide open and wonder whether she ever created us equal. The last two lines allude to the fact that the

situation 'I' in the poem is in is better than being dead. The 'many tombs in the deserted vale' are representative of death. The message Angira is conveying here is that no matter what sorry state one might find themselves in, surrender should not be the way out for as Tupac Shakur sings in 'Me Against The World' , there is always tomorrow:

I know it seem hard sometimes but uh...
 Remember one thing
 Through every dark night
 There's a bright day after that
 So no matter how hard it get
 Stick ya chest out
 Keep ya head up
 And handle it.

Shakur is in this case urging his listeners to always struggle to survive no matter what they go through. The question of despair is non-existent here especially now that Shakur's main audience constituted the African Americans whom he considered a minority in the predominantly White American society that he considered racist.

The philosophical question dealing with life and death, hope and despair has extensively been explored in 'KNOTS IN VISIONS' which has eleven parts. The concepts have directly been juxtaposed in successive lines. The words - life, death, hope, despair - have consistently been used in an oxymoronic style. This looks like the time Angira is trying to understand the world through introspection. This is in a bid to satisfy the youthful anxiety and curiosity in him and at the same time present the prevailing atmosphere in his society. There seems to be a lot of disillusionment here. He for instance juxtaposes birth and death at the start of Part IV when he says:

No mother ever
 Forgets the labour pain
 No year ever
 Forgets the funeral days
 Of the saints and tyrants

Strange comrades at rest (p.98)

The mention of labour pain signals the pain and pleasure a mother experiences during parturition. This process can in turn give rise to someone who fits the two extremes of characterization: a saint or tyrant. That both the saint and the tyrant shall become strange comrades at rest (in death) is an admission that both birth and death make humans equal. He goes ahead to strongly reflect on the frustrations that befall the youth when their dreams go unmet. He says:

Where instead of laughing
 As the playwright had intended
 They wept
 At the sad joke
 Made of mankind
 As you put out to sea
 Into the hands of the cosmos
 The sails wave us farewell
 We forget the sweet pain
 We forget the painful smile
 Of the hull
 Oh yes, the face of youth
 Made like ant bitten piece
 There are no more legends
 The youth the legend
 The hybrids we hoped for
 Who will bring down the moon
 For judgment
 Over the betrayal
 In the high seas? (p.99)

The expected result of the adventure and actual result contradict each other in that while laughter (celebration) was expected, the actual eventuality was failure (they wept). Further down, the mention of 'sweet pain' and 'painful smile', both of which are oxymoronic, still mirror the absurdity of life. This is complemented later in the poem when the persona says that the face of youth is 'made like ant bitten piece' which mocks the glamour, brilliance and attractiveness that accompany the face of youth. The section closes with a lamentation

typical of despair: 'Who will bring down the moon/ For judgment/over the betrayal/In the high seas?' The moon here symbolizes some direct or indirect superior authority. Note that the question mark at the end of the second last line in *Tides of Time* could have been a typographical error for it is appropriate if placed at the end of the final line instead of the full-stop therein. We have made the suggested alteration. Angira here seems to suggest that life and death just like hope and despair exist in a one-to-one correlation instead of assuming mutual exclusivity. This observation is further reinforced in Part VI which takes the political rivalry that characterized the then cold war era between America and Russia as being a matter of life and death :

Life and death
 Like America and Russia
 Exist side by side
 Wishing to control the earth
 Which they jointly do
 So who outmanoeuvres the other
 Death needs life
 For out of the depths of death
 Spring the sprouts of life (p.100)

The images of America and Russia take us back to the time when Angira wrote these poems, a period when Washington was seen as the seat of capitalism and Moscow, that of communism (this was the pre-1989 period of extremely bitter rivalry that pitted the West against the East, the arms race era, America and Russia being the only two superpowers then). Would the two have sparked a nuclear warfare, mankind would have been annihilated due to the power and destructiveness of nuclear weapons of warfare. However, Washington managed to bring about the collapse of Moscow resulting in Washington remaining the only econo-military cum political world superpower. Their bitter rivalry enabled them to sponsor regimes and wars all over the world that ensured they exploited the whole world: crude oil, gold, diamonds, name them. It is instructive to note that the two superpowers competed in

flexing their muscles in Africa to the detriment of the people of the continent. Such are the absurdities Angira consciously addresses. The Part XI of this poem addresses the plight of the downtrodden. He mentions the 'street Arab in Addis' (p.104), the 'Nairobi parking boy' (p.105). Of these he says: 'They are the children/Of a world cold and aloof' (p.105).

Angira does not stop here at the mention of what the children are going through (neglect, indifference, and of course, exploitation). He gives a further observation pointing to the way they are treated finally suggesting very strongly that they indeed need recognition and love more than just pity:

At Robben Island
 They eat worms and grass
 They too are the children
 Of a world that loudly howls
 Like hyenas at dawn
 Boasting of human dignity
 What pity can we spare
 To them in Robben Island quarries?
 They no longer need pity
 They yearn for a world
 That has iron filings of feelings (p.105)

The mention of 'Robben Island quarries' reminds one of the South African coal mines at Robben Island where the renowned freedom fighter and world icon Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for twenty-seven years for political reasons. The depravity of the Robben Island dungeon cannot be gainsaid. That the world loudly boasts of human dignity when all this cruelty is going on is an indictment on society. The paradox here is that though the majority in society put on sham dignity and morality, quintessentially the same people exhibit a very different behavior depending on who they are dealing with. It becomes a case of multiple personality. It is also rather absurd when one makes a promise they cannot honour. That all they need is 'a world/That has iron filings of feelings' means the poet has

decided to confront society head-on and appeal for change so that humans can show others compassion instead of aloofness.

As the anthology progresses, Angira reverts to his pet subject: hope juxtaposed with despair. In 'LINES IN MIDSTREAM' (p.121), he likens human effort to Penelope's web (the proverbial expression for anything which is perpetually doing but never done). He says that for the distant traveler:

Like sailors from a wrecked ship
Any bird that wonders around
Is a sign of land
It is wonderful
To live in a world full of hope. (p.121)

The message of hope here tends to be Angira's way of challenging his audience not to give up. He does the same in 'THIS TIME EVERYWHERE' where again his traditional juxtaposition of hope and despair runs across the five stanzas. The final stanza reads:

This time somewhere, in cloudy weather
Someone is busy on gadgets
Steering the craft to the original course
Wanting to reach the promised land
So we're not alone, searching for the phoenix (p.123)

The usage of a 'cloudy weather' suggests blurred vision. This means the pilot will suffer the effects of an unclear aerial view. However, the pilot will fight to 'steer the craft to the original course/ . . . to reach the promised land'. This promised land is the successful arrival of the pilot at the intended destination. The final line uses the collective persona 'we' which in Roscoe's words might be Angira's way of regarding himself as part of the downtrodden and therefore their mouthpiece. The phoenix is that magical place of everlasting bliss. Perhaps this is the future he envisions for his representative audience. So saying that

'others' are also attempting to reach the promised land and assuring his representative audience (the downtrodden) that 'we are not alone', on the converse might imply complacency or apathy. Angira therefore refrains from prescribing more radical or militant actions for his people, which makes him cleverly avoid the tag of an apologist in his bid to portray the absurd situation.

Hope seems the only weapon in 'THIS TIME EVERYWHERE' (p.123) as the search for that 'promised land' continues. On the contrary, 'A SOLO FOR DUET' (p.125) portrays a situation where the worker/the struggler does not reap what is rightfully theirs. Thus, instead of the poor worker being empowered, he is exploited. It reads:

They weaned the heifer
 And fed her well
 She got a calf
 And they guarded the homestead
 Milked the cow
 And took the seats
 To drink the milk
 And told the shepherdsboy
 Canaan is far lad
 Canaan is far. (p.125)

The title is self contradictory. A solo is understood as an unaccompanied (lone person) performance. However, in this case, it is for a duet. This implies two performers. The two are the ones who, in this poem, weaned the heifer (read worked for a given goal). The heifer reminds one of the nascent stage of development. So 'they' in the poem work in solidarity to ensure everything succeeds. Success here is symbolized by the 'milk' 'they' sit to drink. The expectation is that all the active participants in the process would partake of the milk (read benefit from their struggle). This does not happen. Instead raw betrayal is the answer. The shepherdsboy is told: 'Canaan is far lad/Canaan is far.' The huge contradiction here is

that one is barred from reaping what they had sown. What one wonders here is: could it really be true? The answer is an emphatic yes. It happens all the time. This paradox could not escape Angira's prying eyes as his society's watchdog.

Angira starts on the section of this anthology called 'TIDES OF TIME' with 'TIME HAS DEALT ITS WAYS' (p.131) where he personifies time and mocks the society for lost opportunities. Angira chides 'we' in the first stanza for having let time pass unutilized only to 'bark/at the wrong tree' (l.7-8), which means, blaming someone else for their own failure. The words 'he's gone' . . . , 'Bereaved at dusk', and 'At death' seem to denote the missed opportunity. The second and third stanzas are paradoxical in meaning. They are self contradictory and presented like a pun:

How can we forget
 What no one
 Wants to remember

How can we wash
 A mouth
 Filled with scum (p. 131)

These two stanzas accurately capture absurdities of life. Situations punctuated with horror, failure, ignominy, embarrassment and scorn had rather be confined to the dust-bin just like 'the forgive-and-forget' sermons propagated by some religions. But on the contrary, it is not humanly possible for the people who have been through such bad times to simply forget them. Forgetting is not conscious nevertheless. Similarly, 'A mouth/Filled with scum' automatically qualifies to be washed. However, the lines here suggest the rot, evil, and decay already experienced. This might be wished away as if it never happened. However, the suggestions that can be ascribed to this are that the past cannot be brought back, and that it can only be used as a springboard and yardstick for a better future. The situation is

therefore paradoxical in that history, however horrible it might have been in the past, cannot be altered. It is only the future that can be changed to deviate from the bitter and bad past experiences. The message of hope in such a case becomes the only way. It is this message that Angira expresses in 'FREEDOM TRAIN' (p.133) in which the word 'hope' has been used twice. The two last stanzas summarize the whole poem:

There is life in season
 For those who roam
 The pastures
 With hope

There is new life today
 For those whose eyes
 Have shed off
 The vegetable paintings (p.133)

The poem is explicit at this point in that 'those who roam/the pastures', refer to those people who are out to explore possibilities, people searching for information, knowledge and experience. Such people will ultimately be empowered socially, politically and economically. Finally, 'those whose eyes/have shed off/the vegetable paintings' are those who have attained the necessary experience required to survive, they are no longer green or inexperienced. This implies they are now able to determine their own destinies. When a people are denied opportunities, it is not humanly possible for them to design their destinies. Angira uses the example of the Russian student Alexander Ogorodnikov who was a student at the All Union State Institute of Cinematography of Moscow when he became an Orthodox Christian in 1973. The poem 'DATELINE IN BERNE' (p.138) therefore describes the plight of this student who was pursuing a career in Film Studies. The first stanza reads:

Listening to the Dateline
 From Berne last night
 It stabbed my heart
 A man jailed years

To the gulag archipelago
 A parasite
 Social dependency- (p.138)

The poet alludes to the possibility he could have been in Berne, the predominately Swiss town in Indiana, U.S.A, listening to perhaps the NBC's Dateline Radio, when the absurd news strikes his ear which in turn 'stabbed' his heart. The imprisonment of Ogorodnikov on charges of parasitism, which is a historical fact (it happened in 1979), is a mockery of justice. It defeats all known logic that someone who has been proscribed from seeking any gainful employment due to his Christian beliefs can be jailed for a year on charges of parasitism. Angira captures this absurdity in stanza two:

He had no job!
 When hands are cuffed
 How does one wield
 The sickle?
 When hands are cuffed
 How does one
 Hold the hammer?
 When feet are tethered
 How does one
 Walk the paddies? (Punctuation mine)
 When eyes are folded
 Dark like the night
 How does one read
 The adverts in the press? (p.138)

Angira is condemning a historical injustice in the Soviet Russia. Ogorodnikov was of course handed a further five year term plus six years internal exile in 1980. The reason was that he had been involved in anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda. Angira has wondered aloud in stanza two using rhetorical questions. The answers are self-evident. It is rather absurd that anybody in their proper senses could think of any other way to survive for this prisoner at the Gulag aside from dependency on a people's generosity. He could not legally obtain a job! Should he have opted to starve? The KGB interestingly expected him to survive! Their

purpose though for perpetrating such heinous crimes against humanity was in pursuance of the oppressive Communist Russia's reactionary policies. It is therefore paradoxical that the same institution that had deprived Ogorodnikov of any chance or opportunity to work is the one that expects him to work. This paradox constitutes the semantic absurdities in Angira's poetry which is a function of literary aesthetics.

The accuracy with which Angira reflects on intimate human experiences cannot be gainsaid. This assertion can be illustrated best using the message and style he uses in 'THE THOUGHT OF ANOTHER DAWN' (p.141) where he juxtaposes the seeming difference between the desires of the human body and those of the soul:

I've watched men
 Jump
 From the twentieth floor
 A leap
 Without insurance
 Between
 Scaffolds unconcerned
 To the concrete pavements
 For what on the glass
 Is not a burden
 For this world
 No business
 For the soul
 Mistakes of the mind
 They've spilt
 The nation's blood
 Trampled by the wheels
 Of foreign technology (p.141)

The poet seems to cast aspersions on the culture of acquisitive capitalism which worships material aspects of life to the detriment of love. Love in this case has been used to stand for values such as kindness, compassion for other humans; honesty, generosity, togetherness, moral purity and unselfishness. He says in the poem that he has watched men jump from the

twentieth floor. The twentieth floor here is a sign of skyscrapers world-over that are a result of urbanization. This is closely associated with the interplay of labour and capital, the growth of industry and modern market trends. He describes the leap as being without insurance between scaffolds unconcerned to the concrete pavements. This suggests an atmosphere of disillusionment and despair because while scaffolds are meant for the execution of the guilty, aside from being used for the support of men and materials in the construction of a building, nobody is concerned now for whether guilty or not, one could still easily find themselves between the scaffolds. That men (read desperate workers) become suicidal due to lack of care and concern from their employers who care little about the workers' condition - 'scaffolds unconcerned'. The two words 'scaffolds unconcerned' are a pointer to the kind of indifference workers are subjected to by those in power - the rich employer. He further laments that the world has 'No business/For the soul/Mistakes of the mind.' This implies that materialism has replaced humanity. He further observes that this lack of care and concern for the soul has resulted in bloodshed using foreign technology. Angira arguably castigates foreign technology. He could probably be pointing an accusing finger at the Western gun-manufacturing industries that find their way into Africa which seems to be a rich dumping ground. He too could be alluding to the fact that these same capitalists initiate wars in Africa in order to sell their arms and also get an avenue for looting Africa's wealth. This presents a glaring contrast between the benefits of technological innovations and the inherent disadvantages that accompany them; the juxtaposition of job opportunities with the massive dissatisfaction therein that drive disoriented workers to suicide; the gloomy picture of technological rewards and human misery and suffering. The picture mirrors life, man and woman's selfishness and greed as opposed to Plato's statement that human beings are good and honourable as long as they

conform to the basic qualities of morality and goodness. This is Angira's craft in presenting semantic absurdities.

The brutality of capitalism is revisited on Part II of 'BIRDSONGS AT DAWN' (pp.163-169). The last stanza in this poem indicates the poet's revulsion against capitalist manoeuvres that have bred violence, disunity, despair and death:

Many things, we shall never do together
 For the fog laden sea has its secrets
 I do not know why the oil rig wants to drive
 The race for oil, the prices will soar
 And there the ice of sanity cracks
 Soon to be washed away by floods
 You see, that will open the gate
 For the violence of love
 Pardon, I mean the love of violence
 Inside the ring
 Hope throws in the towel
 Joining the long queue of suitors
 Struggling to win the hands
 Ah despair never been so jilty
 Ah many things we'll never do together
 Like visiting old friends, for they too are gone. (p.166)

This stanza mentions the race for oil and subsequent rise in oil prices. It then talks of the tension and fear that grip the market operators, especially the buyers, who are apparently exploited by transnational oil merchants. It says that this shall result in a crack of sanity, which points to loss of peace. The raging floods that soon wash away the cracked ice of sanity suggest an upsurge of tension. It then openly says that this will open the gate for the love of violence. The little hope the people had is quashed - 'throws in the towel' - and now it is a huge struggle to urge the people to embrace hope (peace) for despair (violence) is exceedingly 'jilty'. This suggests an unwillingness to embrace peace and unity. Angira says that old friends are gone, which makes the reader assume they have run away from violence or have been murdered. It is paradoxical here that a people can have a preference for violence with oil being the bone of contention while at the same time totally disregard

peace. The rise in oil prices here is intended to make oil dealers reap enormous dividends with total disregard of the poor. War here also affects the poor most, unlike the well-to-do who can buy protection from armed criminals. The vicious cycle therefore rules the lives of the powerless.

In conclusion to this chapter, Angira has employed paradox, contrast, oxymoron and juxtaposition in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* aside from signing off from the same anthology with the mood of melancholy. The semantic absurdities in poems in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* comment predominantly on a people's despair interplayed with hope. Despair however tends to outshine hope throughout the text. The question one wonders is: could Angira be suggesting that Africa and the downtrodden of the word are irredeemable? Could he be saying that Africa needs to rise up to its challenges? Could he be saying that Africa is a failed case and sees no way out? The last part of the last poem 'BIRDSONG AT DAWN' could perhaps allude to his general verdict. The second stanza of Part IV reads:

Into the darkness
 Have vanished
 All the meek
 Who modulated
 The cantilena
 But tell me my dear
 Has the light been off? (p.169)

The suggestion that all the meek have vanished into the darkness fills Angira's readers with hope. The meek denotes the complacent majority who blindly do the will of the exploitative few who constitute the ruling class. Angira wants to know whether the light has been off in the last line. The expected answer is yes, it has been off for far too long. It has been so long because the people here are stricken with despair. The meek are an embodiment of this long-to-do despair for they blindly supported/support the power élites. However, their

missing in action at this point signals a new dawn, a brilliant tomorrow blossoming with glamour, a better future swollen with hope. Angira seems to be deliberately working towards realizing positive socio-economic and political changes that will benefit the majority African populations that have been disadvantaged in the past. This could be said to be his social vision in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems*. Melancholy is present here while bliss is envisioned.

Time is a major delimiting factor in this study; we could not touch on all the poems in which Angira portrays semantically absurd characteristics. We do strongly believe however that this work shall help the readers of Angira's *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* further unveil semantic absurdities on their own. We shall now venture to see how Angira has presented his message in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* in the next chapter.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE

THE SEMANTIC ABSURDITIES AND SOCIAL VISION IN *LAMENT OF THE SILENT & OTHER POEMS*

This chapter focuses on the semantic absurdities in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* and how they help communicate Angira's message to his audience. Angira's social vision has also been analyzed in this chapter. In addition to the elements of semantic absurdity that we have featured in *Tides of Time*, we have included irony here since, as far as we understand, no one has studied this feature of semantic absurdity in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*. We have analyzed thirteen poems from *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* (the poems are mostly very long, either covering whole sections of the text or a few short ones that are still parts of the larger sections) in this chapter. We have also introduced six poems from *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* in our discussion on Angira's celebration of the strength of a woman.

To begin with, the title captures an element of semantic absurdity called paradox. "Lament of the Silent" is in a manner paradoxical. The silent have no way of expressing themselves because they have been hushed, yet they are lamenting. The presentation of these poems as being the 'lament of the silent' could probably be a way the poet is saying that someone else, probably himself, has assumed the role of speaking for the 'silent'. We therefore see the speaker or persona in these poems as the poet's instrument of representing the silent. This title therefore welcomes us to Angira's world of poetry full of semantic absurdities.

The title for the first long poem 'RHYTHMS FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT SING' (pp.3-15) is paradoxical. On the surface, the title is self self-contradictory in that one who cannot sing (read the deaf, and by extension dumb) needs nothing to do with 'rhythms'. Rhythms embrace sounds and movements. The mouth-piece that is the speaker in this poem obviously sings on behalf of those who cannot sing, and indicates that even though one might not sing, everybody innately bears a huge potential for appreciating rhythms (music). The speaker seems to speak against blatant lies and dishonesty in the face of despondency and a missed past opportunity. On Part III, the poem says:

You thought
 You'd flee the claws
 Of yester years
 How wrong
 The troumbone
 Chord. (p.4)

The poem here strongly paints a picture that graduates from a real dream for a brilliant tomorrow to an illusory reality of that tomorrow. There is therefore a sharp contrast here. The 'yester years' here appear undesirable and the 'you' in this poem wishes it another way. The dissonance between the note 'chord' and the sound of the instrument 'troumbone' is an indicator of an aborted dream. Note that the word 'troumbone' could have been a misspelling of 'trombone'. The next part seems to reveal a case that closely connects with the politics of the nations of the world. Most politicians have found mendacity and rumour-mongering more tempting than integrity and honesty for political survival. This is in their attempt to stick to power. Part IV reads:

Lies are not accidents
 Same old footsteps
 Retraced
 To punctuation marks
 To lull the sleepy

Each horror
 Restored
 To oil and canvass
 A dose of pain
 Fear of tomorrow
 A fresh ulcer
 Speaking a language
 That says it all
 In twilight beam
 Crowned
 By silence of the stone (p.5)

The poet here attacks the insincerity of the promises made by those whose real intention is not to fulfill them. When he says the lies made 'are not accidents', the poet seems to conclude that this has been made a way of life by those who peddle them (lies). He says that this is in an attempt 'to lull the sleepy'. The 'sleepy' here suggests the politically inactive, the ignorant, and the poor. These are the groups that politicians always exploit in order to remain in power. The restoration of every 'horror' hints at the retention of bad leaders through the ballot. 'To oil and canvass' is a more direct expression Angira has used to highlight the support-consolidation process. This oiling and canvassing is however described as 'A dose of pain/Fear of tomorrow/A fresh ulcer'. The three lines seem to spell doom. The incumbents obviously paint a picture of gloom to the electorate telling them how bad the new office bearers would be should the electorate make the 'mistake' of electing them into office. This is political robbery without violence. Electorates in most countries fall prey to such deceit. This is ironic because those who detest change and employ such absurd methods as spreading fear to remain in office are the real enemies of the people. Angira is openly exposing their dishonesty. The last four lines of this part seem to conclude that the fear that society has of untested leaders and/or system that is deliberately instilled in the people - 'speaks a language' - (by those in office) facilitates the perpetuation of the status quo. 'Twilight beam' points to the end of the regime. However, there is barely any change,

since as earlier indicated, the 'silence of the stone' portends no change. Rather it implies a death-like atmosphere that empirically needs no attention. This is then an absurd contrast between what is and what should be.

Angira's subtle artistry seems to remain potent and progressive as he tackles the latter-day world issues. Part VI of 'RHYTHMS FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT SING' attends to the ever-manipulative political game in Angira's country. This is so because the creative writer is never an air plant, but someone who is grounded in some place. Every writer's roots are very important in understanding his or her work. We therefore deem it appropriate to allude to the connect between the message on Part IV and the post-the-year-2002 hub of political activity in Kenya. The part reads:

Here in the grave yard
 They crave for a hearing
 On unpaid dues
 Distorted history
 Tired, discarded cats
 Now wild with anger
 Inhabit the disused cupboard
 Consolation
 At the tone cushion
 Hunting the rats
 Uneasy inmates
 Of the junkyard (p.9)

The 'graveyard' denotes a burial site. In the poem however, it symbolizes the various houses of representation: parliament, city and town councils. These are dominated by elected representatives in their retirement age when they ought to officially refrain from active employment, especially when unemployment for the young is very critical. It can also be seen as a graveyard for here, the people's dreams are decimated in readiness for burial. This is due to the witnessed politics of eccentricity that even baffle observers. Inexplicable selfishness and wanton greed rule the heads of politicians. The poet says 'They crave for a

hearing/On unpaid dues/Distorted history' to allude to the persistent rise of betrayal witnessed in Kenyan politics. One uses others to ascend to power and then dumps them or he himself is used. This presents the absurd juxtaposition of the incompatibility between the politicians' declared intention and the real result of their after-election squabbles and redundancy (read their deliberate indolence and greed for huge salary perks while ignoring their constituents). As always, the represented populace becomes the collateral in the ensuing war of words that ultimately injure the day-to-day business of the nation.

The 'tired, discarded cats' here perhaps is a reference to the politicians who find themselves isolated by the clique of the ruling élite. These now resort to fierce criticism of the establishment. They become the hunters while those in power become the hunted. The reason being that after falling out with their colleagues in office, they resort to negative portrayal of those in office even when such attacks are undeserved. This is paradoxical. In mature democracies, the citizenry benefit since the 'cats' help guard democracy, transparency and accountability. In Kenya too, these have helped expose grand graft. The usage of 'rats' in reference to what the 'cats' hunt is also symbolic. The symbol 'rats' is ironically used. Rats denote dirt, filth, and evil. It signifies the corrupt and shrewd politicians and their operatives who plunder public wealth. Normally, these office holders are expected to work for public good: instead they aspire to institutionalize and perpetuate their own devil-know-what desires. This is ironic. The 'junkyard' normally constitutes a collection of 'old scrap' to be cannibalized and / or scavenged. Our country's political class too seems to be dominated by a crop of 'old scrap' that has always used enormous financial resources to ensure the voters always recycle them. The junkyard here suggests Angira's deliberate effort to characterize the August House. The 'cats' and the 'rats' therein are, as a result, 'uneasy inmates'. Their dwelling together, coupled with the crafty manoeuvres they are

known for, especially to ensure they are the highest remunerated in the world, culminate in the paradoxical picture of the cat and rat dwelling together, however uncomfortable the union might be.

In the aftermath of such a cat and mouse drama, disunity and lack of accountability become a way of life in the society. Part VII of the same poem uses thickly veiled images, which are almost elusive, to paint the picture:

The water jar
 Weeps most
 For the lost limb
 Broken arse
 Peeled mouth
 Lived a rough life
 Not its choice
 Used to have
 Asset number
 In the owner's book
 Now gone
 Here only rain
 And winds
 Come and go
 But take no records

 For the assets book
 Is long closed (pp.9-10)

The 'water jar' is most probably the treasury, the consolidated funds. It might also refer to the head of state who, in most cases, might influence how the consolidated funds are utilized for the life of the nation. The 'water jar' has been personified here so it has parts: limb, arse and mouth. It also exudes human feelings (weeps, lives a rough life). The water jar loses a limb which signals disjointedness, disharmony, and discord. In spite of the brokenness of the assumed collectiveness, silence rules the air (peeled mouth). This lack of articulation from both the leaders and the public spells doom for the common good of the nation. The poet alludes to a lack of accountability in such a situation when he says that the 'asset

number' that once was, is no longer there. This further complicates an already subtle situation. This is double irony. There is no protest in the face of open lack of accountability. As if the situation is beyond redemption, the poet says that only rains and winds 'Come and go/But take no records/For the asset book/Is long closed'. Rain and winds are a gesture of instability, unstable regimes and leaders who lack a stand could have been implied here. This 'Come and go' of winds spells no good for the stability of the nation. It is paradoxical that such an evil spell appears to continue unabated. Are the people and their leaders complacent? Sadly, apathy results in such a situation. A situation where graft and silent disquiet dwell together. Men and women are not called upon to account for their actions. It is indeed absurd but does it not happen? Angira seems to agree that the people themselves have failed to gang up and correct such situations. He laments:

Along the dusty road
 Lies the grave
 Of the radical
 Trade union hawk
 Silent now
 No pockets
 No strikes
 Death
 That decapitates
 The tongue (p.11)

That the voices of protest have gone under is not in contention here: trade unionists, pickets, and strikers. This is the paradoxical reality of strange bedfellows, the oppressors marrying the oppressed. Things that mattered count no more:

Sidewalks that gave hope
 Now lonely and cracked
 Sign posts that mean nothing
 The standards
 That died of neglect (pp.11-12)

'Sidewalks' in this stanza allude to the desirable/right path that everybody ought to pursue. Its being 'lonely and cracked' however probably means no one is any longer interested in following proper channels in their day-to-day businesses. Corruption (read shortcuts) is hinted here as having been embraced as a normalcy. Similarly, 'Signposts that mean nothing/The standards/That died of neglect' indicate a complete collapse of systems, a total disregard for the socially prescribed norms and value systems and most probably a total disrespect for the constitution. The question one wonders here is whether Angira, now seasoned, has completely lost hope for the African people, for he lives and works here in Africa, or whether this could be his indirect challenge to Africans to stand up and deal a death-blow to complacency. The latter appears true. Writers write about society's experiences or important areas of concern that affect the populace. Angira says that what they write mean nothing, a mockery of their work indeed. This ironic situation is part of the absurdities encountered in Angira's poetry.

The second set of long poems, 'LAMENT OF THE SILENT & OTHER POEMS' (pp.17-37), opens with 'MOMENTS IN SOMETIMES' where Angira, in the subjunctive mood, registers his wishes. He talks of the hypothetical situation of 'time' and 'rivers' altering their courses. These are hypothetical, for in the creative realm of imagination, they are possible.

The second stanza however is prominent:

At times I wish
 Mountains would bow
 And lie prostrate
 To bring down politicians
 Whose only creed
 Is ascending
 Into the realms
 Of royal household (p.19)

The poet expresses his wish that these politicians were brought down for their 'only creed' is acquisition of power. Angira uses the subjunctive here. His words echo an inner feeling of impotence and despondency. It is like a case of a lonely traveler stricken with fatigue and lying prostrate not knowing what to do or where to go. On the contrary, however, the message would have been concretized by use of the people themselves demanding the kind of leadership they need. In this case, Angira would have exacted his 'wish' from the people, the electorate by luring them to impel politicians to bring about the desired change, not to aspire for power for power's sake. This would have been necessary as an expression of Angira's burning concern for the plight of the masses. Though this might appear political activism or agitation, it is vital that artists assume an actual role in society for, as Okot p'Bitek once said, the artist is the ruler of his society and Wole Soyinka has demonstrated this by actually participating in political protests in Nigeria in the recent past, making him to be even detained by the Obasanjo administration. Whether the poet is apprehensive or apathetic is not clear here. Perhaps Angira is directly avoiding being confrontational in a bid to shun critics who see strong political reservations on the part of an artist as an adulteration of art itself. Therefore there emerges a sharp contrast here between what is and what should be. This is indeed semantically absurd.

In 'THY WILL BE DONE' (pp.22-23), the poet juxtaposes what he alludes to The Biblical recordings and what has become of the world today. He starts by quoting the 'Lord's Prayer' in the *New Testament*: 'Thy will be done on earth/ As it is in heaven' before contrasting what he observes happen on earth as opposed to what God demonstrated as His will for His people in the Bible in the past. The first stanza records that God had the power to 'turn Lot's wife/ Into a pillar of salt', 'strike Sodom and Gomorrah' and take His son 'Christo Jesu' to His right hand. The Bible records that Lot's wife was destroyed upon her

disobedience while Sodom and Gomorrah were annihilated due to the wanton wickedness inherent in the two cities. These examples have been deliberately cited to show the poet's stand against evil in society. God embraces His son Jesus Christ who is held an epitome of moral uprightness, righteousness, justice and eternity of life in Christianity. On the other hand, Angira talks of what is happening on the earth today:

On earth today
 Oh Lord
 Brother upon brother's throat
 Father snatching the little
 The children try to gather
 The earth today
 Rears many Lazarus
 Who have no Chariot
 Of Elijah's generation
 Man has gone
 Into a Pentecostal binge
 Mad at the dead
 Storming the morgue
 Looking for soul
 Whose price has soared
 At the stock exchange (p.23)

The poet here hits out hard at the cruel rivalry that has become of one individual versus another or one organized group versus another - 'Brother upon brother's throat.' The picture painted here is one of typical capitalism. The strong ('fathers') are depriving ('snatching') the weak ('children') of the 'little' the weak try to gather. The net result is that the world is full of paupers afflicted with penury and pestilence which is what Angira is alluding to using 'many Lazarus' as opposed to the Lord's chosen like Elijah who is said to have ridden to heaven on a fire powered chariot. That Christian crusaders are in an ecstatic mood, preaching the gospel of salvation might be the implication at this point. The irony here however is that the preachers have been met with profound resistance for the price 'has soared /At the stock exchange.' This suggests the uphill task world-over experienced by those aspiring to give the world a human face: selfish intents and greed override the general

good for humanity as intended in the Bible. This is ironic indeed, for while humanity envisions general good, evil seems the transcendental power. The poem ends with what seems to echo Thomas Malthus' Economic Theory on the rise in population versus world resources. The 'many hands' here point to the growing population while the 'few souls' points to the declining world resource base. This means the huge populations are competing for the meager resources. Angira calls upon God to devalue the price of 'souls' so that there could be a balance with the hands. A serious question arises here: why is there a perception that population has superseded the resources to sustain it? While Malthus had prescribed both positive and negative checks, our answer to this is that the enormous wealth the world possesses is at the disposal of a few while the majority languish in want and hopelessness. This is the paradoxical influence capitalism has deliberately meted upon humanity. It is thus absurd that while some people swim in extreme affluence that would make one blush with shame, most people barely have enough for subsistence.

The paradox of the African concept of freedom is expressed in 'FREEDOM TRAIN' (pp.24-27) where the poem says:

And we have done
 Those things we ought not
 To have done
 But there's hope for mankind (p.24)

This seems to be an admission by the poet that the 'we' have made mistakes and are therefore penitent. He says in the second stanza that the most important thing in the life of a new Africa is not property/material worship, 'valuation/ of real estate', nor is it in money 'broad smile/ at the bank account' but in sincerity of character. This is ironic, for the world today lacks honesty: most people thrive in the name of dishonesty and betrayal. Angira

condemns the carnival mood, dependence and exploitation of others by the lazy who 'hate the plough' and 'abhor the sickle.' It is ironic here that those who claim to be free evade hard work, independence and responsibility. Angira satirizes the 'endless seminars/on African culture' tailor made in Europe - 'edited in Europe'. This is in other words an affront to those who spend immense public resources in barren discourses on how to improve African economies and social situations instead of demonstrating their resolve to spark off real action intended to bring about solid-rock progress. Angira acknowledges the fact that foreign theories have failed in Africa and so 'we' should shift attention 'from the blind embrace/of air flown slogans' whose fruits are repugnant:

The unemployed in the street
 Require no banner
 Red or white
 To tell the truth
 The hungry in the slums
 Require no cultural crusades
 To announce their plight
 O Lord hear our prayer
 And let hope blossom into mankind (p.27)

This is a challenge to African leaders and scholars alike to take a more proactive approach in the running of the state affairs for the glaring picture of unemployment and burgeoning slums mock such leaders' over-reliance on retrogressive foreign policies. It is ironic therefore that most of Africa has embraced the West only to plunge deeper into economic and social underdevelopment. Instead of embracing the West, Africa should pride herself in the freedom she claims to have won and stand on her own two feet and be counted in the world. This is the only hope she has.

The question of marriage has been attention-eliciting from time-immemorial. This does not escape Angira's attention either. He talks of the happiness and peace that accompany

marriage 'when a couple walks down the aisle' in 'THE TUNNEL AND THE FUNNEL' (p.43). Couples are normally wished well so they might live happily ever-after. Life however in most cases is a paradox as Michael Jackson once sang in 'Off The Wall'. Angira captures this most accurately here:

When therefore O time in deceit
 From yonder comes the Sinai desert
 Its winds tearing apart
 The bridal laces
 Taking the synagogue roof
 Beyond the oasis dry

Behind, the tunnel narrows in darkness
 Ahead the funnel opens into blinding spectrum (p.43)

These two stanzas unveil a heart-rending picture similar to what Langston Hughes calls a dream deferred in his poem 'Harlem' which reads:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?
 Or fester like a sore _____
 And then run?
 Does it stink like rotten meat?
 Or crust and sugar over _____
 Like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
 Like a heavy load.

Or does it explode? (Chapman 1965, 430-431)

Hughes gives six possibilities of what is likely to happen to a dream deferred. All these situations are hypothetical. Meaning, one cannot state for sure which is likely to be and which is likely not to be.

Angira's case however reveals what causes the above union to hit the rocks. The 'Sinai desert' and its attendant 'winds' in the Angiran case point to unmet expectations. Perhaps

the couple had envisaged a perfect bliss without taking stock of the fact that life has varying chances and that even couples reap what they sow. One cannot sit back after tying the nuptial knots and expect success to come knocking at their door. The 'winds' too signal outside influence that when wholly embraced by both or either of the couple, make the 'bridal laces' get torn apart. This, when taken to unmanageable proportions, goes beyond 'the oasis'. The 'oasis' signals hope. Going beyond hope could be the death of the relation. Little wonder then that the happy past disappears into oblivion - 'behind, the tunnel narrows in darkness' - while the future is marred with confusion due to the multiple possibilities that the couple now considers ('ahead the funnel opens into blinding spectrum'). This is paradoxical because the words that seal such a union at the altar with the whole world as witness do not hold enough water to salvage the union. The words 'in health and in sickness, for better for worse till death do us sunder' fail to live the test of time ('O time in deceit'). The question of partners rushing to wed each other only to seriously fall out later on is put to the spotlight. Coalition politics or mergers that are ultimately betrayed are also alluded to here. Angira could be mocking such unions here. Therefore, in terms of meaning the context that makes marriage a nullity in this poem is an absurdity.

Further afield, Angira focuses on international politics especially where violence is the main ingredient. In 'PEACE IN WAR' (p.45) which itself is a paradoxical title, Angira highlights the Israel-Palestinian crisis in the Middle East. He mentions Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem, a street named after Ben Yehuda, the Jew who worked to revive the Hebraic language. The 'raid' he mentions is the bombardment of the Palestinians resisting Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. In the final stanza, he mentions Ben Gurion (1886-1973) who had worked for the creation of the Zionist state of Israel in 1948; seen as a saviour by the Israelis (he was even their prime minister to the 1960s) and viewed as a cruel

racist who was the primary force behind the collective dispossession and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people during the 1948 war. Angira seems to have been taken aback by the Israel complacency in the face of the persistently violent Palestinian quest for self determination:

The Israelis, not the Jews
 Have agreed, without elbows
 To live with wars, and sleep in peace (p.45)

To insinuate that there can be 'peace in war' is to say the Israelis have blatantly refused to commit themselves to any meaningful peace pact. This can be alluded to history which informs of their failure to honour the past peace deals jointly made with the Palestinian authorities. So, they have resolved to 'live with wars and sleep in peace' which is the absurd reality brought about by the Israel condescension as far as the problem is concerned. Aside from this absurd politics where violence appears the conjunction between Israel and Palestine, Angira unveils a totally different kind of politics in PACT FOR TANGO' (p.49). While the former pitted inter-states hostilities, the latter appears as cooperation between two unlikely compatible forces whose conjunction appears to have been political expediency rather than common good:

Which king of kings
 Or feudal Lord
 Has nurtured in the arms
 A black jack subject
 Of discordant serf?

Which benevolent king
 With his palace team
 Ever built
 An aerated pool
 For foes to fish?

Don't you believe
 The same way I do
 That somewhere in the annals

Exists a classified pact
For God and Satan
To tango in peace? (p.49)

This poem literally poses questions about the relation between God and Satan as understood in religion. The poet uses rhetorical questions in the three stanzas to express the incomprehension that is the experience one ascribes to God's grace, abundant love and forgiveness perpetually extended to Satan (sinner) as the Bible records. The repayment of good for evil, for example, which is the notion painted in the poem, is in most cases inconceivable as far as human nature is concerned. On the contrary however, Angira seems to have employed connotation to present his message: the paradox that is the politics of survival. The person described here as the 'king of kings/Or feudal Lord/benevolent king/God' is an indirect reference to an all powerful political leader - a president, a prime minister, a monarch - who has assumed power de facto or de jure. The same leader however cooperates with a 'discordant serf/ . . . foes/ . . . Satan', the epithets which denote undesirable elements. Perhaps these undesirable elements are those who have been involved in grand graft, human rights abuses and abuse of office in the past or even oppositionists defeated in the previous elections and who are to be treated with the contempt they duly deserve. It is therefore paradoxical that such elements get co-opted in power sharing pacts.

The poet wonders whether there exists 'a classified pact/for God and Satan/To tango in peace?' The simple answer to this as history has informed us is that such inaction on the part of those in power is a pointer to their willingness to protect class interests: the power elites work together for their own selfish interests while the majority poor, who constitute the superior part of the body-politic, whine in despondency. This is the historical class struggle in the Marxist literary theory. The same class struggle is expressed in a rather dressed up

message in 'THOUGHT IN ECLIPSE' (p.64) where the images of the flowing 'river', 'the canal' and the 'dam' are used, finally ending at the 'Stock Exchange'. The river does 'the long journey' which is unappreciated by the 'canal' as the water finally enters 'the dam'. At the dam electricity is generated -'the voltage'- whose value is felt at the 'Stock Exchange':

You thought in your mark time dream
 That the canal
 Appreciates the river
 Or the dam ever thinks
 Of the long journey
 Through the mountains terrain

In your eclipse of thought
 You forgot
 The dam stands for the voltage
 That only goes
 At the Stock Exchange (p.64)

The images above symbolize human endeavour. The 'river' epitomizes the hardworking hands who strive through untold hardship ('long journey/through the mountains terrain') only to go unrewarded or poorly compensated. The 'dam' stands for those in power ('the voltage') who determine what the workers receive as the wealth of the land is speculated at the 'Stock Exchange'. This is a typical picture of the winner-take-all situation that is typically capitalistic. The irony here is that hard work does not pay dividends and the destiny of the majority lies in the hands of the minority. Such is the absurdity Angira is aesthetically concerned with. The poet's anti-exploitation sentiments are rife here.

Aside from the politics of deceit and exploitation of the masses by an elite political class, Angira immensely focuses on the environment as one of his key concerns. In this anthology, he specifically takes exception to the water hyacinth that has literally wreaked havoc on Lake Victoria, threatening to completely render the lakeside fishing-dependent population jobless on the one hand, while posing a serious form of food insecurity on the other. Perhaps

it is with this strong message in mind that Angira presents the irony of the: 'green carpet' that is the curse that the hyacinth has inflicted on the Lake Victoria environment in 'THE GREEN CARPET ELEGY' (pp.78-79). The poem raises a very grave environmental issue:

They have been blessed
 Awarded green carpet
 To extinction (p.78)

This stanza alone echoes the words of Ezenwa Ohaeto who has previously complimented Angira's use of verbal irony in his earlier poetry. This critic says that verbal irony is Angira 'artistic epitome for it contributes immensely towards the enhancement of his vision in the portrayal of social realities' (Jones & Jones 1996: 87). And, quoting Abrahams, Ezenwa Ohaeto says that verbal irony 'is a statement in which the implicit meaning intended by the speaker differs from that which he ostensibly asserts' (Abrahams 1981: 89). The speaker in this first stanza therefore talks of 'they' as having been 'blessed/awarded green carpet' which implicitly is not a blessing but a curse. It is a curse because through this 'green carpet', 'they' are headed for 'extinction'. The title itself 'The green Carpet Elegy' suggests this curse for an elegy is sung as an expression of sadness at the death of somebody. The poem further substantiates this dreadful news in the subsequent stanzas:

The last fisherman
 Lost his net
 Consumed in the greens
 Lost his hook, line and sinker
 Stuck in the roots
 Lost his lifeline for tomorrow's race

Hungry children
 Longing for defilleted heads
 Long forgotten
 Now stare at the sky
 Grassless and blue
 Even the Vultures
 Who used to harass the planes

To green pastures
 Will God ever pity
 These children
 These descamisados
 Abandoned to an existence
 Void of any tiny crumbs? (pp.78-79)

The above stanza portrays a fisherman at the brink of despair - 'Lost his net . . . /his hook, line, sinker/Stuck in the roots'. The 'green carpet' therefore has resulted in the detriment of a career: fishing. It is therefore not a blessing.

The third stanza equally presents 'Hungry Children' who long to partake of their only familiar delicacy: fish. This is only an illusion for they long to have even the 'defilleted heads' of fish that are no longer available. Note that defilleted fish is the one with bones that have not been removed. Even this is not forthcoming since the hyacinth (carpet) has literally eaten up the fishing ground. The final stanza paints a picture full of life ('green') yet the children are 'descamisados' that cannot access even 'any tiny crumbs'. This is ironic because 'green' is normally associated with abundance of food and environmental health. The case here is however absurd since 'green' now denotes environmental degradation and food insecurity! The water hyacinth has threatened to suffocate Lake Victoria unless enormous resources are channeled there by concerned authorities to salvage the lake and the affected human population. The word 'descamisados' reminds one of the Argentinean case of politics of the mid 20th Century. The word is Spanish meaning 'without shirt' or 'shirtless'. The word is associated with the supporters of Juan Peron (Argentine president, 1945-1955, and 1973-1974) whose thousands of supporters gathered in front of the Casa Rosada, Buenos Aires (La Casa Rosada, the Pink House in Spanish, is officially known as the Casa de Gobierno 'Government House' or Palacio Presidencial). The Presidential Palace is the official seat of the executive branch of the government of Argentina. While waiting

for Peron's release from prison on this hot day, many men in the crowd removed their shirts, hence the term 'shirtless'. Angira adopts this as a perfect analogy to the Lake Victoria case in that the people resident in areas adjoining Lake Victoria and holding fish as their staple food, in the heat of the sea level altitude, have taken off their shirts, just like the descamisados. The reason they have done this is found in the 'green carpet' which Angira has ironically used to denote hot temperatures. Therefore apart from succumbing to the exhaustion of heat and hunger, the people of Victoria Nyanza have resigned to despair. It is a pity that this 'green carpet' leaves the people without the minutest of food and an upsurge of temperatures.

Angira directly mentions Lake Victoria in 'VICTORIA NYANZA' (p.77) where he also uses 'this new carpet' for the water hyacinth on Lake Victoria. He also mentions the hyacinth directly in 'SINCE THE HYACINTH FLOWERED' (p.75). The whole section 'WHEN THE HYACINTH BEGINS TO FLOWER AND OTHER POEMS' (pp.74-81) therefore underscores the poet's concern for the environment and his attempt to announce this to the world through his poetry.

Angira concludes this section by questioning the wisdom and sincerity of those that purport to look into the Lake Victoria question. In 'AT THE LABOUR COLLEGE' (pp.80-81), Angira sarcastically describes those who attend seminars aimed at finding a solution to this problem only to end up considering their stomachs first. The labour college is the Tom Mboya Institute in Kisumu, Nyanza, Kenya, named after trade unionist and the Kenyatta administration young minister Mboya who was assassinated in 1969 in Nairobi. So instead of seriously working towards solving the problem, they break 'for a five course lunch/At Sunset Hotel . . . six course dinner/and merited wine/At Sunset hotel'. Angira is particularly

incensed when he sees this lunch and dinner as being 'merited'. The opposite is true for this is outright robbery. The final stanza is emphatic of the sharp contrast in the life condition between the so called busy seminarians and the afflicted people of Nyanza:

And there on the shores of Victoria Nyanza
 Cassava dry mouths of hunger stricken beings
 Yawn their despair into the sleepless nights. (p.81)

The irony here is evidently an indictment on the Kenyan society. An evidently agitated Angira seems to pour scorn here on the so-called experts who in reality are exploiters out to enrich themselves by capitalizing on a problem that requires immediate attention. These so-called experts denigrate the poverty cum hunger stricken local populace instead of taking urgent measures aimed at alleviating the suffering of the people resident around Victoria Nyanza. In an environment of deceit and cover-up, one easily survives by acting the chameleon in consistency with changing situations. Such behaviour is highlighted in 'IT IS ALL GRAFFITI' (pp.129-130) where irony and paradox substitute each other just like the confusion in the inconsistency of the character of 'we' in the poem. The poem uses the word 'transparencies' to communicate the converse of what is:

With the aid of transparencies of a past
 We present in the overhead projector
 Pieces of history
 Made to the tutor's measure,
 Who can blame them anyway
 Everyone wants a history
 For the season's end
 Little slabs
 When they fall from the heavens (p.129)

Graffiti are drawings written on a wall in a public place that are usually rude, humorous or political. The poem uses 'With the aid of transparencies of a past', explaining that 'pieces of

history', are 'made to the tutor's measure', to indicate that all is a sham. When transparency is the matter in a case, alterations are not necessary. This is a strong irony. 'Made to the tutor's measure' is suggestive of a doctored reality. Therefore such alterations are meant to portray those that have come to their 'season's end' as having been good and/or clean before they 'fall from the heavens'. The message here is that a person has perhaps come to the end of his tenure in office (for example, political office) and now he wants to pretend that he has not done any wrong. That is the reason he is adulterating facts for the purpose of survival which is also self-preservation.

The second stanza indicates that in the confusion 'traffic jam', corrections are quickly made 'dents are quickly puttied/sprayed to perfection' for 'no one wants dented history'. This is the converse of what had actually been done. It is only the face that will appear clean, the surface, not the inner person. One sees a situation that lacks moral bite for no one seems to care whether what they are doing is right or not. The aspiration of everyone is to be at the safe place when called upon to account 'everyone aspires to paradise/E'n with a false ticket'. This is rather paradoxical for we expect one to own up to their past mistakes and be clean for 'paradise' is associated with perfection. The word paradise however has been symbolically used here to denote the ideally desired station, for example, where one is viewed as being socially acceptable. It is therefore possible that humans readily lie in order to attain social acceptability: they use ('rackets/in entry to heaven'). The poet blames this on a lack of a standard measure, perhaps implying a lack of transparency in the judiciary where wrong doers are supposed to be brought to book. This is what Angira seems to allude to by use of 'absence of halo'. This absence is attributed to the impotence or lack of a proper justice system 'the gate' and also absence of upright judges 'gate keeper,' the two of whom are said to have conspicuously 'taken an off!' Inasmuch as this might be viewed as absurd,

in reality such seemingly inconceivable trends are witnessed - cases of abuse of office even in the judiciary where justice is supposed to prevail for all. Is it not absurd for example that a judge can fail to appear in court in order to delay justice in a case whose determination is self evident? The complexity with which Angira employs irony and paradox in a situation like this becomes his trademark in the literary world of poetry.

Angira has been viewed mostly as a poet whose poetry is generally complex and highly abstract. We must however endeavour to demystify Angira's poetry by asserting that he is one of the poets whose ability to come up with fluid lines easily endears him to the reading public, especially lovers of verse. This ability is clearly seen in the way he is able to combine semantically incompatible words to effectively communicate his message to his target audience. He echoes Ferdinand de Saussure's arbitrary relation between the 'signifier' and the 'signified - the word as uttered or written and what it suggests. His use of words is therefore deliberate for he writes with intent. A single glance at the title 'THE ROCK WITH A SOFT HEART' (p.132), for instance, makes one conceive a picture of two seemingly incompatible objects: while the rock is perceived as being hard and non-living, a soft heart denotes tenderness and life. Paradox therefore falls perfectly in place in this poem from the onset:

This rock
 Has a soft heart
 The woman
 Who delivered twins
 Left the placenta
 And the blood
 Percolated down
 Where the plant took root (p.132)

The rock in this stanza is a metaphor for the 'woman' who is said to have 'delivered twins'. This woman goes through the pain of child bearing ('placenta and blood'). The percolation

of blood down ('where the plant took root') connotes the woman's ability to perpetuate society, by directly contributing to an increase in human population on the one hand, and by perpetuating her wisdom through teaching these young people on the other. This is thus her solid-rock contribution to society's superstructure. As the title suggests, the mother's love and tenderness enables society's progeny to thrive while her industry ensures the social fabric holds firmly in harmony. This is not the first time Angira is underscoring the fact that the woman is the quintessential chord that holds society together. He compares the beauty of Christina Maria to that of flowers in 'CONTRAST' (*Tides of Time*, p.9). In the same breath, Angira glorifies the woman's mothering ability: 'accept me on your laps; let me hear your maiden voice; . . . let me suckle your breasts' in 'MY MOTHER WHO ART . . .' (*ibid.* p. 26). Note that this has no one to one correlation with the earlier mentioned beauty since a woman's mothering ability is not an aspect of her physical beauty. In 'WOMAN SO LUCKY', Angira expresses his sympathy for prostitutes. The title is ironic. The poem says in part:

Prostitutes are such lucky . . .
 Need no name . . .
 No parentage, no country, and for that
 An unpolished dish of vice (*ibid.* p.28)

Angira here is taking stock of the fact that most prostitutes are in the industry, not for the love of sex, nor for the love of money, but essentially because the man-eat-man capitalist society of today cares for the self more than it does for the neighbour. They have no other meaningful employment. So, life must go on. Also, he nostalgically mourns his mother who was a teacher and a leader of a women's choir: 'I'll wait for Rosebella on the soprano' (*ibid.* p.40). He has dedicated two poems to her: "ELEGY AT THE GATE (Farewell for My Mother)" (*ibid.* p.127) and 'LIKE HEATHER' (In Memory of My Mother) (*ibid.* p.132) both of which take the form of an elegy and indicative of the deep seated sensibility characteristic

of his poetry. Finally, 'HIGH ALTITUDE BALLAD' (For My Wife) (ibid.p.82) expresses Angira's gratitude to his wife for having weathered all the storms that characterized his graduate days in London. The images of 'clouds, seatbelts, and no smoking signal' allude to the general atmosphere in the poem that points to traveling in high altitude areas. All in all, Angira seems to have a soft spot for women, which is a great attribute of an artist writing in a predominantly patriarchal society.

The success of an artist is best evaluated by the versatility and pervasiveness with which they write. A seasoned artist is a keen observer of their society. They are also discreet in offering solutions to diverse social problems without being directly antagonistic to any particular group. Looking closely at 'THE ART OF ENTERING HEAVEN' qualifies Angira's maturity as a social philosopher:

Our Lord who art in Heaven
 Hallowed be thy name
 Thy will be done
 On earth as it is in Heaven
 But Lord
 Who is the comptroller
 Of your State House
 Who the Chief of Protocol
 To give us the passes?

Lord who will open the curtain
 To let in the light
 When the pope at Castel Gandolpho
 And Runcie with Cantebury Tales
 When Akorino Sikhs from Subukia mills
 And Legio Maria at Got Kwer
 When the Chief Kadhi and the moon
 Hold the regulators
 To the nearest radar? (*Lament of the Silent*, p. 42)

Angira seems to have observed disenchantment on the part of humanity as far as religion is concerned. That religious leaders have no capacity to lead the world to that desired

destination 'State house'/'Heaven'. That the Pope, Runcie, Akorino Sikhs, Legio Maria and Chief Kadhi see themselves as the holders of the key to heaven - 'regulators' / 'To the nearest radar') - is rather satirical. Perhaps a leaf borrowed from history and what Angira himself has observed in the world affairs informs of the conjunction that has always existed between most religions and the brutalities of dictatorships in the world. It is an open secret that most religions have, from time immemorial, supported political dictators who in turn oppress their subjects. That religion and its self-declared saints, holies and Supremes are not an end in themselves cannot be discounted. This is a challenge to the world to find practical solutions through pragmatic leadership instead of relying on old-school prescriptive solutions that have failed humanity. This constitutes the social vision in Angira's poetry. This most likely prompts Angira to see a future where those who have been silent for so long shall rise and destroy the evil socio-economic classes that threaten to annihilate humanity. In 'THE FIRE OF TOMORROW', he sees the opposite of a bloomer tomorrow when he says:

But the coal in the store
 Is black; deadly black
 No one knows of a chemical property
 That works it up
 Red to the flame
 Torn into crimson defiant
 Boils the water for the engine
 Turns the turbines
 To anger the falls
 And burns Sodom
 And Gomorrah to ashes (ibid. p.71)

The image of 'coal in the store' that is 'deadly black' connotes the deep-seated anger whose eruption someday shall deal a death-blow to the evil forces of 'men' that subjugate other 'men'. Though physical violence is expressed here, the nature of this defiance and the pace at which Angira drives it implies the internal violence of the spirit that resists oppression,

despair and even death in the struggle for self-determination. The usage of 'tomorrow' here implies the employment of a deliberately designed procedure that is deficient of the revolutionary jet-like speed of 'now'. This will ultimately result in a 'green tomorrow / . . . a future that discards/theory of despair' (ibid. p.111).

Finally, Angira castigates the market forces of capitalism for the mechanical nature that is characteristic of today's human relations ('friendships'). That truth, fairness and honesty no longer punctuate human relations. Paradoxically, love now lies for it has been 'floated . . . /At the stock exchange/Where it assembled/Arsenals of lies' (ibid. p.136). This is the absurd reality that has resulted from the commercialization of even the tender affection that was inherent in the human heart. He sarcastically signs off here saying: 'No friendship anymore/Only toleration spectrum' (ibid.). This is a mockery of human relations – friendships - that have today deteriorated to the level of compromise 'toleration' as if human intelligence has absolutely dealt a death-blow to the love and tenderness that should have been natural. Little wonder then that silver and gold have driven men and women to engage in atrocious acts that even the devil could not imagine. To Angira, capitalism is evidently the worst option should the world look forward to continuity.

In conclusion, Angira has made his 'Lament of the Silent' known. He has presented 'rhythms for those who cannot sing', always presenting them as hardworking, optimistic, ambitious and visionary people. Angira seems to see little fault in the people, the masses themselves (one of course sees faults in others except in themselves). Angira appears to blame a certain section of the society for the woes afflicting 'silent' majority therein whose 'lament' he presents in this text. Angira's cry echoes that of James Russell Lowell (1819-1891), the American poet and critic who wrote:

Careless seems the great Avenger;
 History's lessons but record
 One death-grapple in the darkness
 'Twixt old systems and the world;
 Truth forever on the scaffold,
 Wrong forever on the throne;
 Yet that scaffold sways the future,
 And behind the dim unknown
 Standeth God within the shadow
 Keeping watch above his own. (Du Bois, 1982, p.54)

Lowell's words as quoted here are punctuated with a lot of what Angira himself has employed in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*: semantic absurdity. As Lowell said over one hundred years ago, "Careless" on the part of the society to the plight of the majority still 'seems the great Avenger'. It is for this reason individuality has replaced society; selfishness is preferable to kindness. 'History lessons' are only 'but record'. This is in concordance with what Angira has consistently depicted in his poetry: that the past mistakes that have made our society lag behind in terms of socio-economic and political development still abound in the 21st Century. And as we have seen earlier on in this chapter, Angira derides the politics of mendacity when for instance he equates politicians' only creed to ascendancy to 'powerdom' ('Is ascending/into the realms/ - which is the persecution of truth as justice lies in prostration while 'wrong' is 'Of royal household') (p.19). Justice therefore suffers down here - 'Truth forever on the scaffold/Wrong forever on the throne' (ibid.). The amount of public consciousness raised here is enormous since for wrong to be in power is contemptuous. It indeed touches the reader's heart the way Martin Luther King Jr's words do when he wonders: 'How long will justice be crucified and truth buried, how long?' (King 1968: 3). King said this in his campaigns against racism, economic injustice and war.

Therefore, the best Angira has done in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* is to present the human condition of his people in what can be called a semantically absurd style (read paradox, irony, juxtaposition, contrast and oxymoron). This style demands that the reader employs stylistics approach to unveil the import of the poetry. And since the injustices perpetrated here have a historical bearing, Marxist critical approach has also been handy in rediscovering the text. The plight of the population resident in areas adjoining Lake Victoria has for example been underscored in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* because a greater part of the book addresses this question. This is a topical issue, which means that Angira is still an ardent fighter for the cause of the downtrodden and society as a whole. Besides, the plight of women such as mothers and prostitutes as addressed in the poetry is prominent in this chapter. Angira foresees a new day for such groups in the horizon as his message for them in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*. The final chapter therefore gives a brief comment on what we have done in the preceding chapters to summarize the poet's use of semantic absurdities and his social vision as the conclusion to this study.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study sought to unfold how Angira has used semantic absurdities (paradox, oxymoron, irony, contrast and juxtaposition) to present the plight of the downtrodden in society, and also bring out his social vision for the disadvantaged groups in society. It aimed at establishing what the poems in both *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* and *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* say about the downtrodden groups in society in relation to the bourgeoisie.

The study has analyzed *Tides of Time: Selected Poems* in chapter two in a precise but detailed manner in a bid to unravel the poet's message as presented through the use of the poetic device called semantic absurdities. Through this style, Angira communicates very powerful messages that hit hard at those who use their socially privileged positions to suppress the masses. Angira voices the concerns of the downtrodden by presenting topics such as capitalistic injustices, politics of exploitation, hope and despair. He therefore functions as the mouthpiece for those who cannot, for various reasons, articulate their case eloquently enough to reach the ears of the so-called political leaders. The reader is thus made privy to Angira's concerns in *Tides of Time: Selected Poems*.

In chapter three, the study established Angira's use of irony, contrast, juxtaposition, oxymoron and paradox as elements of semantic absurdities to paint heart-rending pictures of the conditions the downtrodden have been subjected to. It has been evident in our study that Angira's use of language is subtle and elusive. The study was therefore a daunting task as

we went through the poems in an attempt to pin-point what we felt was the message in Angira's *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*. The discussion in this chapter has therefore demonstrated that Angira has taken the fight for society's downtrodden to another level. He, for instance, has addressed himself to the problem of the water hyacinth on Lake Victoria which literally threatens the food security and income-generating ventures of the local population. Angira has also taken a stand against the politics of manipulation, grandstanding and self-enrichment. This politics is a close-reference to the Kenyan case in the not-too-distant past and also what has been witnessed in other countries in Africa, and by extension the world. A good case in point is the rampant betrayal of trust between and/or among political players that has taken the Kenyan politics to an absurd and violent level.

In light of the objectives of this study, we were able to meet our aims of establishing Angira's use of semantic absurdities to front the case of the downtrodden aside from unveiling his social vision. We felt that the poems we analyzed represented the two anthologies well and that our discussion represented, almost in entirety, Angira's published poetry.

Broadly speaking, this study has arguably run through Angira's poetry right from the late Nineteen Sixties to the year Two-Thousand and Four. This is so because the two anthologies studied here are representative, as stated earlier, of almost all of Angira's published poetry. This study has attempted to show how Angira has employed language in a style that seems to communicate his message in an indirect manner. Angira alludes to this when he says:

Brother upon brother's throat
 Father snatching the little
 The children try to gather (*Lament of the Silent*, p.22)

This, in addition to Angira's words in *Busara* as we have seen earlier, suggest that the woes associated with capitalism cannot be gainsaid. The world today has made instruments and machines capable of conquering the heavens, the waters and the earth. Interestingly however, competition for dominance - whether individual over another, nation over nation - has made human beings increasingly unable to live together as brothers and sisters. Instead, raw emotions make us to resort to the basest of differences such as nepotism, tribalism and racism to see 'that other' in our fellow humans. Little wonder then that 'brother upon brother's throat' has become today's trademark. In a way, Angira is saying that the only sure path to the future of humanity must inevitably be a socialist one, however ideal this might appear. It is only through this that murder, plunder, robbery and other forms of injustice can be reversed or brought to the critical minimum. This is the social vision entrenched in Angira's poetry. We must also add to this by saying that a world where humans regard one another with dignity; a world where everyone enjoys their birthright of freedom while taking cognizance of their duties and obligations to the society at large will have the final say.

Equally important is Angira's strong message of optimism to the downtrodden. In 'SPHINX SYMPHONY' ((*Tides of Time*, p.65), Angira says that the 'greatest challenge' to mankind today:

Is to squeeze his soul
 Into the world beyond
 Tunneling through
 The rocky clouds of discouragement

...

At least the greatest challenge
 Is the making of tomorrow. (ibid.)

The poet here is saying that the challenge that the downtrodden (those undergoing discouragement) face, is to get ready to exploit the available opportunities now or in future ('tomorrow') to survive. The making of tomorrow is Angira's way of suggesting that nothing comes out of the blue: everybody must work in order to earn despite the enormous (perhaps imposed) hurdles to be overcome (the word discouragement suggests a deliberately instigated situation). He strongly emerges here as having a sanguine view of the future for those who are ready to work to turn the tide. There is a persistent interplay of hope and despair in most of Angira's poetry. Perhaps Angira is acknowledging the realities of life - that every cloud has a silver lining - which echoes Ralph Waldo Emerson's words that every sweet has its sour; every evil its good. The part 'TAILORS OF HOPE' (*Tides of Time*, pp. 143-169) is laden with despair thinly coated with grains of hope. A reverse angle of this picture is what Angira envisions.

This study has been an enormous challenge, but we sincerely believe that it shall serve to motivate readers of verse, especially of Angira's poetry, so they can critique this poetry with an open eye. It is for that reason that we regard this study as an eye opener likely to be insightful to those who previously wanted to interact with Angira more closely. The pragmatic approach we have employed (stylistics) has helped explicate the poems more deeply in a bid to extract the message therein. Similarly, the Marxist literary perspective employed here has helped us unravel most of the historical references abundant in this poetry as well as contribute to our understanding of the social vision the poet is working to achieve for his society. The themes in this poetry are also of profound social importance for hope and despair, capitalist injustices, the environment, time and seasons, the place of the woman and politics have all been attended to. Thus the totality of life as we know it. The powerful message here has hopefully made the world hear that inner voice of the 'silent'

whose music can only be meaningfully appreciated by understanding them (the downtrodden). Angira does this. That is why he has been able to 'sing' on their behalf with adequate sonority for he is part of the sorority he represents here.

As a recommendation, the poetry of Angira is extensive and it is diverse. Interested critics therefore have an opportunity to build on this research by for instance taking a closer look at the use of symbolism, allusion and imagery in *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrahams, M. H. (4th edition 1981). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- Achebe, C. (1966). *A Man of the People*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Amateshe, A. D. (ed. 1988). *An Anthology of East African Poetry*. UK: Longman.
- (1979). 'The Social Functions of Poetry in Underdeveloped Society: An East African Experience.' M.A Thesis. University of Nairobi.
- Angira, J. (1971: 18-25). 'A Letter To My Wife' in *Busara: Literature Journal, University of Nairobi, Vol.3*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- (1979). *Cascades*. London: Longman.
- *Juices*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1970.
- (2004). *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- (1972). *Silent Voices*. London: Heinemann.
- (1973). *Soft Corals*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- (1980). *The Years Go By*. Nairobi: Bookwise.
- (1960). *Tides of Time: Selected Poems*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Asego, N. "Silence Given a Loud Voice": A Review of *Lament of the Silent & Other Poems* in <http://www.eastandard.net/archives/cl/mags/society/articles.php?articleId=20421&date=15/...4/23/2007>
- Calder, Angus. (1979: 37). 'Jared Angira: A Committed Experimental Poet' in *Individual and Community in Commonwealth Literature*. Ed. Daniel Massa. Malta: University of Malta Press.
- Chapman, A. (1968). *Black Voices: An Anthology of Afro-American Literature*. New York: New American Library.

- Cook, D. and D. Rubadiri. (ed.s, 1971). *Poems from East Africa*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Cox, C. B. and A. E. Dyson. (1963). *Modern Poetry: Studies in Practical Criticism*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1969: 64). *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York and Scarborough, Ontario: A Signet Classic, New American Library.
- Ezenwa-Ohaeto. (1996: 87–100). 'Conscious Craft: Verbal Irony in the Poetry of Jared Angira' in *New Trends And Generations in African Literature*. Ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones and Marjorie Jones, Vol.20. London: James Currey.
- Jackson, M. (1979). 'Off the Wall' in *Off the Wall*, New York: Quincy Jones.
- Johnson, R. et al. (1996). *New Poetry From Africa*. Ibadan: University Press PLC.
- Kariara, J. and E. Kitonga. (1982). *An Introduction to East African Poetry*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Kemoli, A. (1973). *Pulsations: An East African Anthology of Poetry*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- King, M. L. Jr. (1968). *The Trumpet of Conscience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- (1972: 8-10). 'Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech' in *Nobel Lectures, Peace 1951-1970*, Ed. Frederick W. Haberman's, Amsterdam: Elsevier Publishing Company.
- Luvai, A.I. (2000). *Boundless Voices*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Maritim, K. C. (1979). 'Modern East African Poetry: The Case of Jared Angira.' B.A. Dissertation. University of Nairobi.
- Ngara, E. (1985). *Art and Ideology in the African Novel*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Ntiru, R.C. (1971). *Tensions*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- P'Bitek, O. (1986). *Artist the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture and Values*. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya.
- Roscoe, A. (1977). *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Selden, R. (1988). *The Theory of Criticism: From Plato to the Present*. London and New York: Longman.
- Sergeant, H. (1973). *African Voices*. New York: Lawrence Hill and Company.

- Shakespeare, W. (1933). *The Merchant of Venice*. Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Classics editions Limited.
- Shakur, Tupac. (1995). 'Me Against The World' in *Me Against The World*. Los Angeles: Death Row Records.
- Soyinka, W. (1985). *Poems of Black Africa*. Nairobi: Heinemann.
- Stephen, M. (1991). *English Literature: A Student Guide*. London and New York: Longman.
- Stephen, M. (1991). *English Literature: A Student Guide , Second Edition*. London & New York: Longman.
- Tejani, B. (1970: 158-159). 'Jared Angira' in Eldred Durosimi Jones' Ed. *African Literature Today, No.6*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- Thiong'o, N. (1977). *Petals of Blood*. London: Heinemann African Writers Series.
- Wanjala, C. and Angus, Calder. (1977). *Faces At Crossroads*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- Widdowson, H.G. (2000). *Practical Stylistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yusufu, A.R. (Spring 1984: 327-35). 'Jared Angira and East African Poetry of Social Testimony' in *World Literature Written in English* 23.2.
- From (1971). *The Bible: Revised Standard Version*. Britain: Collins Bible.