

**LEXICAL VARIATIONS AND THE QUEST MOTIF IN CHRISTOPHER
OKEMWA'S POETRY, THE GONG**

BY

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*Lexical variations
and the quest motif*



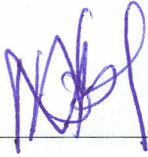
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DECLARATION

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

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DEDICATION

*For you, Candy and Daisy,
A fulfillment of your love for
poetry*

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First and foremost, I thank God, my heavenly father for giving me this opportunity to exploit my potential and realize my academic dream.

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on lexical variations and the quest motif in Christopher Okemwa's anthology; *The Gong*. The study is premised on the understanding that lexis is an essential ingredient in any work of art particularly in as far as the writer exploits the available linguistic resources to render his/her experience. Therefore, we sought to investigate lexical choices in Okemwa's poetry and how these variations have enabled him to articulate issues affecting society and also to bring out the quest motif in his poetry. The study relied on Deconstruction and Stylistic theories in the analysis of the lexical variations. We demonstrate how through them, the poet is able to communicate to his audience and foreground the quest motif. We utilized library research, which involved the textual analysis of both primary and secondary texts. We also deployed purposive sampling in the selection of the twenty-six poems for this study. The findings of this study reveal that there are lexical variations in Okemwa's poetry. Okemwa engages various lexical choices in his poetry not only to bring into the fore the quest motif in his poetry but also to foreground the various issues affecting contemporary society. Lexical choices in Okemwa's poetry are not deviations as such but variations in the usage of lexical items in his poetry from their corresponding ordinary use. Therefore, the study is invaluable to the literary fraternity since it has opened up a window into the world of the twenty-first century Kenya poets, showing how such poets exploit the vast language resources at their disposal to express their social vision, reveal how they view the contemporary society and the solutions they prescribe for the widespread socio-economic and political woes.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 CHRISTOPHER OKEMWA'S PROFILE

Christopher Okemwa is a poet, actor, dancer, playwright, story-teller, short-story and children writer. He graduated from Kamagambo Teachers' Training College and has taught for several years in Kenya. He later graduated from the University of Nairobi with a Bachelor of Education degree, specializing in English and Literature. He also holds an MA degree in literature from the same University. He is currently undertaking doctoral studies at Moi University with research focusing on performance poetry in Kenya.

Okemwa has published two collections of poetry: *Toxic Love*, and *The Gong*. He has three collections of children's stories: *The Village Queen*, *The Visitor at the Gate*, and *Let Us Keep Tiger*. *Let Us Keep Tiger* was nominated for Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature in 2011.

Okemwa is a well-known playwright and actor. He has scripted and presented award-winning plays and poems at Kenya Schools Drama Festivals. As a respected drama and literary critic he has published numerous articles in the dailies, journals and newsletters. In 1991, he attended and participated in a theatre and technical workshop in Bristol and Winchester, which was sponsored by the *National Operatic & Dramatic Association of England*.

Okemwa has also attended and performed his poetry in international poetry festivals, including XX International Poetry Festival in Medellin, Colombia. In 1993 he participated in a poetry workshop in Northern Ireland. He has won awards such as the 2002 Editor's Choice Award for Outstanding Achievement in Poetry, presented by the

International Library of Poetry, and the 2006 Changamoto Arts Fund award for the performance of his poetry in Secondary Schools in Kenya.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

There have been varied attempts from scholars to define and describe the nature of poetry. In an effort to show what poetry is, Amateshe notes that it would be an overwhelming task to exhaustively define the term poetry. Consequently, he observes, “In basic terms, poetry is music...” (3) on the basis of how it sounds to the ears while being rendered. On the other hand, Olembo views poetry as, “The expression of ideas and feelings in the most appropriate language” (83). Her argument is tied to how poets engage language in the composition of their poetry. On their part, Sunkuli and Miruka define the term poetry as an imaginative composition arranged in patterns of sounds and lines expressing in language some deep thought, feeling or experience. This definition points to the nature of poetry in that it foregrounds certain feelings and experience as well as expresses certain thoughts in its composition. These definitions are crucial and cognate in this study since they shade light on what poetry is. Thus, we do not engage in the politics of defining what poetry is in an attempt to reach an exhaustive definition. However, for purposes of this study, we define poetry as the expression of all forms of imaginative insight, of subtle thought and profound feeling normally presented in verse. In Literature, its usefulness derives from its enormous pedagogical as well as aesthetic value.

Poetry is an important component of the cultural heritage of many societies in Africa and the world over. Finnegan (1977) observes that poetry is by no means a recent import into Africa from Europe but an important and living part of African culture going

back to the distant past. She argues that in nearly all-African societies, there has been a thriving oral tradition of poetry. Poetry and song are among the widely used oral art forms in Africa to accompany the activities of the African's daily life, to give utterance to a people's joys and sorrows and to comment on life. Further, Finnegan broadly classifies African poetry into four categories: Epic, Panegyric, Lyric and Elegiac poetry. She goes a step further to describe what the four categories that she has identified are. She notes that epic poetry records the adventures of a hero or heroine whose exploits are important to the history of a nation. Masizi Kunene's *Emperor Shaka: The Great* and Meneniang Mubima's *The Lianja Epic* are well known African epics, which fall into this category. Panegyric poetry is one of the most developed and elaborate poetic genre in Africa and it is primarily praise poetry for the kings, chiefs and other leaders in the society such heroes and heroines. The members of their official entourage commonly performed it in the courts of kings and chiefs. Elegiac poetry is also a common form of poetry in Africa and is performed in funeral or memorial rites. It is usually sung in commemoration of a friend or a loved one that has died. Lyric poetry is the most common form in sub-Saharan Africa and its performance involves popular participation. A lyric denotes a short poem, which is sung.

Modern African poetry exhibits a diverse variety of content, language and style. Some of the modern poets have heavily borrowed from the rich African oral forms as it is evident in P' Bitek's *Song of Ocol* and *Song of Lawino* while others like Bukenya and Nturu have also borrowed from European poets like T.S. Eliot (Bukenya 1978). However, there are characteristic changes of form and content in modern African poetry. For instance, free verse has taken centre stage in modern African poetry as opposed to the

traditional iambic pentameter, which is a common characteristic of the West. Thus, Okemwa favors modified forms of the classifications of poetry that we have elucidated above in his quest to express his ideas freely and more forcefully.

Ogungbesan and Woolger argue that the modern poet is not much different from his/her traditional ancestor due to the fact that he composes his poetry on the basis of his day-to-day experiences in the society as his traditional ancestor did. The poems that a modern poet composes illuminate and reflect on the realities of the world he lives in. This implies that the poet was and still is a very important person in the society for he/she has taken over the baton to continue with this noble duty of not only entertaining the members of the society but also educating them on the various issues that affect them. Therefore, the modern poet complements the work of his/her predecessor. We seek to ascertain whether Okemwa's poetry resonates with this argument or whether in an attempt to articulate the concerns of the modern society, he has shifted away from his predecessors. Further, he observes that

While commenting on the language of poetry, Ogungbesan and Woolger observe, "the words of poetry are compressed, charged with meaning and significance" (.8). This observation closely relates to Nowotny's argument on the language of poetry. Moreover, she goes further to argue that "...poetry is language at full stretch, bringing into maximal interplay the various potentialities afforded by linguistic forms in artistic structures." (123). Consequently, she posits that a poet makes better use of the resources of language than the ordinary person for the purpose of articulating and making meaning out of the various experiences in the society. These postulations lead us to style in poetry since language constitutes the raw material that the poet engages to communicate his/her ideas.

In Literature, style, which is also regarded as form, refers to the “how” while on the other hand content refers to the “what.” The question of the relationship between form and content has preoccupied literary debate since the beginning of literary criticism with scholars like Plato and Aristotle. Mugubi argues that any literary study that tries to divorce the “marriage” between the two core aspects of form and content is erroneous since the two are inseparable entities. To capture the inextricable relationship between form and content, he aptly quotes Wordsworth in saying that “Matter is expressed in manner”. He further argues that in literary writing, the question is not just “what” is being communicated but “how” it is communicated (17).

It is important to note that the most important resource in the hands of a creative writer is language and what he does with it to come up with something special comprises his style. Ngara refers to this as a writer’s idiosyncrasy. Chapman observes that “... good style has been used as a description of writing that was in some way praiseworthy, skilful or elegant.”(12). Further, he observes that a writer is free to select from language where he wills, aided by his peculiar sensitivity to the use of language. Chapman also notes that in most cases, the language of literature is often notably deviant and adds that a deviant feature, be it lexical, syntactic, or phonological can simply be noted as an infrequent item in the total. All these point to a writer’s freedom to manipulate linguistic devices. This study hopes to analyse the deviant lexical features inherent in Okemwa’s poetry. Our focus is on how he engages various lexical choices in his poetry to bring out the intended message and the quest motif.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As far as we have established, Okemwa's poetry so far has received little scholarly attention despite his first poetry collection, *Toxic love*, which has been included in this collection being published in 2004. Thus, our study explores Okemwa's poetry to show his worth as a poet and act as a source of inspiration to many scholars to turn their interest and focus on upcoming poets as well as writers other than the already established ones. For instance, his ability to integrate various stylistic features to articulate modern issues in the society and depict a full cycle of human life as well as to bring out his message in such a powerful way makes it incumbent that studies be carried out on his poetry to widen the scope of knowledge in this area.

This study examines lexical variations and their relationship with the quest motif in Okemwa's poetry. Lexical utilization in a language is one of the critical tools available to any creative writer in articulating issues affecting the society. But the manner in which the creative writer employs the lexical choices in articulating these issues affecting society calls for critical examination. This is the subject of this study. The study interrogates how the poet Christopher Okemwa engages lexical choices in his poetry to foreground issues affecting society. Further, it investigates how through the lexical choices, the quest motif is brought out in his poetry.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is based on the following objectives. To:

1. Identify and analyse various stylistic features that enhance lexical variations in Okemwa's poetry.
2. Critically examine lexical variations and show how they reveal the quest motif in Okemwa's poetry.
3. Establish how the quest motif reveals the poet's social vision.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study answers the following questions:

1. Which stylistic features does Okemwa employ to enhance lexical variations in his poetry?
2. To what extent do the lexical variations identified in Okemwa's poetry reveal the quest motif brought in his poetry?
3. How does the quest motif reveal the poet's social vision?

1.6 RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

The study is founded on the following assumptions:

1. That Okemwa employs certain stylistic features to enhance lexical variations in his poetry.
2. That some of Okemwa's lexical variations reveal the quest motif in his poetry
3. That the quest motif plays a major role in unveiling the poet's social vision.

1.7 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The identification and analysis of the various lexical variations and how they resonate with the intended messages goes a long way to help readers of Okemwa's poetry to view it as an intelligible work of art. Further, this enables readers to see the many possibilities at hand that a poet can skillfully deploy to the benefit of creativity and hence contributing to the literary sphere of knowledge.

Ngara laments that students of Literature in Africa and elsewhere have concentrated on narration of themes and characters of works of art at the expense of the aesthetic aspects of Literature. On his part, Indangasi decries the culture of privileging content over form. Consequently, he talks of a situation where a work of art is "...far too often seen as a bundle of messages or themes" (5). Thus he argues that form and content should be viewed on an equal plane. These arguments illuminate on the importance of style in the role of communication of a writer's message. This study, however, examines lexical variations in Okemwa's poetry in articulating the issues affecting society and foregrounding the quest motif in his poetry. Lexical choices are some of the features of style available to a writer. Therefore, this study sought to find out how the lexical choices that the poet deploys play a major role in the poet's attempt to articulate social issues affecting society in a way that makes his work outstandingly artistic.

1.8 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

Any literary scholar examining any work of art can look at the many facets of it. Such facets include themes, characters, style and/or language. However, this study focuses on lexical variations and the quest motif in Okemwa's poetry. The study limited itself to the various lexical features in Okemwa's poetry and how they impact on the

content and help foreground the quest motif in his poetry. It was hoped that presenting a critical appraisal of the author's use of the lexical choices and the quest motif facilitates the understanding of the poet's social vision.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.9.1 Introduction

This section covers the following research design, population and sample selection, procedure for data collection and data analysis.

1.9.2 Research design

The study adopted the qualitative approach. We mainly utilized library research, which involved reading, analyzing and the interpretation of data from primary and secondary sources. Here, we sought for relevant information from relevant written records, books, journals and the Internet. We also used biographical information though on a small scale where we found it useful in illuminating our concerns in the selected anthology.

1.9.3 Population and Sample

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of the poems for this study. We read and analysed five poems from each section of the anthology, which implies that the study handled a total of twenty-five poems in the anthology. The criterion used in the selection of the poems was based on the objectives of this study. Thus, we selected poems that were rich in lexical manipulation, variations in terms of length, structure as well as the themes they handled. This was done objectively and reliably.

1.9.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The primary and secondary data collected were examined and analysed in line with the objectives of this study. First, the selected poems were read and reread in a bid to identify various lexical features employed by the poet. Therefore, through content analysis, comprehensive synthesis of both the primary and secondary data was conducted in terms of the various features of style, the lexical choices employed in the poems and the quest motif. In this regard, we were able to elucidate on the poet's social vision.

1.10. Organization of the study

This research project is made of five chapters. Chapter One is the introduction to the study and it delineates the problem of the study, the objectives, research questions, assumptions and captures the scope and delimitations of the study. It also tackles the methodology, justification as well as organization of the study. In Chapter Two, the study delves into the literature review and theoretical framework. In Chapter Three, the first objective is presented where we discuss the various features of style in Okemwa's poetry. Chapter Four discusses the various lexical choices employed by the poet. It also focuses on the quest motif and how it elucidates on the poet's social vision and finally chapter five recaps the major findings of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of two parts: Literature review and the Theoretical framework. The first part explores the review of the related literature to the study. In this process, we attempt to map our study into the grid and point out the gap that exists in these studies that our study attempts to fulfill. This review is structured in a way that it explores studies conducted on the poetry but with particular emphasis on language, style and semantics; on which the current study is anchored. The chapter then culminates with a theoretical framework.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2.1 Introduction to the review of related literature

In the forward to Okemwa's anthology, Alembi notes that, "Its skills are different but, instead of being less challenging, in several ways they are more exciting and demanding than those of longer literary forms."(ix). He further argues that his poetry requires, " ...a careful reading by people who appreciate its appeal, form and power." (ibid). His observations point to the style and content of Okemwa's poetry. It is out of creating a general understanding of how style controls content and vice versa that we are able to appreciate Okemwa's poetry. Thus, this study sought to unravel the lexical variations and the quest motif in the poems in an attempt to make a critical appraisal of Okemwa's poetry.

In this review, we examine various studies that have been conducted on African poetry to shade light on the preoccupations of Modern African poets and what critics

perceive of them. Studies on oral poetry, particularly, those focusing on style are examined to provide base for our study. These studies come in handy in shaping the thoughts for our study since as far as we have established, there is neither critical studies so far for the poet neither under study nor on his works. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that the poet is relatively new in the field since he thrust himself to the world of poetry in 2004.

2.2.2 Language in the composition and analysis of poetry

Bukenya observes that sound features play a very important role in poetry. He posits that sound features such as rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia are not mere decorations to a poem but play an important role in the understanding of a poem since they are part of the poet's technique of communication. Therefore, in the analysis of a poem, one should pay close attention to these features. This study investigates not only how Okemwa involves the use of various lexical features in his poetry but also remain semantically sound as he articulates various issues in his poetry.

Leech and Short recognize that linguistic analysis is more important in the study of poetry than prose. They posit that:

The poet, more obviously than the prose writer, does interesting things with language. And if one wanted to find a definition of poetry that went deeper than the run-of-the mill dictionary definition, it might be that whereas in poetry, aesthetic effect cannot be separated from the creative manipulation of the linguistic code, in prose it tends to reside more in other factors (2).

Leech and Short demonstrate how poetry is rich in terms of its aesthetic effects due to the use of language. Poets manipulate language in poetry in order to be able to achieve maximum communication as well as make use of the available language resources to attain a heightened form of communication. Consequently, the two critics proceed to argue that in doing so, the poet does “interesting things” with language. In our study of Okemwa’s poetry, we endeavour to critically examine and analyze what Leech and Short refer to as “interesting things” that the poet does with language and their effect on the work.

2.2.3 Style in Poetry

Olembo underlines the idea of style in poetry. She observes that style plays a critical role in the understanding of poetry. She goes ahead to analyze the utilization of various stylistic features in a poem such as alliteration, rhythm, stress and how they can be manipulated both for aesthetic purposes and meaning. Her assertion is significant to this study since it not only illuminates on the aspects of style in poetry but also shapes our understanding on the mechanization of style and its role in the poetry. Therefore, this study endeavours to widen the scope by exploring the lexical features and the quest motif in Okemwa’s poetry.

Kamau laments that most the studies on P’ Bitek have concentrated on themes while neglecting the element of style. His study focuses on the poet’s creative use of language, which he notes is important particularly in the study of poetry. We concur with his observation that, “Poetry, more than other genres of literature, relies on the skilful exploitation of linguistic resources for the realization of its meaning” (vii). However, Kamau pays particular attention to the use of imagery and symbolism in poetry with

illustrations from P'Bitek's poetry. His study does not observe how poets could employ other features of language use such as manipulation of the lexicon; phonological features among others as communicative devices. Thus, this study fills this gap by examining and analyzing how various lexical variations deployed in Okemwa's poetry help to bring out the intended message.

Mugubi's work is imperative to our study as it clearly expounds on a number of areas that concern this study. It provides the researcher with an in-depth analysis of the term style as well as the relationship between form and content. It also further explicates stylistic techniques based on the broad linguistic branches of semantics, syntax, lexis, morphology and graphology. His study will play a pivotal role in shaping our ideas for this study. Following his insights, we examine and analyze how Okemwa employs various lexical techniques in his poetry.

2.2.4 Lexical choices in Poetry

Alembi posits that words are of utmost importance in poetry and their careful selection greatly enhances the communication of the message. Alembi argues that poetry involves careful patterning of words for effective communication. This implies that for one to be able to derive meaning of a poetic piece, he has to pay attention to how words, which constitute language, are employed in that poem. The proposed study examines the lexical choices the poet makes in an attempt to unravel how they inform his poetry. This involves a careful analysis of how words are used in Okemwa's poetry in order to come up with a critical appraisal of his poetry.

Oiyo examines the sounds of words in his analysis of style and social significance of Luo children's oral poetry. While acknowledging that the sound of words is an

important device in children's oral poetry, he says that children listen keenly to the many sounds in their environment and that they learn and derive pleasure from listening to such sounds. However, he is of the view that they advance little meaning if any in the poems. As much as we concur with Oiyó's view of the aesthetic function of sound in oral poetry, we note that he does not look into the ways in which words can be manipulated to advance certain meanings. The study thus endeavors to fill this gap by examining the manipulation of words as part of the stylistic techniques in Okemwa's poetry to enhance meaning.

Nyagemi's study on two of Angira's anthologies of poetry is useful to our study. Nyagemi focuses on the manipulation of semantic elements in Angira's poetry in an attempt to effectively deliver his message. To demonstrate Angira's prowess in the manipulation of language, he posits:

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 (28).

The assertion resonates well with the poet's ability to use language deliberately to communicate to the readers. For instance, he further observes that the poem "Dialogue" "epitomizes the height of Angira's artistry, his rare ability to combine words, his mastery of diction" (58). All these depict how poets carefully employ language in their works to effectively communicate.

In studying lexical variations and the quest motif in Okemwa's poetry, we endeavour to study his artistic prowess in the manipulation of words to articulate his social vision to the readers. For instance, Nyagemi's study recognizes the value of

semantic absurdities in literary creativity and its ability to conceal meaning in a work of Art. Thus, Nyangemi's study is very significant to our study since it illuminates our understanding of semantic manipulation, one of the aspects of style in poetry. It is this dexterity in manipulating semantic aspects to address social issues that we examine in Okemwa's poetry. Whereas Nyagemi's study provided us with an incisive analysis of the use of semantic absurdities in Angira's poetry, we took note of the fact that he did not look at other forms of linguistic manipulation such as lexical choices. Thus, this study examines how Okemwa engages lexical variations in his poetry and how he brings out the quest motif in his poems in an attempt to present a critical appraisal of his work.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study employs the theory of deconstruction built on ideas of Jacques Derrida on truth, meaning, knowledge and objectivity. Derrida argues that meaning is very unstable and there exists no absolute meaning to any work of art since the same work is subject to many interpretations depending on the individual examining the work. He further argues that language, on which truth, meaning and knowledge is carried is often contradictory such that certainty always eludes us.

Deconstruction clarifies that there is no unmediated knowledge of reality because knowledge is symbolic. The manner in which one interprets such symbols alludes to the kind of meaning he/she will arrive at. Derrida points out that all texts are mediated (or in the process of being mediated) thus truth, meaning and knowledge is held by cultural systems, ideologies, symbols (signs), intertextuality, structure of ideas and practices which we call reading. Literature relies on deconstruction because it is admissible to multiplicity of meanings. Deconstruction theory argues that meaning keeps on changing from time to

time and it relies on difference. The process of deconstruction always reveals an underlying authority beneath prior authority and that way it brings is a depreciation or displacement of a text or narrative. In deconstruction the inferior is elevated and the superior imploded giving rise to extended and expanded horizons. This implies that a thorough examination of a work of art reveals embedded meanings as we take different viewpoints in examining such work of art.

In this regard, deconstruction then becomes a system of inquiry, which tries to identify meaning in areas, which are marginal or deferred as opposed to the proclaimed authorial intention. All those ideas decentred by a text are privileged in deconstruction so that difference between the centre and periphery is explored. In this study, we explore the ways in which lexical variations in Okemwa's poetry call for different interpretations and heralds new thinking of what we perceive of the modern society.

On the other hand, Stylistic theory is used to complement deconstruction in analyzing the relationship between form and content. Wellek and Warren argue that although stylistics bears a close relationship to linguistics, it is not possible to simply identify it with poetics or general theory of Literature. Stylistics includes plot, themes, characterization and even motif. The two further stress the necessity of a thorough grounding in general linguistics as a prerequisite to an understanding of stylistics.

Ngara argues that Stylistic criticism is concerned with the aesthetic aspects of literary works of art. Stylistic criticism takes cognizance of the fact that a work of art must be objectively analysed and evaluated in terms of an aesthetically sound set of parameters, and that the student of Literature should be trained to take stock of these parameters if his study is to be satisfactory and intellectually challenging. He further

notes that the aesthetic parameters that Stylisticians are concerned with here are mainly of a linguistic nature. He observes that criticism based on sound aesthetic principles will forever be useful because even though it may be overtaken by a more satisfactory theory, it will form a basis for further developments. In his discussion of stylistic criticism, Ngara refers to the linguistic idiosyncrasies that characterize individual writers saying, “ We are not merely concerned with what is idiosyncratic about a writer but equally with the effect of his manner of presentation and with the relationship between language and content” (35).

Consequently, Ngara argues that Stylistic criticism puts great emphasis on a writer’s use of language in which the critic identifies distinctive features and other idiosyncrasies of the author and tries to account for the author’s choice of these features. Our study, which focuses on the interplay between style and content in Okemwa’s poetry, attempts at unraveling these idiosyncrasies as well as their contribution to the meaning of his poetry.

Further, Ngara describes the role of a stylistician as opposed to a student in general linguistics. He argues that a student of general linguistics is concerned with linguistic description, with the analysis of the various levels of language: the phonetic level, the grammatical, the lexical and semantic level .The stylistician on the other hand uses the principles of general linguistics to single out the distinctive features of a variety of the idiosyncrasies of the author. The stylistician also uses the principles of general linguistics to identify the features of language, which are restricted to particular social contexts, and to account for the reasons why such features are used and when and where

they are used. We espouse his ideas in our study in an attempt to present a critical appraisal of Okemwa's poetry.

On their part, Leech and Short observe that a study of style is rarely undertaken for its own sake but that critics do so because they want to explain something; the relationship between language and artistic function. They note that the motivating questions are not so much "what" as "why" and "how." From a linguistic angle, it is, "Why does the author choose to express himself in this particular way?" From the critic's viewpoint it is, "How is such and such an aesthetic effect achieved through language" (13). Our study, however, focuses on both the "what" and "why" as we seek to establish the lexical choices in Okemwa's poetry. We seek to identify and analyse the lexical choices in Okemwa's poetry and how these choices bring out the quest motif in his poetry.

Chapman argues that stylistics views art as an author's way of appreciating his own environment (15). In that process, an author could employ language in such a way that he either applauds or criticizes what happens in the society. Okemwa's poetry originates from various social experiences that he has encountered. These experiences are drawn from his immediate environment and he manipulates language to render them to the members in the same society. This implies that he is cautious as a poet in his use of language so that the message does not cause any fuss to his readership. However, beneath his cautious use of language, underlies various manipulations of the linguistic choices in an attempt to articulate and pass the message across in the simplest way possible. This is thus the subject of this study.

Stephen observes that the interpretation of style can be in relation to the author, or to the sociological, historical and biographical features. I am of the opinion that Okemwa's poetry might have been motivated by the society as well as his own creativity and imagination in order to articulate his experiences in the society. This indicates that in an attempt to unravel the various linguistic choices in his poetry, this study pays close attention to the society that the poet is addressing. In doing so, we could be in a position to demonstrate why particular lexical items are employed in certain poems and not in the others. This study is significant in that it clearly demonstrates the various lexical choices employed by the poet to unveil his social vision.

The above assertion brings to the fore the fact that the poet's style is a reflection of a people's shared experiences, employs figurative language to express his message in the world. The study of the poet's language in poetry is closely regarded to the poet's style. There is a significant connection between the poet's communicative text with which he constructs the world he lives in and the poetic text, which is viewed as the poet's artistic representation of language through which he makes a particular social statement about the world. The poet's style is a reflection of the poet's social and cultural background and is a key to understanding the poet's style.

The study of the poet's style is a critical aspect in the interpretation of his poetry. This study shows that the poet's style is a reflection of

CHAPTER THREE

STYLISTIC FEATURES THAT ENHANCE LEXICAL VARIATIONS IN

OKEMWA'S POETRY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Poetry is one of the genres of literature in which poets employ the magic of language in many ways in their attempt to discern the various aspects of reality in the society. In this way, poetry offers an opportunity for a people's shared experiences as depicted by Njuguna Mugo in an introduction to *Daughter of My people Sing*, where he observes that, poetry must articulate a people's collective experience; it must enrich the precious safe in which the sinews of the collective group are preserved. It is for this reason that the poet who puts a people's idiom and metaphor into poetic verse soon captures the imagination of his/her audience, soon gains central ground, because the artist becomes his/her people's collective articulation (viii).

The above assertion brings to the fore the idea that poetry, in articulating a people's shared experiences, employs figurative language to portray the issues in the society. The figurative use of language in poetry is widely regarded as the poet's style. Hence, style becomes the poet's communicative tool with which to foreground the societal issues in his/her poetry. Style, which is viewed as the creative fashioning of language (Mugubi, 2005), makes a poet to stand out from another. In this regard, this chapter endeavours to examine various stylistic features in Okemwa's poetry in our bid to depict how his poetry stands out in the twenty-first century.

This study recognizes the fact that language and style are critical areas in the expression of meaning in any work of art. This implies that for a literary critic to arrive at

any meaningful interpretation to any work of art, (s) he must pay particular attention to the language and style of such work of art. Thus, the objective of this chapter is to examine and critically analyse some of the selected poems to depict how style has been utilized in Okemwa's poetry. We intend to examine how through style, Okemwa is not only able to foreground issues in the society but also evoke and appeal to our emotions and feelings as readers.

While foregrounding the centrality of language and style in literary interpretations, Jeremy Hawthorn in *Unlocking the Text* argues, "Literary works are the only-works which consist largely of language-if one interprets 'literary work' in such a way as to include such things as oral poetry and some of the performing arts. It is not surprising therefore that the artists have sought to use language in the construction of theories about literature" (51). This points to the idea that language whether in poetry or in other forms of art play a pivotal role in unraveling the meaning(s) of such work of art. Language is the only prime aspect in any work of art that is subjected to interpretation. Hence this study recognizes that Okemwa's poetry as a work of art like any other deploys not only to construct theory but also literature. The language of any work of art is intertwined with style and hence this study adopts an interpretive approach to examine the various styles in Okemwa's poetry.

Style addresses the specialized use of language to elicit interesting ways of communication in Okemwa's poetry. Further, it offers insights into how he seeks to present the social reality in his poetry; linguistic and lexical choices he makes while bringing into the fore the quest motif in his poetry. Our interest is on the selected poems

as we seek to unravel how language operates in Okemwa's poetry and how stylistic features are captured to give his poetry a unique representation.

3.2 RHYME AS ENHANCEMENT TO LEXICAL VARIATION

One of the stylistic devices that Okemwa utilizes in his poetry is rhyme. Robins and Hargreaves defines rhyme as "the matching of sounds in particular words" (23). This implies that rhyme is the repetition of similar sounds in two or more words in a poem. For instance, look at the last words of each line in the excerpts of two of the selected poems below:

A Teacher

It is strange why I had to be a *teacher*
Wallowing in a life that is in *rupture*
I should have done better as a *preacher*
Probably I would have been *richer*
See those pastors on Sundays at the *market*
Confidently going through their *racket*
And coins jingle piling up their huge satchet
While poverty busy dusts a teacher's jacket
(42)

And in,

Stuck in a Groove

In the love-making dark street of my *mind*
Lurks about their swain who is going to die
He is not aware of it as he is ignorant and *blind*
To so many evils the cold stars shed from the sky
He nimbly gadabouts with intent to make *love*

While the abyss ogles at him with red malice
 Ensnaring him where he is stuck in a *groove*
 The heavens scream and retreat from his bliss

(83)

Italics mine for identification

The words such as mind and blind in lines one and three, die and sky in lines two and four in the first stanza above, when said carefully fall into pairs. Each pair of the words ends in the same sound. In this regard, we say that these words rhyme. For instance, *teacher* rhymes with *preacher*, *rupture* and *richer*. In order to depict the existence of rhyme in the poems, the sound and not the spelling of the words is important.

For instance, *market* also rhymes with *racket* as indicated in the poem, “A Teacher”.

The poet exploits rhyme as one of the devices in his poetry to reveal his concerns.

Let’s now turn to the rhyming patterns that are discernable in the excerpts of the two poems:

A Teacher

It is strange why I had to be a <i>teacher</i>	a
Wallowing in a life that is in <i>rupture</i>	a
I should have done better as a <i>preacher</i>	a
Probably I would have been <i>richer</i>	a
See those pastors on Sundays at the <i>market</i>	b
Confidently going through their <i>racket</i>	b
And coins jingle piling up their huge <i>sachet</i>	c
While poverty busy dusts a teacher’s <i>jacket</i>	b

(42)

And in,

Stuck in a Groove

In the love-making dark street of my <i>mind</i>	a
Lurks about their swain who is going to <i>die</i>	b
He is not aware of it as he is ignorant and <i>blind</i>	a
To so many evils the cold stars shed from the <i>sky</i>	b
He nimbly gadabouts with intent to make <i>love</i>	c
While the abyss ogles at him with red <i>malice</i>	d
Ensnaring him where he is stuck in a <i>groove</i>	e
The heavens scream and retreat from his <i>bliss</i>	f

(83)

Italics mine for identification

In examining the rhyming patterns in the excerpts of the two poems, we realize that the first poem has this kind of pattern: *aa, aa; bb, cb* while the second poem reveals this pattern: *ab, ab, cd, ec*. The rhyming patterns are referred to as rhyme scheme. The two kinds of rhyme schemes reveal that the poet engages a simple rhyme scheme in his poems. It is simple in the sense that the rhyme scheme is easily identified as well as can easily be predicated. This is so because the poet either maintains the same sound in two line of a poem or alternates the sounds from one line to the other. Further, our examination of where the rhyming words occur, we realize that they occur at the end of each line of a poem. Hence, this kind of rhyming is called end rhyme.

Mugubi argues that rhyme is not a mere decoration or a feature of poetic composition (31). Rhyme transcends the mere act of pleasure resulting from a regular sound echo as it also enhances the meaning in a poem. Okemwa like any other poet deploys rhyme in his poems to foreground the meaning of his poems. For instance, in the

excerpt of the poem “A Teacher” above, the persona parallels his life as a teacher and that of a preacher. The persona wonders why he wallows in poverty while the preacher, who by not working hard actually working only on Sundays is pretty rich as compared to the teacher. In fact the persona argues that while the preacher is busy counting his money, “poverty dusts his jacket.” This way, the poet foregrounds the irony of life. The preachers who are supposed to be giving spiritual guidance to the people, they only rob them the little they have and hence enrich themselves. Therefore, rhyme has been used to show the contrast that exists between the teacher and the preacher in order to bring out the harsh realities of life. In the second poem, rhyme has also been used to bring out the irony that characterizes the love life in the society. The persona depicts how many people conceive and cute love in their mind. Therefore, the poet not only foregrounds the reality in society as pertains to love but also the irony that characterizes those who claim to be in love. The poet depicts that they (those who claim to be in love) only pretend to be in love in their quest to fulfill their own selfish desires and once they achieve what they want, they opt out. Thus, Okemwa depicts that immediate gratification of desire other than love pervades the love life in our contemporary society. In this way, he is able to confront veiled pretence as one of the vices in the society.

3.3 ALLUSION INRELATION TO LEXICAL VARIATION

Allusion refers to reference to familiar objects or persons known to the audience as well as readers. It also implies an indirect reference to a presumably familiar person, place, event, thing or quoting from known authorities, journals or books. It is a literary device by which implications are made to ridicule, euphemise and so on. However, Okemwa in his poetry utilizes Biblical allusion in expressing his social experiences. Thus

the study exploits a allusion as an enhancement to lexical choices in his poetry. Okemwa traverses the spiritual and the physical cosmos as he seeks to show the relationship between human beings and God. The poet recognizes the existence of God throughout the anthology and attributes various achievements to him. However, he is critical to various Christian traditions and practices. For instance, the centrality of the cross in the Christian mythology is clearly fore grounded in his poetry. In the poem “*Nyabururu church Alley*” Okemwa describes with mock deference the metallic Madonna that stands in the church. He says:

The wooden crucifix, metallic Madonna,
Both smile at me,
Mocking my leaking conscience
I simply feel guilty passing here
(58)

In this stanza, the poet implicitly depicts the ignorance among the members of the church regarding to the various church practices such as the wearing of the cross or even inscribing it in church walls. The members do not actually understand the essence of such practices in their religious life no wonder like the person, they are guilty of not carry out these practices as required. Further, they cannot deduce the true and false crucifix as shown in this poem.

The entire poem shows that most of the members of the church dogmatically partake on the religious practices and doctrines without fully understanding their essence and potency in their Christian life. For instance, many of the people do not understand the essence of wearing the crucifix. The poet views this as an imposed practice among many church members. Christian mythology views the crucifix as a symbol of the tribulations

that the Lord Jesus had to undergo to redeem mankind. Therefore, many Christians view the cross as a symbol of their salvation and above all it is a symbol of their spiritual strength. Whenever faced with problems or even sinned, Christians turn to the cross, confess their sins and in the process ask for forgiveness. However, many people in the contemporary society have been duped to believing that they worship the true God. Their pastors and spiritual leaders lie to them and follow their teachings blindly like the persona in this poem. But after sometime, they come to realize that they have been fouled hence defy the worship of these man-made images as the poet depicts in the poem in that the persona blatantly refuses to worship this image when he says:

No I won't kneel, I won't pray

I don't feel the invisible spirit

No angel; a dead stonewall

All is man-made, inanimate.

(59)

It is thus clear from this stanza that the persona is not all alone in the worship of man-made idols other than worshipping the true God. In this stanza, the poet depicts that the worship of Idols is real in the contemporary society and thus many should be cautious of false prophets in the society who make references to the Bible for their own selfish ends.

Biblical allusion is further evident in the poems "Lift your eyes to Golgotha" and "The Slim Path." In these two poems, the poet makes references to various teachings in the Bible regarding salvation and righteousness. On the one hand, Okemwa borrows the teachings that surround Golgotha in the poem "Lift your eyes to Golgotha." For example, he observes that as a Christian, once your faith is under test or seems to falter, turn your

eyes to Golgotha. At Golgotha, all the burdens were lifted and thus Christians should draw their strength from it. On the other hand, he foregrounds the need for salvation for mankind when he talks of the slim path, a corruption of the narrow path in the Bible. For instance he says:

If you hunger for a home,
That lies way beyond the blue,
Follow the slim path, its twists and turns
Keep on, though drudgery and irksome

But remember temptation looms here
A fidget will call for a fiasco
Like Lot's wife be a mound of salt
And loose a healing from that intangible largesse
hand

(64)

The two stanzas depict his heavy reliance on the teachings of the Bible regarding salvation. One could think that the poet has turned preacher in his poetry. This assertion is supported by the two first stanzas of cited above. For instance, the poet in the first stanza is talking about heaven: the home where Jesus went to prepare for mankind and where the faithful will ascend to in the second coming of Christ. Christians observe that for one to be able to go to heaven, other than being saved and faithful, you need to follow the narrow path. They further argue that the narrow path is not any easy option since it is full of potholes and thorns. Okemwa depicts these same characteristics in his version of the narrow path which he calls "The Slime Path." He also shows that his slim path not

only has twists and turns but also is tedious and requires one to work hard: all these being the characteristics of the narrow path. Further, Okemwa shows that one ought to be extra careful in following the slim path, the narrow path.

In the second stanza, he draws the analogy of Lot's wife to depict the consequences of not abiding by the requirements of the slim path. For instance, he artistically alludes to the case of Lot's wife in the Bible in concretizing the consequences that shall befall anyone who fails to abide by the requirements of the slim path. In this way, he urges the readers to beware of what will happen to them in case they transgress. Therefore, Okemwa deploys Biblical allusion to depict the spirituality of the contemporary society.

Besides Biblical allusion, Okemwa alludes to the myth that surrounds the hooting of an owl in many traditional African communities in his poem "The Owl." The mention of an owl sends shivers to many members of the traditional African communities since to them the appearance of the bird near homesteads does not portend well. Traditional African mythology has it that the appearance of an owl symbolizes a bad omen that will befall the homestead that the owl has visited. Besides, it is also believed that the owl usually visits the homestead at night because of its evil nature. Okemwa depicts this timing of an owl in the first stanza where he observes:

His elegies surge up in fits and starts
Blow into the dead night, in gusts
Moan the night coldly, brutally and wildly
Waking you each time in a different world

(129)

Many communities believe that evil lurks in the nights and thus since the owl is usually evil, it usually visits at night and seldom does it appear during the day. African communities hold the view that the hooting of an owl simply implies doom is imminent. They believe that if it visits a certain homestead, death shall befall one of the members of that family in the near future. The poet depicts this in the fourth stanza where he uses sardonic questions to show how the owl foretells of the imminent death:

He has always come to make a portentous row
Perching himself on the thick green hedgerow
Whoooooo! Who? Who do I take? Who? Whooooo?
Who is tired with life's irksome journey? Who?
(129)

The above stanza clearly spells out the purpose of the owls visit: it wants one of the family members. Further, the poet portrays that members of the society do not take the hooting of an owl kindly as he observes:

The blood libation, stone-throwing in a huff
Scolding or shouts can't scare him off
He is a special emissary from Hades
And stands not to be appeased or condemned
(129)

The stanza depicts that being aware of the dangers that are associated with the hooting of the owl, the members of the family where it has visited do all that they can to avert the doom which its appearance portends. For instance, in order to appease the ancestors who are believed to have sent the owl, the pour blood libation. It is believed

that the ancestors are in need of blood and so offering blood libation will quench their thirst and hence abate the need of human blood.

3.4 SYMBOLISM AS ENHANCEMENT TO LEXICAL VARIATION

Chadwick defines symbolism as “ the art of expressing ideas and emotions not by describing them directly, nor by defining them through overt comparisons with concrete images, but by suggesting what these ideas and emotions are, by recreating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplainable symbols”(2-3). This implies that symbols signify reality that transcends the referent. In other words, a symbol stands for something whose meaning lies elsewhere. For instance, in the poem “Toy Bus,” Okemwa engages symbolism to depict the parents’ indifference to their children games. In the first stanza, the poet says:

Eng’ stamps up and down the stairs
As if a devil has invaded his mind
He demolishes his toy-bus
Assembling the parts together again
He then runs the bus down the stairs
Crying out loudly-his passengers
screaming from inside.

(8)

The poet skillfully employs the playful mood by the child Eng’ to symbolically depict parental ignorance in play activities among children. Children most of the time engage in play or playful activities either in a group or alone as Eng’ does in this poem. As the poet shows through Eng’, children while at play are busy and in a jovial mood oblivious of what is happening around them. Eng’ while acting as engineer as well as bus driver is busy ferrying his passengers down and up the staircase which is his road.

However, as the poet depicts, Eng and his mother have a serious quarrel. On the one hand, Eng, the enthusiastic driver, is determined to get his screaming passengers to their destination. The passengers are perhaps screaming for being delayed by the mechanical problem that the bus which he managed to fix. While on the other hand, his mother is more concerned with his shoes. Eng' got carried away with the new role of engineer cum bus driver until he forgets that he needed to care for his shoes. Eng's mother gets so irritated on realizing that young Eng' is busy with little things and does not take care of his shoes save for knowing where he left them.

Despite the fact that the poem adopts a playful mood, it symbolically depicts the unsympathetic attitude adults often have towards children's play and their obvious ignorance to the power of children's play informing the young minds. Eng's mother fails to realize the efforts that her son has put in repairing the bus so as to ferry his passengers in time. When the bus broke down, the young boy is depicted as being creative enough to dismantle and repair the bus. The poet shows Eng' as being possessed in what he does. Instead of lauding his efforts, mother lashes out on him as shown in this stanza:

He grabs the bus the bus and drives it up the stairs again

.....
His socks wet from the dew outside
Where are your shoes, Eng?

Her murderous voice booms out.

He only points out of the window

Gasping, shaking with fear and horror

Those children picked them, Ma

He speaks and bursts into a screams.

(8)

Thus, the poet's use of symbols underlines the parental ignorance on the role of play in children. Besides parental ignorance, the poet foregrounds the general behaviour of passengers especially when the vehicles they are travelling in breakdown. Their behaviour is depicted as unwelcome since it's not the driver's mistake for the car to breakdown. As the poet shows, their uncalled for complaints sometimes drive the driver mad as does Eng'. This is seen from the way the enthusiastic driver dismantles the bus "As if a devil has invaded his mind." The noise made by the passengers unseats him and he tries as much as possible to satisfy them by fixing and driving the bus very fast.

The poet presents the passengers' disgruntled behaviour to the bus driver and that of Eng's mother as inhuman and harsh since their reactions are only onesided. Their reactions reveal how selfish and insensitive they are to the driver and the young boy respectively. Thus, in foregrounding the question of subjectivity in both reactions, implicitly the poet criticizes the general public on how they treat the children as well as the helpless in the society. In the process, he symbolically underscores the fact that society should change its' attitude towards children and the helpless. They should change their mindset and recognize that they too have to set out to achieve something in their endeavours.

Symbolically, Okemwa condemns violence in the world in his criticism of the mother's violent interruption of Eng's innocent world as well as the passengers' aggression towards the enthusiastic driver. The poet argues that violent confrontations to innocent victims in society are unwarranted. Mother needs to understand the innocent child's world before she angrily reacts on Eng losing his shoes. She fails to realize that the activity that the boy is engaged in is more developmental than the lost shoes. As

well, the passengers should be in a position to understand that the driver is innocent since a mechanical breakdown is beyond his control. Consequently, the poet depicts that reason should prevail in society.

3.5 IMAGERY IN RELATION TO LEXICAL VARIATION ENHANCEMENT

Okemwa, in his poetry, casts out a picture in the mind of his readers. These pictures created or suggested by the poet are called 'images'. Thus, the pictures evoked in a poem and/or in the poems are referred to as 'imagery'. In this case, therefore, imagery refers to the "pictures" which we, as readers, perceive as we read the poems. This perception could be in our mind's eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin as we experience the "duplicate world" created by poetic language. In this section, we are going to explore the various ways in which the poet uses imagery in his poetry.

Imagery evokes the meaning and truth of human experiences not in abstract terms, as in philosophy, but in more perceptible and tangible forms. This is a device that enables the poet to make his meaning strong, clear and sure. The poet uses sound words, words of color and touch in addition to figures of speech. As well, concrete details that appeal to the reader's senses are used to build up images. For instance, in the poem, "Toy Bus" Okemwa invokes in us the image of how the enthusiastic driver, Eng' drives his bus when he observes in the second stanza:

He grabs the bus and drives it up the stairs again

Roaring and beeping out loud

His mum suddenly appears at the door

And stares sternly at him

He lowers his eyes down to his smudged shirt

Clutching his nose that is wet with mucus

(8)

In this stanza, the poet through the use of vivid description invokes various images in our minds as readers. For example, we imagine and visualize how Eng' "grabs the bus" and then hurriedly drives it up stairs. Since the young boy is in a playful mood, the readers are able to perceive the speed at which a grabs and drives the car as though they are seeing him do it. Further, the poet depicts mental images in the poem through the use of onomatopoeic words "roaring and beeping" in the second line of the stanza. Here, the poet invokes aura of images as he vividly brings out the message.

As we have identified in the above example, one of the ways in which the poet creates mental images in his poetry is through the use of vivid description. Okemwa keenly and accurately portrays various scenarios and events in his poems the way they are in the actual world. We are able to visualize the events as they happened in the actual world through the enactment of the images in our minds as we follow the poet's train of thought in his poetry. For instance, in the poem "Koinange Street," Okemwa vividly describes the events in the night the persona visited Koinange Street. The poet makes his readers to perceive what happens at the street through vivid description. For example, in the first stanza, he shows how the persona is dumbfounded when he sees a nude lady. Okemwa says:

Last night I visited Koinange Street

And saw, to my shock, a nude lady

Streaking across the road

A tiny cloth encircled her waist

Revealing, below her navel, above

Her pubic bone, a mass of black hair.

A strip of cloth covered her chest

below which flapped huge sagging boobs

That swung from one armpit to the other

While her posterior—the massive ballon,

Bouncing in rhythm with her quick steps.

She came to a stop at the curb

Self-confident, without an iota of qualm

looking around in a wild gaze

Her lip-sticked lips moved, sneering at the lads nearby

Who whistled and made faces at her.

(75)

In this stanza, the poet vividly captures and describes every detail that happens in the street on that particular night. He describes the nude lady that he sees, all that she does and the reaction from nearby lads. Through this vivid description, readers are able to see clearly and without a shadow of doubt in their minds deduce that the lady being talked about in this poem is no ordinary lady but a prostitute. In the entire poem, the poet engages description to depict the indifferences between the nude lady, the nearby lads, the man who picks her up and that of the persona. In this way, the poet is able to confront the issue of morality in the society through the poem. He shows that society is

morally decayed. This is unveiled in the poem as the poet reveals that both the high profiled people and the low are immoral. That, society should not condemn only the prostitutes being the only ones who are openly known to the general public but there are also others who hide in the dark and pretend to be moral during the day.

Dialogue is another aspect of style that the poet has deployed to bring about imagery in his poetry. Though the poet is virtually writing in verse, he breaks into dialogue to enable leaders visualize the speaker and the particularity of the situation implied. For instance, the poet employs dialogue in the poems, “An Old Retired School Teacher” and “An Amorphous Shadow.” In the two poems, the poet breaks away from verse to dialogue in order to foreground the irony of life in the society. For example, in reading the poem, “An Old Retired School Teacher,” one realizes that other than the first stanza, the three other stanza are portrayed by the poet as an exchange between the persona and the old retired school teacher as the persona sought to find out the problems that the teacher is facing. The dialogue is characterized by sardonic questions as the persona engages the teacher in a discussion. This is depicted in the second stanza thus:

I stopped to ask his troubles
Why he was lonely and talking to himself
He said he has seen the good old days
And enjoyed every hour of his life
He had taught so many great people
Some who held big positions in government
The society as it stood then, he said

Owed it all to his hard work as a teacher

But he shook his head and regretted

That his head carried half of the world's problems

And darkness was engulfing his twilight years

Although the dialogue is in a reported speech, the poet is able to capture it as a conversation between the persona and the teacher. Through the dialogue, he reveals the psychological trauma that the teacher is undergoing at the moment they meet. Ironically, the poet reveals that the teacher who has taught virtually all the wielders of power in the society is left to a cold and indifferent world that does not care for his contribution to the society. Nonetheless, the teacher has made decisions in his life whose consequences he has to fully bear. One of the mistakes he makes is that of marrying many wives. Out of his five wives, the third is at Pumwani maternity waiting to give birth and he is yet to pay dowry for his fifth wife long after retirement.

The poet also deploys comparison to depict imagery in his poetry. This is realized through the use of similes in his poetry. A simile is a figure of speech in which something is said to resemble another with regard to certain attributes. Therefore, in a simile, the basis of comparison is explicit rather than implicit. For instance, in the poem, "The Slim Path," Okemwa engages the use of similes when for instance in the stanza he observes:

But remember temptation looms here

A fidget could call for a fiasco

Like Lot's wife be a mound of salt

And loose a healing from that intangible largesse

In the above stanza, the poet evokes the image of Lot's wife to foreground the consequences of not following the requirements of the slim path. Okemwa's argument is that there are no multiple options to choose from in the slim path. The simile like "Lot's wife" in the above stanza illustrate the tenor of lack of options. In the poem, "Childhood Memories," Okemwa employs similes to describe his poetic artistry. Similes like "feel like dead wood on the page" in stanza one line two and "like a lip from a lip" in stanza two line four show how the poetic words flow from his mind.

The discussion above reveals that Okemwa does not use imagery -- that is, images in general -- as a mere decoration in his poetry. Rather, he deploys imagery to help the reader see his subject matter exactly as it appears to him. Imagery helps him solve his problem, for it enables him to present his subject as it is: as it looks, smells, tastes, feels and sounds. To the reader imagery is equally important: it provides his imagination with something palpable to seize upon.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have established how the poet has engaged various stylistic features in his poetry. It emerged that each of the stylistic features identified help the poet to achieve certain objectives in his poetry. For instance, we have analysed how Okemwa has deployed imagery and symbolism in articulating social issues such moral decadence, ignorance and aggression towards the disadvantaged in the society. It also emerged that the features of style are used purposively to depict certain salient features among the members of the society.

The next chapter analyses lexical choices in Okemwa's poetry. We analyse Okemwa's poetry in line with the second objective which focuses on lexical variations as a way of foregrounding the quest motif in his poetry. Thereafter, we shall proceed to establish how this portrays the author's social vision.

Okemwa's poetry. Halliday and Webster (1990) define a metaphor as a linguistic device that connects the external world and creates a new one. It is the state of affairs that is not directly expressed in the text. This metaphorical device foregrounds the quest motif in Okemwa's poetry which is not a mere procedure that affords us a clear understanding of the text rendering it more accessible. Thus, this chapter investigates various metaphors and analogies employed in Okemwa's poetry and how these metaphors contribute to the realization of the quest motif. It will give structure and a final dimension to the analysis of lexical items in Okemwa's poetry as presented in the previous chapters. The main aim is to establish the realization of the quest motif.

The patterning of linguistic items in poetry engenders a rich and meaningful text through the items that we as readers are able to acquire meaning and establish the literary aesthetic value of poetry. Okemwa's poetry is no exception since for us readers to be able to enjoy, identify its multiple meanings and establish its aesthetic quality, a clear examination of how he engages the lexical items exists. In this regard, there is need to examine particular emotional aspects where these lexical items occur, identify and describe dominant lexical patterns. This in turn captures the variations and shows how they facilitate the realization of the quest motif. However, for us to understand the quest motif manifest through the lexical choices in Okemwa's poetry, we first have to underscore the pervasiveness in which we seek to establish our analysis. These are:

CHAPTER FOUR

LEXICAL VARIATIONS AND THE QUEST MOTIF

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter unravels the lexical organization and variations in Christopher Okemwa's poetry. Halliday argues that the poetic text is completely detached from the external world and creates a "context of situation" for itself through the special patterning of its lexis. This special lexical patterning in poetry leads the reader to negotiate a meaning which requires more processing time, effort and attention, consequently rendering it more enjoyable. Thus, this chapter investigates various lexicalization strategies engaged in Okemwa's poetry and how these variations contribute to the realization of the quest motif. The Chapter focuses on the poetic discourse in general, the nature of lexical variations in Okemwa's poetry in particular, their relations and how they contribute to the realization of the quest motif.

The patterning of linguistic items in poetry engenders critical attention since it's through the items that we as readers are able to negotiate meaning and establish the literary aesthetic value of poetry. Okemwa's poetry is no exception since for us readers to be able to enjoy, identify its multiple meanings and establish its semantic intensity, a close examination of how he engages the lexical items calls. In this regard, there is need to examine particular situational aspects where these lexical items occur, compare and contrast dominant lexical patterns. This in turn unravels the variations and shows how they facilitate the realization of the quest motif. However, for us to depict how the quest motif manifests itself through the lexical choices in Okemwa's poetry, we first have to underscore the parameters in which we seek to elucidate our analysis. These are:

- i. Lexis as a Discourse,
- ii. Lexis as a representational mode of meaning,
- iii. Lexis as a deviated discourse,
- iv. Lexis as a maximally coherent mode of language,
- v. Lexical organization of poetry

4.2 LEXIS AS A DISCOURSE

Various scholars have attempted to define the term poetry. As noted in Chapter One, the definitions advanced are in terms of its specific phonological, syntactic and/or semantic relations. While these definitions are admittedly insightful, they confine poetry to the boundaries of a text. Further, this observation implies that poetry is the end product of exploiting all the linguistic patterns by the poet while the reader encounters this end product, reads it and may adopt a kind of cognitive or aesthetic effect.

Verdonk defines a poem's discourse as a contextual and interpersonal activity with the purpose of transmitting a literary message from the author to the reader. This implies that the poet's text becomes a meaningful discourse when the reader reads it and builds up interpersonal and socio-cultural context around it in trying to elucidate its meaning. In this dynamic communicative process between the reader and the poet, the linguistic structures more especially the lexical items act as impulses which aid or frustrate the meaning of the poem. In this process, the reader will focus on the lexical choices that the poet deploys to relay home his/her message. For instance, to decipher the intended meaning in Okemwa's poem "Idyllic," one needs to view it as a kind of discourse: A discourse that is centred in the contrast between urban and rural areas on

issues of ethics and morality in the modern times. In the poem, the poet vividly captures the rural aura when he says:

Walk past the bushy-paved corner
Come to an embarrassing sight:
A rustic codger, his chin as bushy as his milieu
Squatting in shallow clumps of shrub
Wild-eyed, stooling; his face,
A ballad, manifesting vividly the sort
Of place our childhood was dissipated.
Go further on and a stark nude
Little brat will squelch across the muddy road (10).

In this poem, Okemwa paints rural areas as innocent as most people living in the urban areas perceive them to be. The rural areas are perceived to be pure and not affected by the adulterated urban culture and life style. However, the poet goes further to confront and challenge this urban-rural discourse when he clearly posits:

In the gleaming at the beer party meet dishevelled
Fogey mothers whose haunches will loosely
Be cased in menstruation-stained lesos
Listen to their jumble conversations
Innuendoes, humour and laughter.
Spend your night in a sisal mat, wake
Up in the morning with a lingering headache
Crows, bleats and lows charging your morning air.
You will need a pair of thick boots
To wade through the midden-ridden path

As you leave the village (ibid).

In this, Okemwa confronts the question of whether the rural scene is as innocent as people would like us to believe. For instance, the poet seems to ask: is this the morality you are making as believe when the old men feacing in the bush and children walking about naked?

In this way, Okemwa shifts the contemporary discourse on morality and ethics in the society. He shows that the rural areas should not be used as yardsticks for moral judgments in the society since these areas also have got their form of immorality like the urban areas. Therefore, to him, the discourse that foregrounds the quest for the right moral values in the contemporary society should not be based on areas but on other parameters like the individual person.

Okemwa re-ignites the moral discourse in the society by engaging the rural areas from the dimension that is rarely used by moral critics in the society. In the process, he carefully chooses his lexical items in a way that he clearly captures the nondescript picture and practices in the rural areas that many have turned a blind eye on. In other words, while condemning the urban areas as centres for moral decadence, moralists only focus on the positive sides of the rural areas. To Okemwa, this is seen as a negation of the reality because one needs to take a holistic approach in making such a judgment. While taking this unconventional dimension, the poet is able to generate a discourse that is particular and critical in the society hence opening up more discussions on the controversies that surround the quest for the right moral and ethical values in the society.

4.3 LEXIS AS REPRESENTATIONAL MODE OF MEANING

The representational mode of meaning as a feature can be regarded as the most striking and determinant characteristic of poetry, since other features are subsequently extracted from it. Poetry, like other genres of literature is intended to present a separate reality from the ordinary world where various linguistic items such as the lexicon are used to depict this reality. However, in common communication language is used to refer to the external world and the context with which the reader has enough experience and familiarity; and based on it, he develops his schematic knowledge. Hence, in ordinary communication, the linguistic codes act as indices which direct the reader to extra linguistic and contextual factors in order to get out relevant information (Widdowson, 1990).

Okemwa engages the representational mode to depict various social issues affecting humanity. His lexical choices vary in his poetry depending on the issues at hand. For instance, in foregrounding love and its ironies in the society, he engages lexical items that paint a rosy picture of love as well as the hidden undercurrents that go with it. This is realized in the poem, "An irritating sight," where he captures the ironies of love life. As the poem opens, the poet depicts the persona's feelings when he says:

At first when I met you,
I was inflamed and thrilled
Your erotic smile melted my heart
Your charming smile froze blood in my veins
And your spider-thin waist was a turn on (91).

In this poem, the poet engages the ordinary love lexicon to describe the feelings of the persona towards the beautiful lady that he first met. It is a common language among many youth in the contemporary society while expressing their feelings towards the ones they feel they are in love with. However it is not a crime to love and be loved, the epistemological question that the poet raises is: will this so called “love” stand the test of time? Or will it fade away as time passes by? This is clearly what the poet underscores in this poem when he shows the cruelty in the passage of time in love relationships. He says:

Days flew by and nights passed
I discovered your sex appeal was zero
Your ideas banal and parochial
I realised the grandeur I had seen
Was just a mirage; the mystery
In those eyes had become lucid
The lips, the eyes all had lost their magic
The angel I thought I had found
Was no longer an angel
But an irritating sight before me (ibid).

The above excerpt depicts a reversal in love’s trajectory. The poet shows the bitter irony of affection in relation to time. However, in foregrounding the violence of familiarity in the above poem, Okemwa confronts the age old question: what are the ideals in the quest for true love? Therefore, the poet shows us the thin line that exists between love and hate in the way events unfold within a limited time span. Words such as inflamed, thrilled, erotic, charming, and tender which constitute the love lexicon

quickly vanish and are replaced with words such as banal, parochial, mirage, mystery, and lucid which constitute the hate world.

In the poem, *The Children of Baba Dogo*, Okemwa shifts focus from the love context evidenced in the above poem to another social context: urban poverty. In this poem, his lexical choices vary on the bases of the social contexts at hand in representing meaning. This is clearly shown in the second stanza of this poem where he vividly captures the abject poverty among the urban dwellers:

In tattered creased school uniforms, appearing

Like crowns

Swollen red eyes that strain to keep

Themselves open

Running noses with particles of frozen mucus

Clogging the nostrils

Their unkempt hairs standing on them like

Spikes of hedgerows... (13).

Through the above excerpt, one could easily notice how the poet pays particular attention to unexciting details in foregrounding the social situation that the children find themselves in. However in their quest for knowledge, the children, though strained, soldier on with their schooling in the hope that they will overcome the present situation once they have acquired enough education. Therefore, the poet clearly shows that these children have been hardened by the difficult circumstances they find themselves in, which in turn cannot affect their quest for education.

The absence of a conventional world-base on which the reader of a poetic text could make predictions for its understanding necessitates that the language of poetry replaces its referential and indexical role by a representational one in which it creates its own potential context. To construct such a context, the poet establishes a set of new conventions which either conform or violate the norms of standard language. The representation of meaning in this way lays the foundation for developing a local schematic knowledge. Okemwa, in his poetry, achieves the representational meaning of his poems by constructing various contexts to the poems through the choice and variation of the lexical items. In this way, he demonstrates his prowess in the mastery of various contexts in the communicative process and strives to make his intended meaning clear in those contexts.

As a poet, Okemwa is aware of the fact that poetry, like any other literary work, is open to endless interpretations. In fact, the meaning of a poem changes not only from reader to reader, but also from reading to reading, that is every time one reads the same poem, he/she perceives its message differently, consequently receives a new effect. Therefore, he limits his lexical variations within the social contexts at hand for his intended message to be meaningful. The multiplicity of interpretations of a poetic utterance can be traced back to the volatile nature of the relationship between form and meaning in poetry. Put differently, by increasing the degree of indeterminacy, the conventionality decreases, and relativity of meaning will increase. By reducing the meaning of a poem into a precise interpretation, we assign it an indexical role in which some linguistic items such as the lexical items operates and refers to a conventionalized pre-established meaning within the context. In this regard, it is within the social contexts

that the meaning of various lexical items can be negotiated. However, as Widdowson observes, one needs to go beyond the contextual interpretation of poetry hence contributing to its representational meaning.

4.4 LEXIS AS DEVIATED DISCOURSE

As mentioned earlier, the very existence of poetry depends on representing some aspects of reality in a new way and creating new images of reality which do not exist outside the language. In fact, the way an ordinary subject is represented in an unfamiliar way produces the aesthetic effect of poetry, not the subject matter itself. To this end, the poet enjoys freedom of pre-established norms of language that is the conventional restrictions which exist at different levels of language including lexical, grammatical and semantic and even discourse (Widdowson, 1992).

We have observed above that Okemwa tries as much as possible to limit his lexical choices to the social contexts in which he is writing. However, there are cases where these lexical choices veer way from one context to the other. For instance, look at the first stanza of the poem, *The Annunciation* herein:

My rough fingers fondle
The beads, one by one
Up to the last,
Lips cooing the soft solemn words (53)

One, taking a beeline through this stanza of the poem, could easily categorize the poem as a love poem due to the used words like fingers, fondle, lips and soft. These words are associated with the love world where it is said that men fondle ladies while ladies caress men using their fingers and lips. The use of the adjective “rough” as a

premodifier of “fingers” in the first line further enhances the love discourse by identifying the persona as being a man since roughness is associated with men whereas softness is for women.

However, a cross examination of the stanza reveals a deviated discourse where the lexical items commonly associated with the love world are used to symbolise something else. Thus, the stanza would be seen as an allusion to the Holy Rosery. This is deduced from the second line which contains the word beads, one by one and the third line where the poet talks of the last one-a replica of one in a prayerful mood. Therefore, the ordinary love world as we know it has been elevated in this allusion since the ordinary love words are used to explain the Holy world. It is through these lexical variations across contexts that we realise a deviation in the poetry discourse. Hence in this poem, not only the love but also the saying of the Rosery has prepared the persona into the spiritual journey and enabled him to feel the annunciation of the coming of Christ. It is this spiritual journey that takes the persona to the birth and death of Jesus Christ as seen in the last stanza:

Up the sprout, nine mounts
Of pain; travail
Came a mascot through which the world
Was to heel her wounds (ibid)

This foregrounds a deviated poetic discourse where lexical items associated with certain lexical contexts are used in the less ordinary or familiar contexts. In order to show Okemwa’s poetry as deviated discourse, it should be noted that the communicative situation of a poem is completely detached from the usual process of social interaction,

those shared social conventions accepted by participants involved in normal communication are not adhered to in the context of his poetry as shown in the poem above. Furthermore, the co-operative principles for effective communication are not observed (Widdowson, 1975). Such an apparent contradiction can be claimed to result in lack of clarity; however, in destroying the existing order, the poem creates another one at the same time. This new order is achieved through a kind of lexical patterning in these new contexts to negotiate the intended meaning and create an internal context of the poem. The new order of patterning contributes to "maximum coherence" which is regarded to be as another feature of poetry.

4.5 LEXIS AS A MAXIMALLY COHERENT MODE OF LANGUAGE

As argued above, the contextual detachment of a poem results in the creation of an imaginary internal context which is peculiar to that poem. In representing such a context, everything violates common-place conventional order. Although these elements lose their referential stability in the real world, they gain their value within the boundary of the poem through their close interrelationship. In other words, every single element, whether linguistic or not, contributes to the totality of meaning in the poem not outside it. This observation concurs with Widdowson who observes that: "In denying one kind of regularity, the poem asserts its own" (24).

In this regard, linguistic patterns across all phonological, lexical, grammatical and graphological levels not only realize but also contribute to the semantic unity of the poem. More strikingly, lexical items contribute to creating the internal context of the poem through their association with each other. Put in another way, the value of every lexical item cannot be specified without referring to its neighbouring words. For instance,

in the poem, “Someone in Control”, Okemwa engages lexical items that bring into the fore the concept of absence as a form presence, thus:

In a sleepless night, I open the
Small bedroom window and look out to study
The mystery of the night; a big pool of darkness
Fills the void of the world.

I find it inspiring as well as awesome.
The night has a way of making you think there is no
life

At all existing anywhere in the world, no God living,
Nothing beyond the black sheet of darkness
And we all might as well be dead (49).

In this poem, the absence of sleep as signaled in the first line of the poem opens up a window in the persona’s mind to study the present: the mystery of the night. The persona’s look through the window goes beyond the dark night at his disposal to the concept of being. The simple lexical items describing the dark night such as a pool of darkness easily fade away as the persona links the darkness to the concept of life as well as the life-giver: God. The poet compares the natural darkness to the supernatural forces that prowl in the presence of darkness.

However, in the second stanza, the persona identifies God, as the powerful force that controls the presence or absence of darkness as well as the other forces that lurk in darkness. As much as there are various forces in the dark, God controls them all since as the persona ably identifies in the first stanza, He gives and takes away life. In acknowledging the presence of God, the persona observes:

As I stay blankly staring into the pool of darkness

A star peeps out somewhere up in the sky, then

gradually

The moon pops out of the thick rafts of clouds

Like a beautiful bride and rides across the sky

Smiling down at me by the window...(ibid)

The persona singles out the star as the source of light in the dark. Then he goes ahead to identify light with God. Okemwa's lexical items in this poem make a coherent whole. The poet's lexical choices allow us to observe that this poem expresses the persona's spiritual quest since it is characterised by various spiritual undertones in the lexical items. The persona seeks to understand his spiritual wellbeing through the comparison of various items such as darkness, stars, and the moon which are at his presence in trying to understand the absence. As the poem comes to a close, the persona comes to an understanding that someone is in control. The person who is in control does exist despite the fact that he cannot be seen hence this person is God.

Therefore, Okemwa's patterning of the lexical items to create internal contexts in his poetry constitutes a language pattern that influences the representation of meaning that if this patterning changes, the meaning will be reflected differently and the poems coherence affected. It is worth noting that the concept of "maximum coherence" (Simmons and Cummings 172) as used here has been emphasized by many stylisticians, although they give it different titles: cohesion of foregrounding (Leech, 1969); consistency of foregrounding (Hasan, 1971, 1985); motivated foregrounding (Halliday, 1971); semantic drift (Butt, 1988b); independent coherence (Widdowson, 1992); and literary coherence (Lotfipour, 1992).

4.6 LEXICAL ORGANIZATION OF OKEMWA'S POETRY

As we have strived to show from the discussions above, lexical patterns appear to play a considerably important role in the understanding of a poetic text as it contributes to the "maximal coherence" of such text. Every lexical item, according to Cummings and Simmons contributes to produce images in poetry, either directly or in an oblique manner. Once an image has been established in a poem, all lexical items in the poem may probably be applied to it by extending their meaning metaphorically. Even those lexical items which seem apparently unrelated to the established images can be attributed to the role of creating more images for the purpose of making the experience of the poem mutually intelligible and more complex.

In this regard, strings of related lexis in a poem can help the reader to understand how the poem creates and co-ordinates different levels of imagery in order to convey the sense of an experience. In fact, to get the reader involved in experiencing the same emotional, intellectual and intuitional senses, the poet uses words for the purpose of suggesting various contexts in a way that the reader enters his experience. For instance, in the poem, "Lackadaisical," the poet carefully engages his lexical items to depict the persona's private experiences, thus:

Call me a misanthrope, nonchalant
Or a zombie. I don't care.
I have to keep to my ruminative stance (28).

The poet's use of lexical items for example words such as misanthrope, nonchalant, zombie, and ruminative in this stanza shows the extent to which Okemwa

seeks to foreground persona's personal experiences. Confused as to which it meant, knowing somehow that all are meant, but also that none is exactly meant, the reader can resolve his problem only by extending the persona's experiences as presented by the poet in the poem. In trying to comprehend the poet's suggested context and experiences in the poem, we may unravel his social visions. In the interplay of these different contexts, as Cummings and Simmons (1983) observes, we are able to recreate the poet's experience (172). Thus, in this poem, the poet presents a private theme which he brings into the fore through his public experiences. The poet reveals that the persona has been traumatised by the various negative labels on him by the society. Hence, these negative labels make him feel disgusted and isolated. The general public has denied the persona a sense of belonging as they see him as a social misfit as it is evident in stanza three:

Let me be thought reticent, vapid

Lacking elan, impetuosity

A loather of gregariousness (ibid)

In this stanza, the use of the adjectives such as reticent, vapid, elan, and impetuosity clearly shows how the general public considers the persona. As the poem comes to a close, it is clear that the persona dares the society that underestimates him. Thus, the persona is out proof his worth in the society. Hence, Okemwa foregrounds the persona's quest for individual identity in the society. In this way, he shows us that society has completely misconstrued the persona's identity making him to strive to prove to the society his real identity and personality.

As such, any single lexical item or a group of related items may produce a context in poetry. Each context created in this way gets the reader involved in a momentary

experience of the poet's state. The nearly created context contrasts or combines with other contexts. This sort of shift of contexts creates an "aesthetic view" of poetry. This view sees poetry as an abstract interruption with the language in which rapid shifts in internal contexts, facilitated by the effects of sound and grammar, do not create in the reader an impression, but a series of experiences (Cummings and Simmons, 1983). The dilemma created by the deconstructed word in isolation or lexical patterning in a poem allows the reader to "shift from an obvious reference to some kind of fact to a disguised reference to a state of feeling" (Nash, 1993).

Therefore, Okemwa's lexical choices betray his inclination to the choice of words which is mainly referred to idiolect. For example, his use of adjectives such as reticent, vapid, in the above poem clearly show his personal experiences and preferences to unveil his social vision. The tendency of his lexical deployment is closely connected to his social vision and commitment to his work. It is important to note that one aspect of stylistic meaning in any work of art is realised through the lexical devices in such a work. It seems reasonable thus to suppose that the colour, degree and collocation of words contribute to style in a way. Based upon this observation, our analysis of lexical variations in Okemwa's poetry shall also include:

- i. Colour of lexis
- ii. Degree of abstractness in lexis
- iii. Dynamic state of lexis
- iv. Repetition

4.6.1 The colour of the lexis

The colour of the lexis as Widdowson observes indicates whether the word in use is commandatory, neutral or derogative. Widdowson argues further that in a general case, the overuse of either commandatory or derogatory words would reveal the writer's or the poet's personal attitudes, which result into a sharply-worded text, while the use of the neutral words tends to be calm and mild in tone.

For instance, in the poem *Lackadaisical*, analysed above, Okemwa depicts that the persona's heart is heavy and embittered by the way in which society treats him. The use of 'big and strong' euphemistic adjectives such as *lackadaisical*, *reticent* and *ruminative* in the poem shows the persona's anger. This not only shows how the poem is strikingly worded but also reveals its high tone.

On the other hand, Okemwa in the poem, *what mekes me Tick*, employs a neutral and descriptive lexis that makes the reader enjoy the poem with ease while pondering what the persona wishes to underscore, thus:

If you could extract the blue feelings,
From my heart, or, like a pawpaw fruit
Disect me, and see the seedy inside
Of me my overburned self
Or thrust me up the sky and see me come down
Through the moon-lit night, hollering
Screaming to the one present---who is also
An absence...(27).

The reader will no doubt follow with ease the poet's development of thoughts in the poem since his choice of the lexical items to depict the actions that the persona is

taking about one after the other is carefully done in order to increase anticipation for the next action and built up the intended suspense. Despite the fact that the poet is tackling a complex subject, that is, the complexity of the human subject, his choice of the lexicon in the poem is very simple but loaded with embedded images. Although one, after reading and reflecting through the poem, could deduce that the persona is defying simple human labels that society uses to map the human subject, the poet engages neutral lexical items that make it calm and have a relaxed tone.

4.6.2 The degree of Abstractness in lexis

Abstract words which are deep and profound in meaning will make the poem sound serious and solemn, whereas concrete words which are easy and shallow will make a poem plain and popular. For instance, in the poem, “In love with Cigarette,” Okemwa employs the use of simple, undemanding and common words that people could easily identify with. For example, in the first stanza, the persona says:

My sweetheart my love
The stick and the smoke
My destiny my groove
From whence I take and give (35)

The cigarette praise words used in this stanza are almost identical to those used in the love world. Therefore, they are words that cannot only attract the reader to the poem but also will make him/her enjoy the reading of the poem. Despite the fact that cigarette is personified in this poem, the reader can easily decode the semantic ambiguity embedded in the poem with ease as opposed to when the poem Lackadaisical cited above

where the poet uses very strong and abstract words which pose a challenge to the reader from the word go. Thus it will be difficult for any reader to enjoy reading the poem.

4.6.3 Dynamic state of lexis

The overuse of dynamic words, such as verb and adverb will put a poem in a bright manner as opposed to the frequent use of static words such as nouns, adjectives, and some prepositions which will give a static picture in a poem. For instance, in the poem, *Toy-Bus, Okemwa* shows a sense of dynamism and urgency in the various activities that Eng' engages in. In the first stanza, the poet, for example, shows Eng' as being unsettled and always busy doing something when he says:

Eng' stamps up and down the stairs

As if a devil has invaded his mind

He demolishes his toy-bus

Assembling the parts together again

He then runs the bus down the stairs

Crying-out loudly-his passengers

Screaming from inside (8).

Compare the above stanza with the first stanza of the poem "A Teacher below"

It is strange why I had to be a teacher,

Wallowing in a life that is in rupture

I should have done better as a preacher

Probably I would be richer (42)

The first poem is fluid as opposed to the second one. This is evident from the use of many verbs that describe Eng's activities such as invaded, demolishes, assembling, crying and screaming. These verbs give the poem the liveliness and its dynamic state as

opposed to the second one. It is through the use of these verbs that the poet is able to foreground the conflict that is presented in the poem. As we had observed in our Chapter Two, Okemwa presents the conflict between the innocent and undisturbed world of the child and the adult world laden with norms and conventions. Therefore, the use of the many verbs in the poem helps to foreground the child's innocent world which is oblivious of the worries that characterise the adult world.

4.7 LEXICAL COHESION IN OKEMWA'S POETRY

What is called a lexical pattern is equivalent to lexical cohesion as developed by Halliday and Hasan. Lexical cohesion can be found between content words or lexical items which may be in three sense relations to one another, generally recognized as synonymy, antonymy, metonymy and repetition. Added to grammatical cohesive devices, lexical relations make a text cohere or hang together intersententially. Exemplifying this issue, we take a brief examination of Okemwa's anthology, *The Gong*.

In this anthology, Okemwa has divided his poems into six distinct sections. The first chapter, *The Gong*, from where the title of the anthology derives, is characterised by childhood poems. In this, poems such as "The Gong" and "The Morning" Poems present the world as a beautiful environment as perceived by a child. This section depicts the innocence associated with the child's world in the face of a hostile and unsympathetic environment in which the child lives. This section easily coheres with the second chapter, *Round in Circles*, where the child's innocence is shaded off. The section presents a grown up child who is confronted with various social realities. It is here that the persona realises that the human values he envisages in his mind are not highly valued by the society.

The third section of the anthology shifts to the persona's spiritual world. Okemwa presents the persona as one who has sought recourse in religion after realising that the world as seen in the first section is unwelcomed and does not have a place for human values. In this chapter, Okemwa shows how the persona seeks to understand and recognise the presence of the supernatural being that controls all activities in the world as seen in poems such as "Someone in Control", "Nyabururu church alley", "Lift your eyes to Golgotha" and "The Dawn mystery" among others.

Chapters four and five address the question of love and marriage. Here, the poet depicts the various ironies that characterise love life and marriage. Notice that the child we had encountered in chapter one of this anthology is now a grown man ready to love and marry. In this regard, he is confronted with the various challenges not only in his love life but also in marriage.

Lastly, chapter six takes the anthology to a full cycle since it tackles the end to human life: Death. This shows that the poems in this anthology range from child birth, growth, marriage and eventually death. For instance, Okemwa shows that before the persona dies, he writes his will in the poem, "When I die". In this poem, the persona makes his intentions clear on how his body should be treated when he dies. He says that his body should not be burnt, buried or cremated but be left to decompose.

Therefore, the various chapters in the anthology not only cohere but also link to each other due to the patterning of the anthology. The poet's ability to engage appropriate lexical items at each stage of human growth as depicted in the anthology foregrounds his quest to address various issues affecting humanity right from birth to death. Through this,

the poet has committed himself to seek and prescribe imagined solutions to the human problems that he tackles in his anthology.

4.8 CONCLUSION THE FINDINGS

The intention of this chapter was to outline the various lexicalization strategies engaged in Okemwa's poetry and how these lexical variations contribute to the realization of the quest motif in his poetry. Therefore, from this chapter we draw the following fundamental conclusion. First, that Okemwa engages various lexical items to address issues affecting humanity and to depict their intensity in human nature. These lexical items vary across the human life stages that the poet address and conform to the existing grammatical rules. Secondly, insofar as we have established, the lexical variations in the poems help in foregrounding the quest motif in Okemwa's poetry.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This study set out to examine the 'Lexical Variations and the Quest Motif in Okemwa's Poetry' as well as find out his social vision. The study comprised of an analysis of twenty-six poems from his anthology: *The Gong*. The selection of the twenty-six poems for this analysis was based on the six sections of the anthology; four from each section except for two poems that we considered had a significant impact to our analysis. The choice of lexical items to foreground the quest motif in his poetry is Okemwa's subtle and major strength. His use of ordinary lexical items in ordinary communication in a figurative way makes his poetry stand out. This was the basis of our analysis as we explored how the poet engaged lexical items in his poetry. It is worth noting that *The Gong* has all the poems found in his earlier anthology *Toxic Love*.

Our focus in this study was twofold: the variations of lexical items in Okemwa's poetry and how these items have been utilized to reveal the quest motif in Okemwa's poetry. Our two theories that is stylistics and deconstruction came in handy as they enabled us unravel the embedded meaning(s) of words in the poems. In this way, we were able to not only decipher but also generate new meanings of words depending on the contexts in which they occurred. Hence, they heavily contributed to the unraveling of the various variations in Okemwa's poetry.

One of the main objectives of this study was to identify and analyse various stylistic features in Okemwa's poetry. Our chapter two focused on this as we examined the various stylistic features deployed in Okemwa's poetry. Here, we showed how the poet employed features such as symbolism, personification; repetition, rhyme and the rhyme scheme, imagery among others enhance the aesthetic appeal of his poetry as well as foreground issues affecting humanity. Besides, the use of these stylistic features helps to foreground Okemwa's lexical choices in his poetry which portrays the poet's writing prowess. Through this analysis, we were able to show how these features have contributed to the realization of the poet's social vision.

In chapter three, we turned our attention to the utilization of lexical variations in Okemwa's poetry. Guided by the second and third objectives of the study, we sought to interrogate how Okemwa engages lexical items in his poetry and how these items foreground the quest motif. Basing on Halliday's and Widdowson's ideas on lexicology, we explored various lexical choices in his poetry. Shifting from issues such as poetry as a deviated discourse, representational mode of meaning, and as a maximally coherent discourse and other lexical characteristics such as degree of abstractness and colour of the lexis, we explored the lexical variations as depicted in Okemwa's poetry. Our analysis also paid particular attention on how through lexical variation, the poet foregrounded the quest motif. Motifs such as love, nostalgia, abandonment, the irony of love, among others were also revealed in his poetry. In this regard, we showed how the various lexical strategies employed by the poet revealed his quest to depict the various social ills in the contemporary society as well as his social vision.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals that Okemwa commits himself to addressing issues affecting the contemporary society. His poetry should be seen as a contemporary voice from the periphery which seeks to address the modern issues affecting humanity such as love, unfulfilled marriage life and the role of religion in the modern world. Thus, it is a voice of urgency that needs consideration in the modern African society.

We argue that Okemwa's poetry is (in)formed by personal experiences and/or historical truths as is evident from his fusion of private and public themes in his poems. Themes such as the complexity of the human subject, nostalgia, the question of agency and subjectivity, life's ambiguities among others as seen in his poetry either emanate from his own personal experiences or from his interactions in the social world. Above this, he constructs an idiosyncratic aesthetic in his poetry, which to a large extent shows his quest and commitment to address various social injustices in the society.

Further, this study affirms that Okemwa engages various lexical items not only to foreground the quest motif but also to show his quest to depict human foibles and in turn prescribe solutions to them. In confronting the human issues, Okemwa engages various lexical strategies that include the colour, degree of abstractness, dynamic state and collocation of words, which also contribute to style in his poetry.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study limited itself to the lexical variations and the quest motif in Okemwa's poetry and we therefore recommend further research on other communicative strategies that the poet employs. We have done our current study using the lexical perspective and

as such, future studies on Okemwa can be projected to other theoretical perspectives so as to enrich poetry criticism in Africa.

A comparative study of contemporary African poets can be conducted alongside Okemwa's poetry with a view of exploring how contemporary African poets confront issues affecting humanity in the 21st century. Such a research will enrich and expand scholarship of African poetry since the current study was limited to one poet.

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APPENDIX: Poems used for this study

The Gong

Of my childhood rings louder
Its echo hurtles in, faster
Catching up with me
Every night in my dreams

The bicycles, donkey-carts

The farmers open vans
Raced up and down this pebbly road
Leaving behind trails of dust

I sat here, on this anthill

On a market day
Counting people, donkeys
I was a loner then
The mantis as my teddy bear

The Morning

The gentle morning slithers
Over many smooth miles of space and time
Filtering gently through the transparence
Of the window pane, registering
A new day on the black cypress table
The hedge foliage, yonder, shakes
And whirrs, tossing the deluge
Of the wind's anger over
To the next horizon of space.
Lizards emerge from thatch-roofs
And dot the clay walls of the huts.
At the flower-bed bees are busy
Falling in love with the red rose
Greeting the new day with smiles and kisses

Toy bus

Eng' stamps up and down the stairs
As if a devil has invaded his mind
He demolishes his toy bus
Assembling the parts together again
He then runs the bus down the stairs
Crying out loudly his passengers
Screaming from inside
He grabs the bus and drives it up the stairs again
Roaring and beeping out aloud

His mom suddenly appears at the door
And stares sternly at him
He lowers his eyes down to his smudged shirt
Clutching his nose that is wet with mucus

Where are your shoes, where?

They are out on the grass, Ma

He turns and runs down the stairs
His face contorted in a scream
Tears welling in his small eyes

He comes back after an hour
Wringing his hands upon his head
Mucus and tears mixing on his lips
His socks wet from the dew outside
Where are your shoes, Eng?
Her murderous voice booms out.
He only points out of the window
Gasping, shaking with fear and horror
Those children picked them, Ma
He speaks and bursts into a screams.

Idyllic

Walk past the bushy-paved corner
Come to an embarrassing sight
A rustic codger, his chin as bushy as his milieu
Squatting in shallow clumps of shrub
Wild-eyed, stooling; his face
A ballad, manifesting vividly the sort
Of place our childhood was dissipated
Go further on and a stark nude
Little brat will squelch across the muddy road
The pendulum of history
Beating before the shrine of procreation
Telling what we were in the days of yore
In the gloaming at the beer party meet dishevelled
Fogey mothers whose haunches will loosely
Be cashed in menstruation-strained lesos
Listen to their jumble of conversations
Innuendoes, humour and laughter.
Spend your night in a sisal mat, wake
Up in the morn with a lingering headache
Crows, bleats and lows charging your morning air.

You will need a pair of thick boots
To wade through the midden-ridden path
As you leave the village.

The children of Baba Dogo

The sun rises very early in the Eastern sky
Sending its flaming arrows upon the slum of
Baba Dogo
Children spit out from nowhere to fill the
Sinuous littered alley
The only street that snakes its way among the
Dust-draped shacks that seem to crumble
Under collapsing columns, with rusty
Leaking corrugated iron sheets.

In tattered creased school uniforms, appearing
Like clowns
Swollen red eyes that strain to keep
Themselves open
Running noses with particles of frozen mucus
Clogging the nostrils
Their unkempt hairs standing on them like
Spikes of hedgerows
They walk on and are happy and laugh and chat
They throw paper-balls and scramble over
Them, thro sticks,
Shout and tease, wrestle and wriggle in the
Dusty road.

They will then stop at once, looking back at you
Smiling, showing banana-stained grey teeth
That sticks out of their slobbering mouths
Like crooked cleats
Flies readily crowd and feasts on them
Their necks crane forward to you with expectation.
“Buda jambo?”
“*Jambo sana,*” you would be compelled to answer.
“Mambo?”
“*Poa!*” slang is what they understand.

Their faces readily lights up when your hand goes
Into your trouser pocket, and they darken up
Almost immediately after the coin lands on one of their clammy palms.
The chase resumes, the sticks fly about, the ball bounces up
Oblivious of your presence and your generosity.

They turn to the left, into thick woods
Above which peeps a dilapidated
Wind-beaten building
That contains the classrooms in which they are taught
That the earth is oval like an egg—not flat like a table
And that one plus one makes eleven, for
“How can it not be eleven teacher?”

Round in circles

You go round in circles, your head
In the clouds, expecting a hitch, a hiatus
Anything somewhere along
The slippery arcs of your life

Something to assuage the length
Of the circles, swerve that constant
Fixation of your already-worn-to
a-frazzle mind in making a pile

You start with scotching your niggling
In trivial cogitation, hitching
Your wagon to star, wishing heavens
Broke down into gold-specks, pearls and diamonds

Drowned in cupidity nature secretly
Folds wings, seceding from your strategy
Leaving you scraping the barrel, wretched
On shoestring, doing anything for lucre.

Worshipping at the shrine of mammon
You see your whole self atrophy
Into nothingness and purpose of living
Is lost—all is chasing intangible wind!

You go out in the dark one night
To look at the moon, stars and meteors
Trying to calculate how symbolic
These can be to the wealth of the wind.

One morning your thoughts darken
With thick haze of desperation, you
Realize how steady nature's clock is
And the need to learn this hard fact.

What makes me Tick

If you could extract the blue feelings
From my heart, or, like a pawpaw fruit
Bisect me, and see the seedy inside
Of my overburdened self
Or thrust me up the sky and see me come down
Through the moon-lit night, hollering
Screaming to the one present---who is also
an absence
Or, if you are a scholar, climb up my belfry
And study the polished sticks of metal
That touch to bore my body's chime
You will get to know the stuff
That ignites my body, soul and spirit.
But still you may not comprehend
Or, more so, reach to finger the delicate inside
That the satellite of my whole being
You will still miss out on one single fact
That must combine with another to make me tick

Lackadaisical

Call me a misanthrope, nonchalant
Or a zomble. I don't care.
I have to keep to my ruminative stance

In most part I would rather be left
In peace, undisturbed
In my solitary métier

Let me be thought reticent, vapid
Lacking elan, impetuosity
A loather of gregariousness

But deep in the secret hearth
Of a quiet mind
Will be smoldering a fire
That ramifies into numerous flames
Of pretty symbols, metaphors
While you think me lackadaisical.

An Old Retired School Teacher

I met an old retired schoolteacher

His coat was faded, his shirt tattered
Wrinkles and crevices filled his forehead
Upon his chin was pasted a grey tuft
Of soil-caked, fluff-filled beard
He tottered along on an empty road
His lips moving, muttering to himself
I stopped to ask him his troubles
Why he was lonely and talking to himself

He said he had seen good old days
And enjoyed every hour of his life
He had taught so many great people
Some of whom held big positions in government
The society as it stood then, he said
Owed it all to his hard work as a teacher
But he shook his head and regretted
That his head carried half the world's problems
And darkness was engulfing his twilight years.

He said he had retired a year ago
And TSC hadn't released his pension
His third wife was at Pumwani giving birth
He had not paid dowry for his fifth wife
And to add salt to injury
Neither of his sons-in-law had paid their pride-pride

The old man looked at me again
With red eyes that were heavy with sleep
"Son," he said, "how I long for youth hood!"
He curled his nose and moved his lower lip
Turned and tottered away, muttering to himself.

In Love with Cigarette

My sweetheart my love
The stick and the smoke
My destiny my groove
From whence I take and give

Beside the lawn every morn
You I pick, the sweet stick
Along the lane, through the town
I kiss your stick, with bliss I lick

My sweetheart my love
The stick and the smoke

You make smile and laugh
You make me high, make me click

In a bus travelling, in a bed sleeping
My lips lick your sweet lips
In a pub drinking, in a hotel eating
From your lips I take my sips

Day comes and goes, comes and goes
We eventually marry and keep on loving
The stick of love lights and glows
And I see you as the most caring

Then one day in the morning
Chest pains, the ribs ache and split
I stop laughing, I start mourning
I cough, I choke-blood in the spit!

My sweetheart you are poisonous
You have defiled me with toxic love
In the habit I have become your prisoner
A captive in your lethal groove

You are a monster, a killer
You nip in the bud the growing life
That could blossom into a pillar
To be depended upon in the society

My sweetheart my love
The stick and the smoke
Bye, there is life to live
Talents to nurture, goals to achieve.

An Amorphous Shadow

Like a piece of over-burnt charcoal
Floating on a sea of fire-coloured people
I move around like an amorphous shadow
I walk past stony faces, glaring eyes
Fluffy, floating along with great delicacy
Looking for the famous Piccadilly Circus
I stop to inquire: "Excuse me please, sir..."
One gentleman stops at a safe distance
Scans my face and quickly checks my shoes
"Go down, turn right, walk the corridors..."
He talks through his nose, as if the mouth

Having ground the words for too long, they,
 Out of impatience, decides to escape through
 the nose.
 My English is superior, I realize
 I throw words out, one after the other
 in measured rate, stressing syllables of every
 word
 As if I am pressing on some unseen buttons inside
 the mouth
 I Compliment all with gestures and an expressive
 face.
 They say I talk like a book, then twist their lips
 In knowing gestures, and close their mouths to stifle
 a laughter
 I stand there like a piece of wood, transfixed
 Watching a drama of the absurd unfolding before
 me
 "I have never been to London before," I smile
 sheepishly
 "Never mind," one says. "You will be okay."
 When I finally catch a train to Milton Keynes
 I keep singing "Milton kings! Milton kings!"
 Or else I forget and the train takes me to strange
 cities
 Where I have been told black colour is a riddle
 And people come out to watch a visiting antelope
 from Amboseli
 While their children scratch on your skin to remove
 the soot

A Teacher

It is strange why I had to be a teacher
 Wallowing in a life that is in rupture
 I should have done better as a preacher
 Probably I would have been richer

 See those pastors on Sundays at the market
 Confidently going through their daily racket
 And coins jingle piling up their huge sachet
 While poverty busy dusts a teacher's jacket
 A teacher is poor and a very miserable creature
 His pockets always having a puncture
 His parlour filled up with dilapidated furniture
 What he knows is depression and not little rapture

Like an engineer or an accountant, a doctor or a
soldier
The preacher no doubt has mastered secrets of
nature
But the teacher with his meager salary is in danger
Faced with huge debts and uncertainty of the
future

Someone in Control

In a sleepless night,
I open the Small bedroom window and look out to study.
The mystery of the night;
a big pool of darkness
fills the void of the world.
I find it inspiring as well as awesome.
The night has a way of making you think there is no
life.
At all existing anywhere in the world, no God living,
Nothing beyond the black as well be dead.

As I stay blankly staring into this pool of darkness
A star peeps out somewhere up in the sky, then
gradually
The moon pops out the thick rafts of clouds
Like a beautiful bride and rides on across the sky
Smiling down at me by the window.
Suddenly a meteor startlingly shoots down the
hillside
Burning a path down the imagined horizon
A sign of existence, of someone in control.

The Annunciation

My rough fingers fondle
The beads, one by one
Up to last,
Lips cooing the soft solemn words
She steeped herself in thought
Or, maybe, jostling in domestic chores
Or brushing through lilies
With her feet, in the beds
It was then, suddenly
When the requisite
Holy sentence, like a bombshell
Fell on the hesitant ears.

Up the spout, nine months
Of pain; travail
Came a mascot through which the world
Was to heal her wounds

The dawn Mystery

There was a biting silence
About the doomed rock
The air was damp and heavy
And felt almost stormy

Only the crunched pebbles
Could be heard airing their complaint
Under the shuffling frozen feet
The rustling of the dew-clad
Napier grass, chrysanthemums
Battling the fierce cold wind
And the cheeps and warbling
Of larks, blackbirds
Floating in the dank air.

The stone-barrier, careens
Matted with a peculiar emptiness
The linen sheet, cuddling at the corner
Gave no clue to the dawn mystery
And dazzling white twin
Added more enigma
To this cold cliffhanger

Souls always detach themselves
From carrion; spiral up
Into the air dropping like bird-droppings
The ugly mundane affairs
Lay softly in an empty space
Up in the firmament

Lift Your Eyes to Golgotha

Or place your stiff, stubborn ear next
To the black pieta; the gnash of teeth
The bereaved soul in grief; hear how
Her wall relates to the horrors of your acts
Open your puckered eyelids, softly, expectantly
Read the fragility of the
Feel the wind sown

And the whirlwind to be reaped

Now test your faith on the rood-tree that shoves
Itself each time in the depths of your prayers; it is
Twilight in your soul; the last supper is about to be
served
Smell the darkness that is gathering, emerging

Then move slowly, purifying your soul through
The deep Lethe of thoughts that flood over your
Mind, into an open meadow of purgatory
You are a dead soul dancing naked before the king

I wonder if folks of plastic ears next door
Really hear me as I speak; does wind move there?
Does it go through their iron-wall skulls
To trigger the dull engines of their minds?

Knell of my bells, do you hear them?
Of my soft steps, of me approaching
Does its sound move a street beggar's ears?
Pick my tongue then for it is the map of your life.

The Slim Path

If you hunger for a home
That lies way beyond the blue
Follow the slim path, its twists and turns
Keep on, though drudgery and irksome

But remember temptation looms here
A fidget could call for a fiasco
Like Lot's wife be a mound of slat
And loose a healing from that intangible largesse
hand

You are likely to peek back
And wriggle about in that sludge
That paints earth with grime
And skid down the long slippery way

If you are thirsting for a home
Stifle the dreary weather of your life
Follow the slender, pebbly path
Muddle through as angels do
You will get others there, self-abnegating

Conversing in a peculiar tongue
Sparkling abjurations to the unknown
Gasping under fragile crosses

Peer back to the dark hamlet
Where the tenuous path begins
See the muddy world in which you lived
Where nights wrapped you if fey

You will then reflect in horrors of yore
That lay in fragments, in grit
Scattered on the canvas of the mind
Leave it untouched, uncollected

My Dream World

I would have liked, best of all
A swarthy long-legged willowy belle
With a neck of a swan and eyes of an owl
A tintinnabulation voice of a bell

With zeal I have trudged the cobbled street
Carrying on my dream world
To which I cling passionately
But which keeps turning violent and wild

I am not able to ensnare faces that fit by
And yet the millennium has come to an end
I sit on the lay-by under a lit sky
Wretched with desperation, empty-handed

My dream old vast and round
Has been wasted on the mead, under boughs
The black birds sing and stare at me at the ground
Maudlin, I sidle, wifeless as ever, to my hut

A Sudden Rush of Love
I woke up with a sense of loss
And found a gentle pool of silence
Holding the four corners of my bedroom

I looked up and saw her face there
Staring down from the wall photographs
Our eyes caught and entangled
And stars came into my vision
I felt a sudden rush of love

Rise up from the warm bed-sheets
Spilling softy into my heart
Pushing itself up through my eyes
Filling the whole of my brain

Then slowly assembled itself together
Spilling out into gentle streams
Of soft smiles and erotic sighs
And boiled down into the sheets
From whence it had come

An Irritating Sight

At first when I met you
I was inflamed and thrilled
Your erotic smile melted my heart
Your charming eyes froze blood in my veins
And your spider-thin waist was a turn on
Your breasts stood like twin arrows
On the tender field of your chest
Bursting the rivers of lust in me
I was sure I had found an angel
I had searched for years
Days flew by and nights passed
I divorced your sex appeal was zero
Your ideas banal and parochial
I realized the grandeur I had seen
Was just a mirage; the mystery
In those eyes had become lucid
The lips, the eyes all had lost their magic
The angel I thought I had found
Was no longer an angel
But an irritating sight before my face

When You Are Married

And have someone at night snoring deeply beside
you
On your thick sisal mat or I your small bed of yew
You will have little sleep the and a snake-long
queue
Of thoughts that cling onto your mind like a thick
glue

In my life-time, the people I have met, only few
Are happy with their marriage, many keep wishing
they knew

The repercussions, the cost of bringing up kids till
they grew
and having to tend to a teenage wife whose dresses
must all be new

There are those solitaires you have got to buy, some
pink some blue
Children's school uniforms, shoes, bags and pencils
of different hue
Debts have heaped up and yet there is much for you
to purchase and do
Being thirtieth of the month the electricity and
telephone bills are due

An insomniac you are always out of bed long before
the cock crew
You wake them up for school but one will complain
of malaria, another flu
And you to rush them to the infirmary and
have them attended to
By the end of the day there's a lot your mind
would've gone through

And yet in my life I have met very few, in fact
one or two
Individuals who didn't want to marry; and even
those few
Having no children to create a lineage, are regarded
as true
Dregs of society and are treated with no care-like
those animals in a zoo

Let Me Know

If I ever offended you
Discuss it with me, dear love
Don't keep it in the heart for too long
Let me know of the mistake
I have made, dear love
That makes you pale, mute
If I once shouted at you
And you were flustered, dear love
It is because I cared, or so I thought
Let us talk with open minds
Of the flaws, the pitfalls
And mend the broken fences

Bring to an end this silence
And hear your voice again, dear love
As it always came to me

When I Die

When I die, my fair kin
Don't burn my body
Don't bury it either
Leave it to rot on the ground

Only put a little flower on it
But not the fragrant rose
For I might smell it and be happy
And wish to live again

When I breathe no more
My kind siblings
Sing me a song from the hymnal
But don't choose number thirteen

For it might chant my ears
And heart
Be reminiscent of joyful days
Making me wish to live again

When I kick the bucket
And stark becomes my body
Read me a little line from the bible
But don't read the psalms

For you know I am a sinner
And have done little to mankind
And would want to do something for charities
Therefore wishing to live again

When I die, my fair world
Don't cremate my body
Don't, with hoes, inter me either
Leave it to waste on the ground

What Will I Do?

Suppose today is my last day on earth
What will I do?
Will I start screaming?
Or, remain composed beside the earth

With little ado
Seeing ghosts playing
And death coming?

Suppose this is to be my last day
What will I do?
Will I start crying?
Run about, shouting?
Or, go softly into a church and pray
Without much to-do
Earnestly repenting
And God forgiving?

Suppose today is my last day on earth
What will I do?
Maybe I'll start repairing
Before I start dying
Go to flower garden and construct a wreath
Of varying hue
Knowing I will be leaving
Knowing I won't be living

The Owl

His elegies surge up in fits and starts
Blow into the dead night, in gusts
Moan the night coldly, brutally and widdy
Waking you each time in a different world

The blood libation, stone-throwing in a huff
Scolding or shouts can't scare him off
He is a special emissary from Hades
And stands not to be appeased or condemned

Today, few days, soon, someone will be gone
The entire homestead will quiver in agony
Be it malaria, cholera or be it slimis
The village will take it for their hidden sins

He has always come to make a portentous row
Perching himself on the thick green hedgerow
Whoooooo! Who? Who do I take? Woooooo?
Who is tired with life's irksome journey? Who?

The solemn notes gently drib in silent rage
Colleting themselves over the village
An impromptu soiree will scour for indecencies
Murder, incest, or some moral diseases.

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